

04. THE NATURE AND CAUSES OF APOSTASY FROM THE GOSPEL

by John Owen

Owen examines the nature, causes, and dangers of falling away from the faith. Writing during a time of widespread spiritual decline, he analyzes the theological and moral roots of apostasy and urges believers to persevere in sound doctrine and genuine piety.

16 Chapters

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00.1. The Nature and Causes of Apostasy from the Gospel

The Nature and Causes of Apostasy from the Gospel by John Owen

00.2. Publishing Information

Publishing Information THE NATURE OF APOSTASY FROM THE PROFESSION OF THE GOSPEL AND THE PUNISHMENT OF APOSTATES DECLARED, IN AN EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS 6:4-6; WITH An Inquiry Into The Causes And Reasons Of The Decay Of The Power Of Religion In The World, Or The Present General Defection From The Truth, Holiness, And Worship Of The Gospel;

Also, Of The Proneness Of Churches And Persons Of All Sorts Unto Apostasy. WITH REMEDIES AND MEANS OF PREVENTION.

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES — JOHN 5:39.

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01. TO THE READER.

TO THE READER.

I believe it is important to provide a brief explanation of the occasion and purpose of the following discourse, so that the reader can decide whether to continue reading or not, based on their own judgment.

It is widely acknowledged that the state of religion in many parts of the Christian world is lamentable in our present day. Even those who identify themselves with religion openly complain about the excessive misconduct of some individuals. These provocations, if not boldly addressed, contribute to the overall problems that are being lamented. However, there is general agreement that the glory and power of Christianity have faded and nearly disappeared among the majority of professed Christians. The specific reasons and causes for this decline, though, remain subjects of disagreement. While a few may believe that everything needed for a thriving religious state is already present and that the only requirement is to secure what they have and enjoy, the undeniable reality is that the world is filled with the devastating consequences of human desires and clear signs of divine displeasure. Both heavenly and earthly signs indicate the decline of our religious profession from its original beauty and splendor.

Religion itself remains unchanged; it is the conduct and misrepresentation of those who profess it that bring it into disrepute. Any disadvantage that religion faces in the world will ultimately be attributed to those whose false beliefs and practices have corrupted it. No one could display greater enmity or malice towards the gospel than someone who asserts or maintains that the faith, profession, lives, ways, and behavior of the majority of Christians accurately represent its truth and holiness. The apostle's description of people in their natural state, before they have experienced the transformative influence of the gospel's light, power, and grace, is far more applicable to them than any portrayal of disciples of Christ found in the entire Scriptures. They are described as "foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another." The paths and practices of genuine gospel faith, love, meekness, temperance, self-denial, kindness, humility, zeal, and contempt for the world's allurements, along with readiness to embrace the cross, have become overgrown and almost obliterated among people. They can hardly be discerned where they once flourished. Instead, the "works of the flesh" have created a wide and well-traveled road, which, though it may appear right in people's own eyes for a time, leads to destruction and the chambers of death. These "works of the flesh" are evident not only in their intrinsic nature but also in their open commission and destructive consequences. They include adultery, fornication, impurity, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like, as enumerated by the apostle. It is undeniable that these sins have spread throughout the Christian world among all kinds of individuals, despite any claims to the contrary. The Scriptures explicitly and frequently foretell that this would occur in the last days, as will be further elaborated upon in the following discourse.

It is true that many individuals do not openly engage in such flagrant acts of wickedness. In the midst of the prevailing defection from the truth and holiness of the gospel, we should greatly admire the grace of God for the small remnants of piety, sobriety, modesty, and common usefulness that still exist among us. However, it is important to recognize that open immorality is not the only way in which people can deviate from and even renounce the power, grace, and wisdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Many who do not indulge in extreme excesses are nevertheless ignorant of the mysteries of the gospel, negligent or merely formal in divine worship, infected with pride, vanity, and love of the world, and indifferent to the glory of Christ and the honor of the gospel. It is challenging to find genuine Christian religion in the midst of those who profess to follow Christ or to observe the power of godliness among those who openly embrace its outward form. As a result, Christianity has fallen into such neglect in the world that its cunning and formidable adversary is emboldened to undermine its very foundations, aiming to eradicate its very name from memory. When religion is stripped of its vital connection to the transformative power in the lives and minds of individuals and reduced to a mere outward and lifeless profession driven by secular interests, it cannot withstand the opposition it constantly faces. In this state, those who appear to have some concern for Christianity are too preoccupied with blaming one another for the decline, often based on insignificant differences in judgment that have little impact on the overall situation. As a result, there is a complete neglect of joining together in a collective effort to seek proper remedies for the prevailing spiritual decay.

Another aspect that contributes to the deplorable state of Christian religion in the world is the significance of sacred truth as the sole principle of evangelical obedience. Genuine obedience to God is rooted in and guided by the truth of the gospel, for it is the doctrine that leads to godliness, and all acceptable obedience is an expression of faith. Any form of supposed duty to God that does not have the truth of the gospel as its source and measure is not what God currently requires nor what He will eternally reward. Although many individuals, under the guise of professing the truth, may live in open rebellion against its transforming power, the wounds of religion are not beyond healing, and its stains can be washed away through the proper remedy, which only needs to be diligently applied.

However, if the truth itself is corrupted or abandoned, if its glorious mysteries are distorted or despised, if its vital doctrines are accused of error and falsehood, and if the vain imaginations and worldly reasoning of human intellect are substituted for them or exalted above them, then all hope of recovery is lost. The breach will continue to widen like the sea until there is no one left to heal it. If the very sources of the sanctifying waters of the gospel are poisoned from their very origins, they will not bring healing to the nations to whom they flow. When the doctrine of truth is corrupted, it cannot change the hearts of people or reform their lives.

It is widely acknowledged among those of us who are called Protestants how the apostasy of the Roman church has led multitudes of professed Christians astray. The corruption of the gospel's doctrine within that church has had a twofold effect: it has given rise to the depravity of people's conduct on one hand, and on the other hand, the wicked lives of the church's members have made the restoration of truth and genuine holiness increasingly difficult and seemingly impractical within their current framework. The discourses that follow partially explore this phenomenon, but a

more detailed and comprehensive investigation is warranted. In general, it is evident that error and superstition, existing within the minds of the church's teachers or leaders, along with sin and conformity to the ways and customs of the corrupt world, have mutually contributed to their simultaneous entrance into the profession and lives of Christians. Having established themselves within the visible church structures of numerous nations, these corruptions have become deeply intertwined with their interests, effectively excluding the presence of truth and holiness they have displaced. Moreover, by claiming infallibility, they have provided a pretext that, in their own perception, justifies and supports even the most egregious errors and flagrant disregard for the teachings of the gospel. Therefore, any hope of their recovery rests solely on the sovereign grace and almighty power of God.

It is also widely known and should be deeply lamented that there is another effort, pursuing the same general aim of corrupting the doctrine of the gospel, but in a different manner and to a different extreme, vigorously carried out in the world by the Socinians and those who align with their pernicious ways. This endeavor, too, is accompanied by various advantages that contribute to its success. The corruption of the gospel's doctrine within the Roman church, originating from the ignorance, darkness, superstition, and carnal affections of people's minds, is sustained by the same means. While these factors provided ample opportunity for its gradual introduction in past ages and regions, the principles of corruption have now become deeply embedded in the worldly interests of the majority of individuals in many European nations, securing its position and influence. Nevertheless, in this present age, characterized by the emancipation of reason from the bondage of superstition and tradition, and the freedom to rationally inquire into the true nature and causes of all things, which many claim to embrace, it may seem remarkable how this corruption has gained ground and expanded its reach. Unless it finds adherents who have been enticed away from their own rational faculties and independent thinking by certain external advantages that they consider valuable, its progress would be perplexing. The ensuing discourse explores the true reasons behind its advancement. This new attempt, disregarding the discredited aids of superstition and carnal affections that were dominant and effective in previous eras, finds refuge in the guise of reason and the supposed compatibility of its proposals with the natural light and understanding of human beings. Regardless of the actual relationship between religion and reason, in an age where learning and discourse have flourished but true reverence for God has declined, reason has become an idol, eagerly worshipped. Anyone who presents an offering to this idol, even if it involves sacrificing the sacred mysteries of the gospel, will undoubtedly receive a warm reception and applause. Conversely, those who refuse to burn incense on its altar will be denounced as fools and enemies of humanity. If you tell people that there are aspects of religion that transcend the limits of finite and fallible reason, and that there are truths that may appear contrary to corrupted and depraved human understanding, they will respond (rightly so, although tragically misused) that their reason is the best and perhaps the only means they possess to discern truth from falsehood. Given that the liberty of individuals' own rational faculties has gained immense popularity in the world (as indeed it is the most excellent aspect of humanity in and of itself), it is foolish to expect that it would not be subject to pernicious abuse, as every valuable thing has always been when elevated to such esteem as to make it susceptible to corruption. No one will ever attempt to make use of that which others have no respect for or despise. The advantage that the Socinians and their adherents have in their attempt to corrupt the doctrine of the gospel lies in their ability to exploit the general appeal of reason as the ultimate measure and

standard of truth. By presenting themselves as champions of right reason and dismissing any exceptions or limitations to this proposal, they gain the favor of many who aspire to share in the reputation that reason has acquired in the world. Through the confident use of this artifice, and the absurd application of this principle to infinite and holy mysteries of divine revelation, they have gained the reputation of being the most rational interpreters of sacred things, despite their reasoning being as weak and insufficient as their predecessors in similar endeavors. Equipped with this advantage, when they proceed to present their specific opinions, they already have a predisposed audience and a favorable environment for their reception, leading to their frequent success. Their opinions generally fall into two categories: First, the assertion that there is no reason to believe anything that reason cannot comprehend, thus concluding that whatever is beyond reason is contrary to it and should be rejected as destructive to the natural constitution of our souls. Second, the claim that the human mind, in its present condition, is fully capable of fulfilling all its intellectual and moral duties in relation to God and can meet all requirements placed upon it. Essentially, they purport to defend human nature, common reason, and the inherent morality of mankind against allegations of weakness, depravity, and corruption, which some level against it. Although this is contrary to the universal experience of the world, this design gains acceptance among many due to its alignment with the inclination of human nature to reject charges of its own depravity.

Furthermore, by appealing to the reputation that reason has attained in matters of God, and by encouraging contempt for others as weak and irrational, they cater to the depraved minds of individuals, making their progress in one form or another highly probable. The subtle enemy of our salvation takes advantage of the disposition, inclinations, and prevailing beliefs of each age and season. Without his influence, devotion in the past could have been practiced without superstition, and in this age, the use of reason could be defended without rejecting the necessity of supernatural illumination and the fundamental truths of the gospel. However, once he mixes his poison with something good, it becomes all the more pernicious.

It is unfortunate that the defection from the truth of the gospel is not limited to the instances previously mentioned, but has also affected Protestants to some extent. There is a weariness and dissatisfaction with the truths that have been professed since the time of the Reformation, including those very truths that sparked the Reformation itself. In addition to the extremes of error mentioned earlier, some have departed from the foundations of the reformed religion and compromised the essential truths upon which it was built. This has led to a confusion of harmful opinions and a loss of reputation for stability and usefulness. As a result, divisions, debates, and animosities have multiplied over the core articles of our faith, causing internal conflicts among those who were originally united in preserving the Protestant profession. These divisions have weakened the collective voice of Protestants and made them vulnerable to the artifices and power of those who seek to impose their yoke once again upon the Christian world. Nothing would prepare the way for their success more than the undermining of the doctrinal consistency that the reformed churches maintained for a significant period of time, standing firm against all forms of opposition.

It is a sobering reality that throughout history, no church or nation that has embraced the profession of the gospel has been able to maintain its purity indefinitely. Sooner or later, either partially or completely, there has been a falling away from the revealed doctrine and required

obedience of the gospel. Those who believe that the purity of religion can be preserved solely through confessions and canons deceive themselves. Unless there are vigilant efforts to preserve the truth and power of the gospel, while simultaneously opposing those who seek to corrupt it, the decline and defection will continue. In the present age, the defection from the original pattern of Christianity is almost universal. The visible profession of Christianity does not adequately reflect the scriptural standard or the early believers' example. This raises a crucial question for thoughtful individuals: Should there be an immediate endeavor to bring as many people as possible back to the original standard in their profession, obedience, and worship? Or should we accommodate the present state of affairs to preserve the remaining fragments of religion among those who are not capable of a full restoration? The differing opinions on this matter form the basis of various controversies and debates. However, it is likely that these disputes will only come to an end when God graciously brings about a fresh revival of evangelical faith, love, and holiness among all Christians. Until then, the differences in judgment regarding the path forward will persist.

After contemplating the state of affairs in the world and entertaining legitimate concerns that there may be further deterioration from the power and purity of evangelical truth, I embarked on a comprehensive investigation. I sought to uncover the hidden causes and reasons behind the propensity of individuals, throughout all generations, to apostatize from the genuine profession of the gospel in faith and obedience, as evidenced by the prevailing trends. This contemplation was prompted, in part, by my involvement in the exposition of the sixth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. In that passage, the apostle vividly depicts the nature of complete apostasy and the ultimate judgment of apostates by God. Reflecting on the enormity of that sin and the consequent terror of the Lord, coupled with the escalating impiety, profanity, and detestable indulgences, along with the prevalence of ignorance, error, and superstition, I couldn't help but ponder the potential trajectory of these developments. These thoughts weighed heavily on my mind, despite my modest and inconspicuous position in the world, as I considered the glory of God, the honor of Christ and the gospel, and the eternal well-being of souls—all of which were at stake. I questioned how anyone could find contentment in their professed Christianity without a deep concern for and genuine sorrow over the suffering caused by this woeful apostasy. While I may not have reached the pinnacle of devotion in this regard, I can honestly and earnestly attest that my prayers and tears, though perhaps inadequate given the gravity of the situation, have been heartfelt and sincere.

I was well aware of the limitations and insignificance of my position in the world, coupled with the numerous obstacles that could undermine even the most sincere endeavors. Therefore, I did not harbor any illusions that I, with my humble status, could single-handedly bring relief to nations or national churches that are on the precipice of this disastrous evil. Nevertheless, privately mourning for them, fervently laboring in prayers and supplications for a greater outpouring of the Spirit of Christ upon them for their well-being, are actions that may be disregarded by some, yet they will be accepted by God when offered sincerely by the humblest of His servants who call upon His name. Those who have been granted greater opportunities and advantages will be held to a different standard. Undoubtedly, those who are entrusted with the task of opposing the rising tide of impiety and profanity and applying the effective remedies for these evils to the souls and consciences of people bear a tremendous responsibility. It will be a tragic outcome if they fail to diligently and openly risk all their earthly concerns in order to prevent this breach. A learned writer

from the Church of England aptly noted two significant and odious sins of hypocrisy prevalent among others: Firstly, the belief that martyrdom is not relevant in a state that authorizes the true profession of the religion we, among many, deem most favorable and would choose for ourselves if given the opportunity. Secondly, the notion that errors in doctrine or opinion are more pernicious than indulgence in sinful practices, persistence in a life of sin, or blatant disobedience to God's commandments. Moreover, he declared that ministers of the gospel can deny Christ or reveal their shame of the gospel by failing to oppose sinful behavior as they should. He further emphasized that any era since the propagation of the Christian religion that lacked a sufficient number of martyrs should be attributed more to the negligence, ignorance, hypocrisy, or lack of courage among Christ's ambassadors or appointed pastors rather than the sincerity, gentleness, or faithfulness of the congregation, particularly its leaders. These insights, found in the writings of this author, deserve careful consideration by individuals before it is too late.

However, there is a responsibility to trade with even a single talent. If there is a willing heart, one's efforts are accepted based on what they have, not what they lack. It is this understanding that has motivated me to present my thoughts on the nature, causes, and occurrences of the current departure from the gospel and decline of holiness, along with the means to safeguard against its contamination and prevent its prevalence among individuals. It serves no purpose to confine our efforts to futile complaints or to confront the effects without a thorough understanding and consideration of their causes. Therefore, the investigation and exposition of the causes of this evil form the primary subject of the following discussions. If, through these efforts, I have only succeeded in inspiring individuals who possess greater insight and abilities to uncover the hidden sources of the deluge of sin and error in the Christian world, and who are better positioned to utilize their findings for the public good, then I will consider myself to have received a rich reward.

There is one important matter that I must bring to the attention of those readers who take an interest in my writings. The publication of this exposition on select verses from the sixth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews might give the impression that I am abandoning my original plan of providing a comprehensive exposition of the entire epistle. However, I cannot foresee what I may accomplish as I approach the inevitable time when I must depart from this earthly existence, a reality that constantly reminds me through my many weaknesses and limitations. Thus, as long as I am alive, I am determined to continue with that work to the best of my ability, relying on God's enablement and considering other pressing responsibilities. The only reason, apart from the perceived timeliness, why this particular portion of the exposition is being presented to the public is that the thoughts that arose from it became so extensive that including them within the context and purpose of the apostle's writing would have resulted in an excessive digression. THE NATURE AND CAUSES OF APOSTASY FROM THE GOSPEL.

02. CHAPTER 1.

CHAPTER 1. THE NATURE OF APOSTASY FROM THE GOSPEL DECLARED, IN AN EXPOSITION OF Hebrews 6:4-6.

INTENDING an inquiry into the nature, causes, and occasions of the present defection that is in the world from the truth, holiness, and worship of the gospel, I shall lay the foundation of my whole discourse in an exposition of that passage in the Epistle of Paul the apostle unto the Hebrews, wherein he gives an account both of the nature of apostasy and of the punishment due unto apostates; By examining and clarifying this context, I hope to address the perceived difficulties and shed light on the intended meaning conveyed by the Holy Spirit. The specific passage I will focus on is found in chapter 6, verses 4-6. Here are the words of the passage:

"For it is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age and who fall away, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace." This passage in our apostle's discourse has been widely recognized as accompanied with great difficulties, and there have been many differences about its interpretation, both doctrinally and practically. Sundry have stumbled and miscarried here. It is almost generally agreed upon that these words, and the colorable but indeed perverse interpretation and application made of them by some in the primitive times, occasioned by the then present circumstances of things, to be mentioned afterwards, caused the Latin church to be so slow in receiving the epistle itself, that it had not absolutely prevailed therein in the days of Jerome, as we have elsewhere declared. Therefore, it is necessary that we should inquire into the occasion of the great contests which have been in the church, almost in all ages, about the sense of this passage.

It is known that the early church was very careful about the holiness and upright conduct of those who were part of it. If someone was found to have committed a known and visible fault, they were required to publicly repent before they could participate in the sacred ceremonies. For more egregious sins such as murder, adultery, or idolatry, many churches would never allow the guilty party back into the communion. The most significant issue they faced was with those who, in the face of persecution, complied with the Gentiles and their idolatrous worship. There was no set rule to deal with such situations, and each church exercised leniency or severity based on their own interpretation. The Church of Rome was seen as more lenient than others in their treatment of offenders. This was criticized by Novatus and Novatianus, who denied forgiveness to those who had fallen into open sin after baptism, including those who had outwardly complied with idolatrous worship during persecution. Novatianus went so far as to exclude these individuals from all expectation of forgiveness from God himself. His followers, however, were more moderate, denying only those individuals re-entry into the church's communion. They believed that, although God would ultimately forgive those who repented, the church should not allow those who had committed these sins to return to the community. The Novatians believed that this view was

supported by the use of baptism, which was not to be repeated, and that no pardon should be granted to those who had committed sins that they had been cleansed of at their baptism. They believed that the words of our apostle confirmed this view. Unfortunately, people often interpret a specific text of scripture according to their own beliefs, without considering the context of the passage or the Bible as a whole. The Church of Rome, although it believed that the Novatians were too severe in their discipline, was unable to answer their objection from this passage. They chose to suspend their assent to the authority of the entire epistle, rather than risk the church being damaged by its admission. Fortunately, some learned men later explained the words in a way that did not support the Novatians' views. Otherwise, the authority of the epistle would have been jeopardized.

Today, the controversy is long forgotten, and many churches allow repentant sinners to participate in their communion. Some argue that the individuals described by the apostle were true believers who fell from grace and perished eternally. Others believe that this is not possible according to the covenant of grace in Christ Jesus. The debate continues among scholars.

Once again, there have been various errors in the practical application of the meaning of these words to people's consciences, mostly made by the individuals themselves who are concerned. Because of their sins, they have been overwhelmed with fears and troubles of conscience. In their darkness and distress, they have assumed that they have fallen into the condition described by our apostle, and as a result, they are irrecoverably lost. These apprehensions typically happen to people in two situations. Some individuals, after they have made a profession of the gospel, have committed a serious actual sin against the second table. Their consciences are tormented by their guilt (as long as they are not greatly hardened through the deceitfulness of sin). They believe that they have fallen under the sentence denounced in this Scripture against such sinners and consider themselves to be irrecoverable. Others make the same judgment of themselves because they have strayed from their former strict performance of duties, despite having always followed their convictions.

However, it is certain that the apostle, in this discourse, does not condone the severity of the Novatians, who permanently excluded offenders from the peace and communion of the church. Nor does he support the idea of true believers experiencing final apostasy, which he denounces in this same chapter, in line with numerous other biblical passages to the same effect. Moreover, he does not teach anything that would discourage or dishearten the conscience of any sinner who desires to return to God and find acceptance with Him. Therefore, we must first focus on the explanation of these words so as not to interfere with the boundaries of other truths or transgress against the analogy of faith. When we examine this entire discourse in conjunction with other scriptures and free it from any prejudices that people may have, we will see that it does not give any legitimate reasons for the errors mentioned earlier. Instead, it is a necessary and wholesome warning that all gospel adherents should consider.

Concerning these words, we will discuss 1) how they are connected to the preceding text, indicating the reason for the introduction of this entire discourse; 2) the subject being discussed, or the persons being spoken of, under different qualifications, which we may investigate individually or collectively; 3) what is assumed about them; and 4) what is affirmed of them based on that assumption. The connection of the words is made through the causal conjunction "for." It serves

as a reason for what was previously discussed and also emphasizes the limitation which the apostle added to his plan of further instruction, "If God permit." The apostle does not express his judgment that the recipients of his letter were such as he described, as he later declares that he "hoped better things" concerning them. It was necessary to caution them so that they might avoid falling into such a state. He had previously noted their slow progress in knowledge and practice, and here he warns them of the danger of continuing in a state of slothfulness. Failure to progress in the gospel and obedience leads to a complete abandonment of both. The most severe warnings are not only useful but necessary towards those who are seen to be lazy in their profession. The description of the subject of discussion is given through five instances of the evangelical privileges they received, despite which they may completely forsake the gospel. We can observe a few things about this description in general: (1) The apostle, in an attempt to express the terrible state and judgment of these individuals, describes them using things that fully evidence their unavoidable and righteous destruction. These things must be eminent privileges and advantages that they received through the gospel. Their rejection of these in their apostasy proclaims their deserved destruction from God. (2) All these privileges consist of certain special operations of the Holy Spirit that were unique to the dispensation of the gospel, which they could neither participate in nor receive under Judaism. The Spirit was not received in this sense by "the works of the law, but by the hearing of faith," as noted in Galatians 3:2. This was a testimony to them that they were delivered from the bondage of the law, namely, by a participation of that Spirit, which was the great privilege of the gospel. (3) There is no express mention of any covenant grace or mercy towards them, nor of any duty of faith or obedience they had performed. Nothing regarding justification, sanctification, or adoption is expressly assigned to them. Later on, the apostle declares his hope and persuasion concerning these Hebrews that they were not the same as those he had previously described and would not fall away unto perdition. He does so on three grounds that differentiate them from the former group: (1) They had things that accompany salvation, which are inseparable from it. None of these things were assigned to those described in this passage. If they had, they would not have been an argument or evidence of a different end than the others. Thus, nothing here is ascribed to these individuals that peculiarly "accompanies salvation" (verse 9). (2) They are described by their obedience and fruits of faith. Their "work and labor of love" towards the name of God is mentioned in verse 10. This is also what differentiates them from those in the text, who the apostle supposes may perish eternally. These fruits of saving faith and sincere love cannot do so. (3) The faithfulness of God was involved in the preservation of the previously mentioned group. "God is not unrighteous to forget" them because they were individuals who were interested in the covenant of grace. There is an engagement on the faithfulness or righteousness of God to preserve men from apostasy and ruin with respect to this covenant. There is equal respect for all those taken into that covenant. But the individuals in the text do not fall into this category, and thus the apostle does not suggest that the righteousness or faithfulness of God is in any way engaged in their preservation, but rather the opposite. This entire description refers to some special gospel privileges that were shared by professors in those days, and we must inquire The FIRST thing in the description is that they were "once enlightened." The Syriac translation says "once baptized." It is certain that baptism was called "illumination" early in the church, and "enlighten" was used for "baptize." Baptism was only to be celebrated once, according to the constant faith of the church in all ages. Baptism was called "illumination" because it was one ordinance of the initiation of persons into a participation of all the mysteries of the church. They

were thereby translated out of the kingdom of darkness into that of light and grace. Baptism was the beginning and foundation of a participation of all the other spiritual privileges that are mentioned afterwards. Upon the baptizing of persons, the Holy Spirit came upon them and endowed them with extraordinary gifts peculiar to the days of the gospel. This opinion has much probability in it, and I would embrace it if the word itself, as used here, did not require another interpretation. The word "once" is not to be restrained to this particular but refers equally to all the instances that follow, signifying no more than that those mentioned were truly partakers of them. To be "enlightened" in this place means to be instructed in the doctrine of the gospel so as to have a spiritual apprehension thereof, and this is so termed for two reasons: Of the objects, or the things known or apprehended, "life and immortality are brought to light through the gospel." Hence it is called "light," such as "the inheritance of the saints in light." The state which men are brought into is called "light" in opposition to the darkness that is in the world without it. The world without the gospel is the kingdom of Satan, the whole world, and all that belongs to it in distinction from and opposition to the new creation, is under the power of the wicked one, the prince of the power of darkness. This is called "walking in darkness," and "walking in the light" is opposed to it. Of the means or manner of the knowledge communicated, the word *fwti,zomai* is used to give light or knowledge by teaching, the same as *hr"woh*. The meaning of *fwtismo,j* is knowledge upon instruction. The instruction in the knowledge of the gospel is called "illumination" because the gospel itself is light. The first characteristic of the people being described is that they were "once enlightened," which in the Syriac translation is rendered as "once baptized." In the early church, baptism was often called "illumination," and the times of the administration of the sacrament were known as "the days of light." It was believed that through baptism, individuals were initiated into the mysteries of the church and were translated from darkness into light and grace. Additionally, baptism was often accompanied by the Holy Spirit bestowing gifts upon those who received it. However, in this particular passage, the word "enlightened" refers not to baptism but to spiritual instruction in the gospel, which brings knowledge and understanding. The objects of this knowledge are the doctrines of the gospel, including the person of Christ, God's reconciliation of the world to himself through Christ, and the work of Christ as mediator. This knowledge illuminates the mind and dispels the darkness of ignorance and confusion. While the degree of understanding may vary, a basic knowledge of these fundamental principles is required for someone to be considered illuminated. This property is the first characteristic of those being described, and it indicates that they have received spiritual instruction in the gospel and have been influenced by the Holy Spirit. The apostle emphasizes that being illuminated is a great privilege and mercy, but he also warns that this privilege can be lost and can lead to condemnation for those who have received it but do not continue to pursue it. Moreover, the neglect of this privilege can lead to a hazardous condition that may incline towards apostasy. The text reveals some important aspects regarding the nature of the illumination and knowledge ascribed to the apostates. In order to help those who may be concerned about their own situation, let us examine this first part of their character more closely, and also how this illumination is lost in apostasy.

It should be noted that there is a knowledge of spiritual things that can be purely natural and disciplinary, which can be attained without any special aid or assistance from the Holy Spirit. This is evident in common experience, especially among those who dedicate themselves to the study of spiritual things, yet remain strangers to all spiritual gifts. Some knowledge of the Scripture and its contents is attainable by the same amount of effort and study as any other art or science. The

illumination referred to here, being a gift of the Holy Spirit, differs from and is superior to this purely natural knowledge. It allows for closer access to the light of spiritual things in their own nature than natural knowledge does. Even with the utmost development of purely natural scientific notions, the things of the gospel in their own nature are not only unsuitable for the wills and affections of persons endowed with them but are also considered foolishness to their minds. However, this spiritual illumination gives the mind some satisfaction, with delight and joy in the things that are known. Although it is not fully comprehended, it represents the way of the gospel as a "way of righteousness," as reflected in 2 Peter 2:21, which gives it a unique significance in the mind.

Additionally, the knowledge that is merely natural has little or no power over the soul, either to keep it from sin or to constrain it to obedience. There is no generation of sinners in the world more secure and profligate than those who are solely guided by natural knowledge. However, the illumination referred to here is accompanied by efficacy in such a way that it effectively presses the conscience and the whole soul to abstain from sin and perform all known duties. Therefore, individuals under the power of this illumination and its convictions often walk blamelessly and uprightly in the world, so as not to contribute to the contempt of Christianity, unlike those guided solely by natural knowledge. Furthermore, there is such an alliance between spiritual gifts that wherever one of them resides, it has others accompanying it, or one way or another, belongs to its train. As is evident in this place, even a single talent is made up of many pounds. However, the light and knowledge that come through mere natural acquisition are solitary and lack the company and support of any spiritual gift.

Finally, it should be noted that this spiritual illumination does not lead to a saving, sanctifying light and knowledge. Although it momentarily affects the mind with glimpses of the beauty, glory, and excellence of spiritual things, it does not provide that direct, steady, intuitive insight into them, which is obtained by grace. This illumination does not renew, change, or transform the soul into a conformity with the things known by planting them in the will and affections, as a gracious, saving light does, as described in 2 Corinthians 3:18; 2 Corinthians 4:6, Romans 6:17; Romans 12:2.

I believe it's necessary to clarify the nature of the first part of the character of apostates. The second characteristic mentioned in their description is that they have "tasted of the heavenly gift," which is emphasized by the doubling of the article. We need to understand what is meant by the "heavenly gift" and what it means to "taste" it. The term "dwrea," (δωρεά) meaning "gift" or "donation," carries different nuances depending on its context. Sometimes, it refers to the act of giving itself, while other times it denotes the thing that is given. For instance, in 2 Corinthians 9:15, "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift," it refers to God's bestowal of a generous and benevolent spirit upon the Corinthians in their ministry to the needy believers. This generous spirit is referred to as "God's gift." The gift of Christ is also mentioned in Ephesians 4:7, where it states, "But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it." This means that Christ grants and distributes the fruits of the Spirit according to His own pleasure. Similar examples can be found in Romans 5:15-17 and Ephesians 3:7. At times, "dwrea" can also refer to the thing given, which is properly expressed as "dwron" or "dworhma," as seen in James 1:17. In John 4:10, it is used to signify "The gift of God," referring to the thing bestowed by God or to be bestowed by Him. Some people interpret this passage as referring to the person of Christ Himself, but the context clarifies that it is the Holy Spirit who is symbolized as the "living water" that Jesus promises to bestow. From what I can gather, "dwrea" only signifies the Holy Spirit when referring

to the thing given, and it is never used with any other meaning in relation to God. The Holy Spirit is particularly recognized as the gift of God in the context of the New Testament. The Holy Spirit is called "heavenly" or "from heaven," which may refer to His work and effect, which is heavenly as opposed to carnal and earthly. However, it mainly relates to His mission by Christ after His ascension into heaven, as in Acts 2:33, where He is exalted and receives the promise of the Father and is then sent by Christ from heaven. The promise of the Holy Spirit was that He would be sent from heaven, which is also the same as "heavenly," as in Deuteronomy 4:39, 2 Chronicles 6:23, Job 31:28, Isaiah 32:15, and Isaiah 24:18. When the Holy Spirit came upon the Lord Christ to anoint Him for His work, "the heavens were opened," and He came from above, as in Matthew 3:16. Similarly, in Acts 2:2, at His first coming on the apostles, there was "a sound from heaven." Therefore, in 1 Peter 1:12, the Holy Spirit is said to be "sent from heaven," which is also referred to as "the gift of God." Hence, although there are other reasons why the Holy Spirit can be considered "heavenly," we can see that His being sent from heaven by Christ after His ascension and exaltation there is the main reason for His being referred to as the "heavenly gift" in this passage, although it's not an absolute exclusion but with respect to a particular work.

Regarding the objection raised about the mention of the Holy Spirit in the next clause, it is important to consider the following points:

It is not uncommon in Scripture to express the same idea using different words to emphasize its significance or to provide various aspects of the same truth. This is done to reinforce the meaning and ensure clarity when dealing with complex concepts. The subsequent clause may serve as an explanation or elaboration on the preceding statement. This is a common practice in biblical writing, where a general statement is followed by specific details to enhance understanding. Therefore, the mention of the Holy Spirit in the next clause does not necessarily invalidate the interpretation that includes the Holy Spirit as the gift referred to earlier. In this context, the Holy Spirit is mentioned not in terms of his person, but in relation to a specific work or function. The focus is on the role of the Holy Spirit in transforming the worship practices of the Church. The Holy Spirit is presented as the promised heavenly gift of the new covenant era, through whom God establishes a new way of worship based on the revelation of Christ. The Holy Spirit is entrusted with reforming and renewing all aspects of worship in the Church. This aligns with the broader theme of the passage, which emphasizes the superiority and effectiveness of the new covenant over the old. When Jesus ascended into heaven, he left the existing religious practices intact until the Holy Spirit was sent to enable the disciples to make the necessary changes. The Holy Spirit, as the great gift of God promised under the new covenant, brought about a transformation in worship, abolishing the external and ceremonial elements of the Mosaic law and establishing the new, spiritual worship of the gospel. This understanding aligns with the overall message of Hebrews and the purpose of the Holy Spirit in the context of the new covenant era.

Therefore, the Spirit of God, given for the introduction of the new gospel era in truth and worship, is the "heavenly gift" referred to in this passage. The author of Hebrews warns his readers not to turn away from Jesus Christ speaking in the gospel era through the "Holy Spirit sent down from heaven" (Hebrews 12:25). This includes an antithesis between the law and the gospel, with the former given on earth and the latter given immediately from heaven. While God used angels to give the law on earth, the gospel church-state was given by the Spirit who, although he works in men on earth and is sent from heaven in every act or work, is still in heaven and always speaks

from there, as Jesus himself said of his divine nature (John 3:13).

We can explore what it means to "taste" of this heavenly gift. The expression "tasting" is metaphorical and means no more than making a trial or experiment. We taste things naturally and properly by using our senses to discern our food, and then we either accept or refuse it based on our experience. It does not include eating, much less digestion and turning into nourishment, because its nature is only discerned by tasting, and it may be refused even if we like its taste, for other reasons. Some have argued that "to taste is as much as to eat," as in 2 Samuel 3:35, "I will not taste bread, or anything else." But the meaning is "I will not even taste it," so he would not be able to eat it. And when Jonathan says he only tasted a little honey in 1 Samuel 14:29, it was an excuse and a way to diminish what he had done. However, it is undoubtedly used for some kind of experience of the nature of things, as in Proverbs 31:18, "She tastes that her merchandise is good," or has experience of it, from its increase. Psalms 34:8 says, "O taste and see that the LORD is good," which Peter refers to in 1 Peter 2:3, "If so be that ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious," or found it so by experience. Therefore, to taste means to make an experiment or trial of something, whether to receive or refuse it, and is sometimes opposed to eating and digestion, as in Matthew 27:34. The individuals mentioned in the passage had indeed experienced the power of the Holy Spirit, which is referred to as the gift of God in the context of the gospel dispensation. They had tasted and experienced the excellence of the spiritual worship and revelation of truth that came through the Holy Spirit. This experience was a privilege and a spiritual advantage that not everyone had. It was a recognition that the gospel surpassed their previous religious practices and traditions. The term "tasting" used here implies a limited or partial experience compared to the fullness of spiritual nourishment and understanding that true believers receive. Nonetheless, it signifies an apprehension and personal encounter with the excellence of the gospel as it is administered through the work of the Holy Spirit. This privilege should not be disregarded or despised, as doing so would be a grave offense and lead to irreparable ruin for apostates.

It is important to note that this characterization of the apostates in the passage does not directly relate to faith or the claim that Christ is the gift of God. Instead, it specifically focuses on the apostates' prior experience of the power and efficacy of the Holy Spirit in the context of gospel administrations and worship. To further clarify the apostle's intention in this warning, we can make the following observations:

- I. The gifts bestowed by God under the gospel are distinctively heavenly, contrasting with earthly and carnal things. Those who despise these gifts should be cautious and take heed.
- II. The Holy Spirit is the prominent gift of God under the new covenant, facilitating the understanding of the gospel's mysteries and the establishment of spiritual worship practices.
- III. There is a goodness and excellence in this heavenly gift that can be tasted or experienced to some degree, even by those who do not fully receive it in its life-transforming power and efficacy. They may have a superficial encounter with the truth of God's word without experiencing its life-changing impact, observe the outward order of the church without embracing its inward beauty, or witness the manifestation of spiritual gifts without displaying the accompanying graces.
- IV. Rejecting the gospel, its truth, and its worship after having personally tasted and recognized their value and excellence is a grievous sin. It serves as a clear indication of impending destruction

and a dire consequence. By understanding these points, we can grasp the seriousness of turning away from the gospel after having experienced its truth and the spiritual blessings it offers. The third characteristic of these individuals is described by the phrase "And were made partakers of the Holy Spirit." This privilege holds a central position among the other enumerated benefits, with two preceding it and two following it. This placement signifies that it is the foundational and animating principle from which all the other benefits derive, as they are dependent on participation in the Holy Spirit. The act of partaking in the Holy Spirit can occur through receiving Him, either in the form of personal inhabitation or spiritual operations. The former is impossible for the world, which stands in opposition to true believers, and therefore the individuals in question were not partakers of Him in this sense. The latter refers to the bestowal of His gifts, and to partake in Him in this manner is to receive a portion of what He distributes through spiritual gifts. Thus, being a partaker of the Holy Spirit involves sharing in and benefiting from His spiritual operations.

However, since the other mentioned benefits are also gifts or operations of the Holy Spirit, why is this particular privilege emphasized in such a significant way?

Firstly, it is not uncommon for the Scriptures to express the same concept using different terms in order to impress upon us a deep consideration and understanding of it. This is especially true when an expression carries a particular emphasis, as is the case here. It serves as a severe indictment of the sins of these apostates that they were "partakers of the Holy Spirit" in these ways.

Additionally, placing the participation of the Holy Spirit in the middle of the various aspects mentioned serves to highlight its foundational nature. It is the underlying basis upon which all the other experiences depend. These individuals were not just partakers of the Holy Spirit in isolation; rather, their participation in Him intertwined with being enlightened, tasting the heavenly gift, sharing in the Holy Spirit, and tasting the good word of God and the powers of the age to come.

Furthermore, this emphasis on being partakers of the Holy Spirit underscores their personal involvement and interest in these matters. It goes beyond a mere objective presentation of these spiritual realities within the church; they themselves had a personal stake in them. They experienced the Holy Spirit's workings and were actively involved in the manifestation of His gifts.

Lastly, emphasizing their participation in the Holy Spirit reminds them of the privilege they enjoyed under the gospel, which far exceeded what they had known in Judaism. In their previous religious system, they were unfamiliar with the concept of the Holy Spirit, but now, as participants in Him, they had entered a greater realm of spiritual blessings. This further underscores the seriousness of their apostasy. It is important to note that many may experience the powerful workings of the Holy Spirit without receiving His gracious indwelling, and many may partake in His spiritual gifts without experiencing His saving graces.

FOURTHLY, the description includes their tasting of "the good word of God." We need to address the following questions: 1) What is meant by "the word of God"? 2) How is it considered "good"? 3) In what way did they "taste" it?

Rh/ma means "spoken word," and although its usage by the apostle differs in Hebrews 1:3; Hebrews 11:3, where it denotes the effective active power of God, its typical meaning elsewhere is "spoken words." When applied to God, it refers to His word as preached and declared. Examples

of this can be seen in Romans 10:17 and John 6:68. The "word of God" mentioned here refers to the gospel as preached. It could be argued that they had some experience of the word of God in their Judaistic state. They certainly had the written word, as "the oracles of God were entrusted to them" (Romans 3:2). However, the specific reference here is to the word of God as preached in the gospel dispensation, which is praised elsewhere, such as in Romans 1:16, Acts 20:32, and James 1:21. This word is described as "kalo,n," meaning "good," desirable, and lovely, as implied by the term. The reasons for its goodness will soon be revealed. The word of God as preached in the gospel dispensation can be understood in two ways: 1) In a general sense, encompassing the entire system of truths contained within it, and 2) In a specific sense, regarding the fulfillment of the promise through the sending of Jesus Christ for the redemption of the church. It is this latter sense that is intended here. It is emphatically referred to as "r`h/ma Kuri,ou," or "the word of the Lord," in 1 Peter 1:25. Likewise, the promise of God, specifically, is referred to as His "good word" in Jeremiah 29:10, which states, "After seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill my good promise to you by bringing you back to this place." Jeremiah 33:14 also describes it as "the good thing that I promised." The gospel is the "good news" of peace and salvation through Jesus Christ (Isaiah 52:7).

They are said to have "tasted" this word, as they had done before with the heavenly gift. The apostle seems to deliberately use this expression to show that he isn't referring to those who, by faith, actually receive, feed on, and live through Jesus Christ as presented in the gospel word (John 6:35; John 6:49-51; John 6:54-56). In essence, he's saying, "I'm not talking about those who have truly received and digested the spiritual food of their souls, turning it into spiritual nourishment, but those who have tasted it enough to crave it like newborn infants crave milk, so they can grow by it. They had received a taste of its divine truth and power, which had a variety of effects on them." We can further explain these words and the description of the state of these supposed apostates by considering the following observations, which explain the meaning of the words.

I. There is a goodness and excellence in the word of God that can draw and affect people's minds, even if they don't arrive at genuine obedience to it.

II. There is a special goodness in the word of the promise concerning Jesus Christ and the declaration of its fulfillment. To understand the first proposition, we must examine what is meant by the goodness of the word of God and how apostates can experience it. These things help explain the apostle's meaning. The goodness and excellence of the word of God lies in its spiritual and heavenly truth. All truth is beautiful and desirable, and the perfection of the human mind consists in accepting and conforming to it. While "true" and "good" are distinct concepts, they are inseparable properties of the same subject. The apostle combines them in Php 4:8. Truth is beneficial because it brings peace, satisfaction, and contentment to the mind. Conversely, darkness, errors, and falsehoods are evils that fill the mind with vanity, uncertainty, superstition, fear, and bondage. It is truth that sets the soul free, as stated in John 8:32. The word of God is the only pure, unmixed, and solid truth, as affirmed in John 17:17. In most other matters, men wander aimlessly in the wilderness of endless conjectures. The truth of God's word is firm, stable, and infallible, giving rest to the soul. God is a "God of truth" (Deuteronomy 32:4), the "only true God" (John 17:3), and the eternal source of truth for all things. Thus, the word of God is the only revelation of this truth. Therefore, it is excellent and desirable, and its goodness is to be preferred above all other things.

As it is infallible truth that gives light to the eyes and rest to the soul, it is the "good word of God." The word of God is good in its matter or the doctrines it contains, such as:

[1.] The revelation of God's nature and attributes, which reflects a singular goodness on the word of God since God is the only good, the only source and cause of all goodness, and in whose enjoyment all rest and blessedness is found. Knowing God is incomparably better than enjoying the whole world and everything in it (Jeremiah 9:23-24). [2.] The revelation of the glorious mystery of the Trinity, which is unique to the word of God. The knowledge of this mystery is the only means of having a correct understanding of all other sacred truths, and without it, none of them can be correctly understood or used for the right purpose. This mystery alone gives true rest and peace to the soul. Every true believer, no matter how humble, has this truth's power on their mind, even if they cannot explain it well. All grace and truth are built on this foundation and centre around it, deriving their first power and effectiveness from it. The word that reveals this mystery is a "good word." [3.] The word of God is good in the revelation of the entire mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God and all the effects of infinite wisdom and grace that accompany it. This is the most important aspect of the word of God that I must inquire and declare in this world. [4.] The word of God is good in the declaration of all the benefits of Christ's mediation, such as mercy, grace, pardon, justification, adoption, and so on. The word of God is a good word concerning its blessed effects (Psalms 19:7-9; Acts 20:32; James 1:21). The psalmist assures us that it is "more desirable than gold, even much fine gold" and "sweeter than honey and the honeycomb." This means that it has incomparable excellence, worth, and goodness. Those who do not see the goodness in the word of God are strangers to all. The experience of apostatizing persons with the good word of God can be explained briefly. And their experience is related to the three properties of the word that make it "good": (1) its truth, (2) its subject matter, and (3) its effects. And (1) they experience the truth of the word through their convictions, knowledge, and acknowledgement of it. This brings some peace and satisfaction to their minds, as truth often does, even though it does not renew them. Those who heard John preach the truth rejoiced in his light, finding much satisfaction in it (John 5:35). This was also true of many who heard our Savior preach (Luke 4:22, John 7:46) and countless others who have been convicted by the truth of the gospel. When people escape the corrupting influences of the world through lust and error by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they experience the goodness and sweetness of the rest and peace it brings to their minds.

(2) With respect to the content of the word, they experience its goodness through the hope of future enjoyment. The "good word of God" promises mercy, pardon, life, immortality, and glory. Even though their hopes may be based on faulty grounds, they find great satisfaction in them, especially when they provide relief from their fears and convictions. Although they deceive themselves, they still experience the goodness and sweetness of these things as they are enjoyed by others. Those who truly believe in and receive Jesus Christ through the word experience "joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8), but those who only taste the word still feel a great satisfaction in their emotions (Matthew 13:20).

(3) By this taste, they may experience many effects of the word on their minds and consciences, and therefore experience the power and efficacy of the word. To explain this further and to distinguish this tasting from the receiving and feeding on the word by faith that is unique to true believers, requires an exposition of the text. The experience of apostatizing individuals with the good word of God can be explained briefly, and this experience is related to the three properties

that give the word its name "good": (1) its truth; (2) its subject matter; and (3) its effects.

(1) These individuals taste the word as true through their convictions, knowledge, and acknowledgement of it, which brings some calm and satisfaction to their minds, as it is the nature of truth to do, even though they are not renewed by it. Just as those who heard John preach the truth rejoiced in his light and found much satisfaction in it (John 5:35), so it was with others who heard Jesus preach (Luke 4:22, John 7:46). Those who escape the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of Jesus Christ taste the goodness and sweetness of the rest and satisfaction of their minds, as if they are truly in possession of those things.

(2) They also taste the goodness of the word through the hopes they have for their future enjoyment of mercy, pardon, life, immortality, and glory, which are all proposed in the "good word of God." These individuals have hopes to partake of these things, which will ultimately fail them, but they still find great relish and satisfaction in them, especially when they have relief from their fears and convictions. Even those who deceive themselves in these ways have a taste of the sweetness and goodness of these things for those who enjoy them. Those who truly believe and receive Jesus Christ in the word rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory (1 Peter 1:8), while those who only taste of the word feel great complacency in their affections (Matthew 13:20).

(3) Through this taste, individuals may receive many effects of the word on their minds and consciences, and they may experience the word as to its power and efficacy. More will be said about this in the exposition of the text and the difference between this taste and the receiving and feeding on the word by faith, which is unique to true believers.

(1) This taste is accompanied by delight, pleasure, and satisfaction in hearing the word preached, especially when it is dispensed by a skilled "master of assemblies" who finds "acceptable words" or "words of delight" that are also "upright and true" (Ecclesiastes 12:10-11). The naughty Jews (Ezekiel 33:31-32) and Herod, who heard John the Baptist gladly, found delight and pleasure in his preaching, as did the multitudes who pressed after Christ to hear the word. Unfortunately, this is also likely the case for many in our present day.

(2) This taste not only brings delight in hearing but also some joy in the things heard. These individuals are like the hearers of the word who our Savior compared to the stony ground, receiving it with joy (Matthew 13:20), as it was with the hearers of John the Baptist (John 5:35). The word, as tasted only, has this effect on their minds, causing them to rejoice in the things they hear but not with abiding solid joy or joy unspeakable and full of glory, but rather with something temporary and fleeting. This arises from the satisfaction they find in hearing about good things such as mercy, pardon, grace, immortality, and glory, but they will not go to the trouble of obtaining an interest in them.

(3) The word, as only tasted of, will work a change and reformation of their lives, with a readiness to perform many duties (2 Peter 2:18; 2 Peter 2:20; Mark 6:20).

[4.] I have discussed elsewhere the inward effects that the word may have on the minds and affections of people, including illumination, conviction, and humiliation. However, even with these effects, it is only a taste of the word. The gospel and Christ preached therein are the food of our souls, and true faith not only tastes it but also feeds on it. Through this, it is transformed into grace and spiritual nourishment in our hearts. To achieve this, there are a few requirements:

First, we need to lay up and treasure the word in our hearts, as in Luke 1:66; Luke 2:19. Food cannot nourish us unless it is received into our stomachs, where the means and causes of digestion and communication are located. Similarly, the word needs to be placed in our hearts through fixed meditation and delight. Otherwise, it may please us for a while but will not nourish our souls.

Secondly, food must be mixed and incorporated with the digestive humor, power, and faculty of the stomach, or it will not nourish us. Even if a person eats a lot of food, if there is any noxious humor in their stomach hindering it from mixing itself with the means of digestion, it will not benefit them. Similarly, until the word in our hearts is mixed and incorporated with faith, it will not benefit us, as in Hebrews 4:2. There is nothing of this sort when we only have a taste of the word.

Thirdly, when we feed on the word, it is turned into a principle of life, spiritual strength, and growth within. A mere taste of it will not give us these benefits. Just as food, when digested, turns into flesh, blood, and spirits, the word and Christ in it do the same spiritually for our souls. Thus, Christ becomes "our life" and "lives in us" as the efficient cause of our spiritual life, as in Galatians 2:20 and Colossians 3:3. We grow and increase through the word, as in 1 Peter 2:2. A mere taste of the word may provide temporary refreshment but not lasting strength. Many people enjoy the word when it is preached, but they never gain life, strength, or growth from it.

Fourthly, when the word is received as it should be, it transforms the soul into the likeness of God, who sends us this food to change our whole spiritual constitution and to make us more like Him, in "righteousness and true holiness," as in Ephesians 4:21-24 and 2 Corinthians 3:18. A mere taste of the word will not accomplish this, nor will it give us the love of the truth necessary to abide by it in trials or temptations, as in 2 Thessalonians 2:10. It also will not produce universal obedience or the fruits of the spirit. Many people satisfy themselves with mere notions of the truth and empty speculations about it without even attaining a taste of the goodness of the word. There are many such people in the world. All hearers of the word must scrutinize their own souls severely to determine whether they rest only in a taste of the word and come short of feeding upon it and Christ therein. I must not divert from the text, but I hope that what I have discussed here was necessary to declare the true state and condition of the people spoken of. The second proposition mentioned has been treated elsewhere.

Lastly, the passage adds, "And the powers of the world to come." The term "dunamis" refers to the mighty, great, miraculous operations and works of the Holy Spirit. We have discussed what these are and how they were experienced by the Hebrews in our exposition on chapter 2:4. Such powers are recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. As we have shown in that chapter, the "world to come" mentioned in this epistle refers to the days of the Messiah, which was the common name for the new world that God had promised to create at that time. Therefore, the "powers of the world to come" refer to the gifts that were used to perform signs, wonders, and mighty works by the Holy Spirit, as foretold by the prophets. See Joel 2:28-32 compared with Acts 2:16-21. The people mentioned in the passage are supposed to have experienced these powers, either by witnessing them performed by others or by themselves. They had an encounter with the glorious and powerful workings of the Holy Spirit in confirming the gospel. It is even likely that they themselves were partakers of these powers, particularly the gift of tongues and other miraculous operations. This heightened their apostasy and made their recovery impossible, as nothing in Scripture suggests

that anyone can recover from such sin except those who particularly sin against the Holy Spirit. Although it is possible to contract guilt in other ways, none are as significant as rejecting truth that was confirmed by the Holy Spirit's mighty operations. Such rejection ascribes divine power to the devil, making it impossible to return to the faith. Nevertheless, I would not exclusively limit extraordinary gifts to those that are ordinary. They also belong to the "powers of the world to come," as does everything that contributes to the establishment or preservation of the new world or Christ's kingdom. Setting up a new kingdom requires great and mighty power, but once established, it can be maintained with the ordinary dispensation of power. The extraordinary miraculous gifts of the Spirit were used to set up Christ's kingdom, but it is continued by ordinary gifts, which also belong to the "powers of the world to come." From considering this description in all its parts, we can understand the kind of people that the apostle intends here. It is evident that: The people referred to are not true and sincere believers, at least not described as such, so nothing can be concluded about the possibility of total and final apostasy for those who are true believers. For, (1.) Faith or belief is not mentioned in their description, either directly or in equivalent terms. And in no other part of Scripture are they intended unless by what belongs essentially to their state. (2.) Nothing is ascribed to these persons that is unique to them as believers, taken either from their special relationship to God in Christ or any property of their own that is not communicable to others. (3.) They are compared to the ground on which the rain often falls, and beareth nothing but thorns and briers, unlike true believers. (4.) The apostle distinguishes true believers from those who might be apostates in many particulars. The apostle refers to those who recently converted from Judaism to Christianity based on the truth of its doctrine and miraculous operations. (2.) He refers not to the common people but to those who had obtained special privileges, such as extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit, speaking with tongues or working of miracles. (3.) They had convincing evidence that the kingdom of God and the Messiah, which they called "The world to come," had come unto them. (4.) Such persons could have undergone a change in their affections and behaviour, making them highly respected among the believers.

It takes a horrible frame of mind, a malicious enmity against the truth and holiness of Christ and the gospel, and a violent love of sin and the world, to turn such persons away from faith and blot out all the light and conviction of truth that they had received. However, even the smallest grace is a better security for heaven than the greatest privileges.

These are the people whom our apostle is discussing; and it is supposed by him that they may "fall away," *kai. parapeson taj*. The particular nature of the sin here referred to is subsequently explained in two instances or aggravating circumstances. This word expresses how the sin is related to the state and condition of the sinners themselves; they "fall away," doing that which causes them to do so. We could say "If they shall fall away," as a good expression of the word. Our old translations only rendered it as "If they shall fall," which did not convey the sense of the word and was susceptible to an interpretation not at all intended; for the apostle does not say, "If they shall fall into sin," whether it be this or that sin, or any sin that can be named, even the greatest sin imaginable, namely the denial of Christ in the time of danger and persecution. This was the sin about which so many contests were raised of old, and so many canons were established concerning the ordering of those who had contracted the guilt of it. But Peter fell into this sin and yet was renewed again to repentance, and that speedily. Therefore, we may state that

firstly, with respect to the sense of the words, there is no specific sin that any person may occasionally fall into through the power of temptation that can place the sinner under this condemnation, so that it should be impossible to renew them to repentance. It must, therefore, secondly, be a course of sin or sinning that is meant. But there are different degrees in this, and indeed there are various kinds of such sinful courses. A person may fall into a way of sin while still retaining in their mind a principle of light and conviction that may be conducive to their recovery. To exclude such people from all hope of repentance is expressly contrary to Ezekiel 18:21 and Isaiah 55:7, and indeed to the entire meaning of Scripture. Therefore, men may fall into corrupt and wicked courses after some conviction and reformation of life, and continue in them for a long time. We see examples of this every day, though perhaps none that can parallel that of Manasseh. Consider the nature of his upbringing under his father Hezekiah, the enormity of his sins, the duration of his continuation in them, and his subsequent recovery; he is a great instance in this case. As long as there is in such people any seed of light or conviction of truth that is capable of being awakened or revived, so as to put forth its power and efficacy in their souls, they cannot be considered to be in the condition intended, even though their situation is perilous. The apostle makes a distinction between stumbling and falling in Romans 11:11, and he did not believe that the unbelieving Jews of that time had fallen absolutely or irrecoverably. The word "piptein" means falling absolutely in this context, and "parapiptw" increases the meaning, either as to the perverseness in the way of falling or the violence of the fall itself.

Based on this discussion, it is clear that the apostle is referring to a specific type of falling away.

- (1.) Falling away does not refer to committing a specific sin, regardless of its nature.
- (2.) It is not falling into sin due to temptation or surprise, as there are different rules given for such falls in various places of scripture.
- (3.) It is not falling by rejecting or abandoning certain fundamental Christian beliefs due to error or seduction, such as the Corinthians denying the resurrection or the Galatians denying justification by faith in Christ alone.
- (4.) Falling away consists of a complete renunciation of all the essential principles and doctrines of Christianity, which is why it is named as such. This is the sin of those who abandon the gospel to return to Judaism as it was then practiced, out of opposition and hatred toward Christianity.
- (5.) To fully complete this falling away, the renunciation must be professed and openly declared, such as when someone forsakes the gospel and adopts Judaism, Mohammedanism, or Gentilism in both belief and practice. The apostle discusses faith and obedience as professed, and thus also their opposites. Renouncing the gospel publicly has many aggravating factors that make it a particularly heinous act. However, even those who inwardly reject the gospel but do not profess it due to external reasons are still considered apostates in the sight of God. Their outward compliance with Christian religion only serves to mock God and aggravate their sin. The "falling away" intended by the apostle is a voluntary and deliberate abandonment of the gospel, its faith, rules, and obedience, which would cast the highest reproach and contempt on Christ himself, as explained later in the text.

Regarding these individuals and their "falling away," two things are to be considered:

What is asserted about them; The reason for that assertion. The first point is that it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance. The meaning is negative, denying the possibility of renewing them again unto repentance. However, the qualification of that negation turns it into an affirmation that "it is impossible to do so." The word "impossible" ἀδύνατον (adunaton) is ambiguous in its import, with some suggesting that an absolute impossibility is intended, while others propose only a moral impossibility. The latter interpretation is more commonly accepted, implying that it is rare, difficult, and unlikely to be expected but not an absolute impossibility. There are significant reasons and examples to support both interpretations, but further investigation is necessary to understand its meaning fully.

All future events depend on God, who alone necessarily exists. Other things may or may not be, depending on how they relate to him and his will. Therefore, things that are future may be considered impossible either because they contradict God's nature, his decrees, or his moral order and law. Things may be impossible because they contradict God's nature either absolutely or on some supposition. For example, God cannot lie or forgive sin without satisfaction. In this sense, it is uncertain whether the repentance of these apostates is impossible. It may not be contrary to any essential properties of God's nature, but their actions of "crucifying the Son of God afresh and putting him to open shame" might be incompatible with God's holiness, righteousness, and glory as the supreme ruler of the world. However, this is not a definite interpretation of the passage.

Things that are possible in themselves and with respect to God's nature may be rendered impossible by God's decree and purpose. For instance, God had decreed that Saul and his posterity would not be preserved in the kingdom of Israel, although it was not contrary to his nature. However, God's decrees regarding particular persons, not their qualifications, cannot be what the author is discussing. These decrees are sovereign acts of God's will, not revealed in particular or by any general rule, and create distinctions between individuals in similar circumstances. Therefore, we can have some knowledge about what is possible or impossible with respect to God's nature and essential properties. Still, we cannot know what is possible or impossible with respect to his decrees and purposes, which are free, sovereign acts of his will that even the angels in heaven cannot understand.

(3.) Things can be possible or impossible based on the rules and order that God has set in place. If God has not commanded or given us the means to perform a certain duty, then we should consider it impossible. This is the primary meaning of the impossibility mentioned here. God has neither commanded us to strive for nor appointed any means to achieve the renewal of such people to repentance. Therefore, we have no reason to attempt or expect it, as it is not possible according to any law or rule established by God. The apostle instructs us only insofar as it pertains to our duty in future events. We should not look, hope, pray for, or strive for the renewal of such individuals to repentance. It is not God's law for us to do so. It may be possible with God, but he does not want us to expect such things from him nor has he provided us with a means to achieve it. We should accept whatever he does, but our duty toward such individuals has ended, as they have put themselves beyond our reach. The impossibility spoken of with respect to these individuals is to "renew them again unto repentance." In the New Testament, "repentance" refers to a "gracious change of mind" based on gospel principles and promises that leads the entire soul to conversion to God. This change of mind is the beginning of our turning to God. Without it, neither the will nor the affections will be engaged with God, and sinners cannot find acceptance

with him.

It is impossible to renew, to renew themselves, or to renew them. The construction of the words is defective, and must be supplied. It is not possible for them to do so themselves, and any attempt by others to renew them is in vain, no matter what means are used. We must now inquire what it means to be "renewed" and what it means to be "renewed again."

Renewal or renovation means the restoration of the image of God in our nature, which results in our dedication to Him. We lost the image of God through sin and became separated from Him, but renewal consists of both the restoration of our nature and the dedication of our persons to God. There are two types of renewal:

(1.) The first type of renewal mentioned is real and internal, which occurs through regeneration and effective sanctification. It is described as "the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 5:23). However, this is not what is meant in the context of these apostates, as they never experienced this kind of renewal. Therefore, they cannot be said to be renewed again in something they never had.

(2.) The second type of renewal is outward in the profession and commitment to it. In this sense, renewal consists of making a solemn confession of faith and repentance in Jesus Christ, accompanied by the act of baptism as a sign of this renewal. This was the case for all those who converted to the gospel. They received the outward symbol of an inward renewal when they professed repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, even though they did not actually partake in it. However, this outward profession and pledge of renewal was what they had. By renouncing Him who is the source of this renewal, His grace that brings about this renewal, and the ordinance that symbolizes it, they completely fell away from this state of renewal.

Therefore, it is clear that the phrase "to renew them again," which is "παλιν ανακαλινζειν" (palin anakainizein) in Greek, means to restore them to their previous state of faith through a second renewal and baptism as a symbolic representation of it. This is considered impossible and therefore not to be attempted. In fact, those who make such attempts often engage in blasphemies and persecute the truth, providing sufficient reason for others to avoid them. This is the essence of what is being asserted regarding these apostates: "it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance," indicating that it is impossible to take any action towards them that would bring them back to their former state of faith. From this, several observations can be made to clarify the apostle's intention in this discourse:

(1.) There is no mention of the church's acceptance or rejection of anyone who repents or makes a profession of repentance after committing a sin. Such judgments are to be determined by other rules and circumstances. Therefore, the Novatians cannot use this passage to exclude from church communion those who denied their faith during times of persecution, but expressed a repentance that could not be proven sincere. This passage only refers to those who cannot repent or make a profession of it, with whom the church has nothing to do. It is not stated that those who fell away in this manner can never be readmitted to their previous state in the church upon repentance, but that God's severity against them is such that he will not grant them repentance unto life again.

(2.) There is nothing in this passage that prevents anyone who has committed a great sin or engaged in a course of sinning after receiving light, convictions, and gifts from repenting and striving for sincerity in their faith. In fact, such a desire and effort exempts anyone from the judgment threatened in this passage.

Therefore, this passage can greatly encourage sinners, as it is declared that those who are rejected by God and deemed impossible to renew are those who never endeavor to turn by repentance. Those who are sincerely seeking to repent have the door of mercy still open to them. It is only against those who never seek to turn by repentance that the door is shut. Even if the sinners rejected by God may fall under the conviction of their sins and despair of their future condition, they never rise up to attempt repentance on the terms of the gospel. The impossibility that is intended here, of whatever sort it may be, refers to the severity of God in giving up such sinners to their obduracy and obstinacy in sinning. They become so blind and hard-hearted that they neither will nor shall ever sincerely seek after repentance, and no means can bring them to it according to the mind of God. The righteousness of this severity is taken from the nature of this sin, as the apostle explains in the following instances. In passing, we may observe that: In preaching the gospel, it's necessary to emphasize the severity of God in dealing with sinners who provoke Him. Indeed, God's severity is primarily exercised in relation to sins against the gospel, as the apostle reminds us in the case of the unbelieving Jews in Romans 11:22 : "Behold the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell (those in the text), severity. "vApotomi,a" (βαπτομ■α). refers to a sharp direction or cutting off. Therefore, I don't believe it's an essential property of God's nature, unlike His holiness, righteousness, or vindictive justice, which are essential properties of the divine nature. This is why God cannot and will not allow people to sin and go unpunished without satisfaction or atonement for their sins. This is something we have discussed elsewhere.

God's "severity" is his free act of will, which operates according to these essential properties of his nature in an extraordinary way, whenever and however He chooses. When the apostle wants to remind us of this severity, to instil in us a holy fear and reverence for God in our worship, he adds, "For our God is a consuming fire," in Hebrews 12:29. This means that God is infinitely pure, holy, and righteous, and He will deal with us accordingly. Therefore, if we do not work for "grace to serve him acceptably with reverence and godly fear," He may unexpectedly unleash His severity upon us.

God's severity is His exemplary way of dealing with sinners who provoke Him, according to the demands of His holiness and wisdom, without any further patience or forbearance. There are certain sins, or degrees of sinning, that God's holiness, majesty, and wisdom cannot tolerate without punishment or attention in this world. In these cases, God is said to exercise His severity, and He does so in a way that is just and fitting.

(1.) When preaching the gospel, it is necessary to emphasise the severity of God's punishment towards those who sin against it, particularly those who commit sins against the gospel. The Apostle Paul directs us to consider this when speaking of the unbelieving Jews in Romans 11:22, "Behold the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity." The word "severity" here means a sharp direction or cutting off. I do not understand it to be an essential property of God's nature like his holiness, righteousness, or vindictive justice, which are essential properties of

God's nature. He will not and cannot allow sin to go unpunished without any satisfaction or atonement being made for them, which we have previously discussed. "Severity" is God's free act of will, acting according to these properties of His nature when and how He pleases. Therefore, it is resolved into them. Our Apostle, when trying to illustrate this severity to us, adds as his motive, "For our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29), meaning that God is of an infinitely pure, holy, righteous nature, and will deal with us accordingly. If we do not labour for "grace to serve him acceptably with reverence and godly fear," then He may unexpectedly break forth upon us in severity. This severity is God's exemplary dealing with sinners who provoke Him, according to the exigence of His holiness and wisdom, without any longer patience or forbearance. There are some sins, or degrees of sinning, that God cannot tolerate and so, they will not go unpunished or unnoticed in this world. In such cases, God is said to exercise His severity, which can be seen in two ways:

[1.] Extraordinary, outward judgments on open, profligate sinners, particularly His enemies. When God acts towards His adversaries according to the description given of Himself in Nahum 1:2, He deals with them in severity. There must be something extraordinary in those judgments wherein God will exercise and manifest severity. This is shown in sudden destructions of persecutors or people with flagitious wickedness, great desolations of provoking families, cities, and nations, fire from heaven, inundations, plagues, earthquakes, and such sudden, extraordinary, consuming judgments that God gives instances of His severity in the world, Romans 1:18.

[2.] Open, visible, and manifest judgments that are required to be seen by those who are being punished and those who consider them wisely. So, God speaks of himself in Deuteronomy 7:10, "God that re-payeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them: he will not be slack to him that hateth him, he will repay him to his face," meaning He will do it openly and visibly, so that they and others will take notice of His severity in the punishment. This is how God pours everlasting contempt upon the security of His proudest and haughtiest adversaries. When they think they have sufficiently provided for their own safety, stopped all avenues of evil, and given themselves up to their lusts and pleasures, God breaks in upon them with an example of His severity to their utter destruction. This will be the state one day of the whole Babylonish interest in the world (Revelation 18:7-10), but it is not directly intended in this passage, although this effect of God's severity overtook these apostates afterward.

(2.) In spiritual judgments. Through these, God in his severity leaves unprofitable, provoking, and apostate believers in a state of impenitence where it is impossible for them to be renewed. This is the harshest of all God's judgments, as it carries with it a sentence of eternal damnation. As our apostle tells us, "Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment," 1 Timothy 5:24. God passes judgment concerning them in this world in such a way that their state and condition will never change for all eternity. The severity of God towards sinners under the gospel, shutting them up under final impenitency, consists of four things:

[1.] God puts an end to all his expectation concerning them; he expects nothing more from them, and therefore does not exercise any more care about them. When God is pleased to offer the use of means for conversion and repentance to anyone, he is said to expect corresponding fruits: "I did," says he, "so and so to my vineyard; and I looked that it should bring forth grapes," Isaiah 5:2; Isaiah 5:4. Therefore, when God takes away all means of grace and repentance from anyone, he

puts an end to his own expectation of any fruits. For if a man cannot have any fruit from his vineyard while he tends it, or from his field while he cultivates it, he will never expect any after he has given them up and left them to waste. And on the other hand, when he completely stops looking for any fruit from them, he will not tend to them anymore. Why should he put himself to trouble or expense for no reason? Woe to the souls of men when God in this sense expects no more from them! That is when he puts an end to his patience or long-suffering towards them, from which all supplies of the means of conversion and repentance arise and spring. God does this in some cases, and that in ways we shall discuss later.

[2.] God will actually punish them with hardness of heart and blindness of mind, so that they will never repent or believe: John 12:39-40, "Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them." God will now judicially blind them and harden them, and everything that befalls them will promote their hardening. So it was with these Jews; the doctrine of Christ filled them with envy, his holiness with malice, and his miracles with rage and madness. Their table was a snare to them, and that which should have been for their good turned to their hurt. So it is with all those whom God hardens in his severity. Whether the external means are continued to them or not, it does not matter; everything will drive them farther from God and increase their obstinacy against him. From here, they become scoffers and persecutors, openly scorning and hating the truth. Herein, they may please themselves until they are swallowed up in despair or the grave.

[3.] God usually, in his severity, abandons them to sensual desires. He did the same to the idolaters of old, "giving them over to shameful lusts," as described by the apostle in Romans 1:26. Pursuing these lusts, they were "filled with every kind of wickedness" (Romans 1:29). In the same way, God often deals with apostates from the gospel or its core tenets, leading them to idolatry and superstition. When they become involved in such pursuits, especially when they are given over to them by God, they are certainly held under cords and chains until they reach final impenitency.

[4.] God gave such individuals over to Satan to be blinded and led by him into pernicious delusions. "Because they refused to love the truth and so be saved, God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness," states 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12. This was the condition of those prophesied about in this passage. The gospel truth was preached to them, and for a time, they professed it. They accepted the truth but did not love it, so they did not comply with it or improve it for its intended purpose. This kept them unproductive under their profession. If the truth is not loved in addition to being believed, it will not bear fruit. However, this was not the end of their problems. They took pleasure in their sins, desires, and unrighteousness, resolved not to abandon them for any reason. As all of these are judged and condemned by the gospel truth without exception, they began to dislike and secretly hate the truth itself. However, since they found themselves needing religion or at least the pretense of one to oppose the truth they had rejected, they were ready to accept anything that offered itself to them. As punishment and revenge for their contempt of his gospel and ingratitude, God gave them up to Satan's power. He blinded, deceived, and deluded them so effectively that they not only embraced but obstinately believed and clung to the lies, errors, and falsehoods he suggested to them. This is the path that

many carnal preachers take to turn towards Roman idolatry every day.

More examples of God's severity in dealing with those described in the text could be given, but these are enough to demonstrate the way in which he treats such people. As a result, it follows that their restoration to repentance is impossible, because what hope or expectation can there be for those whom God has completely abandoned, whom he has struck with blindness and hardness of heart, and whom he has given over not only to the power of their own lusts and vile affections, but also directly to Satan, to be deceived and led captive as he pleases? It would be futile to attempt to make such people repent. This severity of God should be preached and emphasised in the proclamation of the gospel. The reader can refer to what has already been said about the use of gospel threats and comminations in chapters three and four. Human nature is prone to "despise the riches of the goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering of God, not knowing that the goodness of God leads to repentance." And as a result of this, "after their hardness and impenitent heart, they store up wrath for themselves on the day of wrath," as our apostle says in Romans 2:4-5. By considering nothing in God but his mercy and long-suffering, and in the gospel but grace and forgiveness, people are ready to despise and pervert them, either turning them into licentiousness or using them to justify their sins. This is how many people, under the preaching of the gospel, harden themselves daily to destruction, being deceived by their own lusts and corrupt inclinations, heightened by Satan's cunning.

Others are not willing to indulge in their carnal desires on such wicked pretexts, but because of their lack of constant vigilance and watchfulness, they are prone to sloth and negligence, as well as many other negative states of mind. Both types of people must be reminded of God's severity, which can serve to motivate them. They must be taught that there are hidden forces that accompany the dispensation of the gospel, which are always "ready to avenge all disobedience" (2 Corinthians 10:6), and that "God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life" (Galatians 6:7-8). But I have already demonstrated elsewhere the necessity of arming the gospel with threats as well as promises, so I will not repeat it here. From what has been discussed, it is clear how necessary and beneficial the warning or threat expressed by the apostle is. It is the incorrect interpretation of men that has caused confusion around it; in itself, it is both straightforward and essential. Should we be afraid to say that God will not renew such sinners as those previously described unto repentance? Or to declare to sinners that without repentance, they cannot be saved? Or shall we preach to people that, no matter how much light they have had, whatever gifts or privileges they have received, or whatever profession they have made, if they fall totally and unrepentantly from the gospel into that which is the most opposed to its truth and holiness, there is no doubt that they may repent again and be saved? God forbid such wickedness should come from our mouths! Instead, we are to warn all those in danger of such apostasy that "if anyone draws back, God's soul shall have no pleasure in him," and that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." He will harden such sinners and "give them up to strong delusions, that they may be damned," and he is not under any obligation to give them repentance, but instead has given many severe warnings to the contrary. He has told us that such people are "trees twice dead, uprooted from the ground," of which there is no hope, and that "denying the Lord who bought them, they bring on themselves swift destruction, whose damnation slumbers not," along with countless other declarations of severity against them. But what can be

said of those who, having renounced the gospel for a time through great temptations, fears, or surprises, or those who, due to great sins against light and backsliding in profession, believe themselves to have fallen into this condition, yet greatly desire recovery and cry out to God for repentance and acceptance? I answer as before: they are not at all concerned with this text. Nothing here excludes them from acceptance with God and eternal salvation, no matter who they are or what they have done, as long as they seek it through repentance. Only those who obstinately shut themselves off from all efforts towards repentance are excluded by God, and we have nothing to do with them.

It is true that the primary and direct recipients referred to in this passage were those who had received extraordinary or miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit during those times. However, by analogy, this may also be extended to others, now that those gifts have ceased in the church. For the gifts and privileges that are still bestowed upon individuals in present circumstances lay the same obligation on them to persevere in their profession and carry the same severity of consequences if they fall away, just as those extraordinary gifts did in the past. Therefore, let us not be overconfident, but instead fear falling away. Unproductive listeners and those who backslide in heart and behaviour should be awakened, lest they come under God's judgment without realizing it.

Returning to our apostle, we must now give an account of the nature of this sin that is accompanied by such a severe judgment. This is done by him in two instances. The first instance is "crucifying again to themselves the Son of God." Beza affirms that the words "to themselves" are absent from some copies, and therefore, the words may have a different sense from what is commonly understood. For "crucifying again" may refer to anyone who would renew them. However, it is impossible to renew them to repentance, for this cannot be done without crucifying the Son of God again. This is because these apostates have completely rejected any interest in or benefit from his death, which was once given for sinners. No one should, nor could, crucify Christ again for them to be renewed and saved. It is unthinkable to even entertain such a thought. This sense is plainly expressed by the apostle in chapter 10:26-27, "For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins." Christ cannot be offered again, and therefore, cannot be crucified again. Without this sacrifice, the sins of these individuals cannot be expiated. The unbloody sacrifice of Christ every day in the mass was not yet invented and is a relief only for those who have no interest in that one sacrifice that he offered for all. The allusion to the sacrifices under the law is made in the other passage. Under the law, the sacrifices could only legally expiate sins that had been committed before their offering. Therefore, they had to be repeated frequently upon repeated sinning. However, this cannot be done anymore. Christ was offered once for sin, and whoever loses their interest in that one offering and forfeits the benefit of it, there is no more sacrifice for them. "Christ henceforth dieth no more." We cannot assume that the grace of the gospel is restricted as it was all confined to that one sacrifice, as represented in the multiple sacrifices of the law.

(1.) The sacrifice of Christ extends farther, both in terms of sins and persons, than all the sacrifices of the law put together: "Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses," Acts 13:39. Under the law, there were sins for which no sacrifice was provided, and those who committed them were to be put to death without mercy, as in cases of murder and adultery, in which David says, "You do not delight

in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings," Psalms 51:16. However,

(2.) If someone were to apostatize from either the law or the gospel, the outcome would be the same. Under the law, no sacrifice was appointed for those who had completely abandoned its fundamental principles or sinned "presumptuously" with a high and stubborn hand. This is what is meant by "despising Moses' law," and those who are guilty of it were to "die without mercy," Hebrews 10:28. The same is true under the gospel. Willful apostates who forfeit all their interest in Christ's sacrifice have no relief appointed for them, and God will cut them off and destroy them, as will be explained in that place. This may be the meaning of the words, assuming that "to themselves" does not originally belong to this passage. God has confined all hope of mercy, grace, and salvation to the one single offering and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Our apostle emphasizes and urges this in chapters 9:25-28 and 10:12, 14. Infinite wisdom and sovereign pleasure have centered all grace, mercy, and blessedness in him alone, John 1:14; John 1:16-17; Acts 4:12; Colossians 1:19. His "one offering" is so sufficient and powerfully effective for all who seek an interest in it by faith that this restraint is not a hindrance, and no sinner has any cause to complain about it. If they reject and despise it, it is their own fault, and at their own peril; and the repeated sacrifice of the mass or anything else they may turn to will not provide them any relief.

However, the word is consistent enough in ancient copies to maintain its position, and the context requires its continuation. This makes the act of "crucifying again" the responsibility of the apostates themselves, and it is asserted as belonging to their sin, rather than denied as a means of relief from their sin: "They crucify him again to themselves." They do not do it literally, as it is impossible; but they do it to themselves morally. This is part of their sin of falling away, making it unforgivable. They crucify the Son of God again, not literally, but within themselves.

We must investigate how they did it, or in what sense it is charged upon them by the apostle. This was primarily done by endorsing and supporting those who had already crucified him. By doing this, they followed the same path and committed the same act. They justified the Jews' crucifixion of Jesus as a criminal, and in doing so, they approved and validated the act. There is no middle ground in this matter. Either Jesus must be recognised as the Son of God, and his gospel must be obeyed, or he must be seen as a criminal and rejected. By going over to the Jews, these apostates endorsed what they had done in crucifying him as a criminal.

They did it by declaring that they had tried and tested Christ, his gospel, and his ways, and found nothing substantial, truthful, or good in them, which would justify them to continue with their faith. Julian the emperor, a famous or infamous apostate, even made this his motto for apostasy, "I have read, known, and condemned" your Gospel. This has been the way of apostates in all ages. During the primitive times, they acted as spies for the Gentiles and brought false reports about the land, not satisfied to merely disapprove of what was truly taught, believed, and practiced among Christians. They invidiously represented and odiously traduced what was really professed and invented lies and calumnies about conspiracies, seditions, and inconsistencies with public peace among them. This was done in the hopes of ruining the entire Christian interest and everything associated with it. Such actions are to "crucify Christ afresh and put him to an open shame." This is still the way of apostates today. Those who have made progress in more intimate religious duties, such as prayer and preaching, by virtue of spiritual gifts, and other acts of mutual spiritual

communion that the majority of people do not concern themselves with, when they fall from these duties and renounce them in compliance with their own temptations, they aim at nothing more than exposing them to open shame and ignominy through malicious and scurrilous representations of them and false additions of things perverse or ridiculous. Their language is "We have known and tried these things, and declare their folly," hoping to be believed because of their pretended experience. This alone is sufficient to render them suspected with all persons of wisdom and sobriety. No living person can dishonor Jesus Christ more in his person or in any of his ways than to openly profess that they find nothing desirable in them upon trial. "It would have been better for such people not to have known the way of righteousness than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them." And this is the first aggravation of the sin mentioned, taken from the act attributed to the sinners, "they crucify him again;" they do it as much as they can, and declare that they would actually do it if they had the power. He adds another from the consideration of the person who was thus treated by them. It was the "Son of God" whom they dealt with in this way. They did not do it when he had "emptied himself, and made himself of no reputation," so that it was not easy to see through all the veils of his outward weakness and condition in this world, to "see his glory, as the glory of the only-begotten of the Father" (in which state he was crucified by the Jews); but now, when he had been "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead," and when his divinity was variously attested to in the world and among themselves. And this is the great aggravation of sin against the gospel, namely, unbelief, that it is immediately against the "Son of God." His person is despised in it, both absolutely and in the discharge of all his offices; and therefore, God himself is also despised, because he has nothing to do with us but through his Son. Thirdly, the apostle adds, as another aggravation of their sin, *kai paradeigmatizontas* (καὶ παραδειγματίζοντας), "exposing him again to public ignominy," or "shame." *Paradeigmatizō* means to bring any supposed offenders to such open punishment as is shameful in the eyes of people, and renders them vile who are so accused and punished. The word is only used once more in the New Testament, namely, in Matthew 1:19, where it is spoken of Joseph in reference to his espoused wife, the holy Virgin: *Mh. qe,lwn auvth.n paradeigmati,sai*, — "Not willing to make her a public example;" that is, by bringing her forth to a shameful punishment for the terror of others.

According to the apostle, who expressed the death of Christ as inflicted by men, the evils that accompanied it can be reduced to two: (1) the pain of it and (2) the shame. In Hebrews 12:2, it is said that "He endured the cross and despised the shame." The death of the cross was both painful and shameful in all its circumstances of time, place, and person. Christ was ignominiously traduced or put to open shame, and his crucifixion was particularly shameful among all people. When calling over his death in this place, the apostle refers to the same heads of suffering and shame, namely "crucifying him" and "putting him to an open shame." These apostates did not spare Christ in the latter aspect any more than in the former, so far as it lay in their power.

Therefore, we can raise a sufficient answer to an objection of no small importance that arises against our exposition of this place. The objection may be: "If those who actually and really crucified the Son of God in his own person, and put him to open shame, did yet obtain mercy and pardon of that and all other sins, as it is confessed they did, why is it that those who renounce him and do so crucify him and put him to shame only metaphorically and to themselves should be

excluded from all hopes of repentance and pardon?" The answer is that the sin of those who forsake Christ and the gospel, after their conviction of its truth and profession of it, is on many accounts far greater than that of those who crucified him in the days of his flesh. There are several reasons why God will exercise more severity towards this latter sort of sinners than towards the former. The sin is greater because it cannot be excused by ignorance. This is widely accepted as the reason why the sin of crucifying Christ was forgivable upon repentance, and why repentance was possible. Peter laid this out as the foundation for his exhortation to repentance in his sermon to the people: "And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders," (Acts 3:17). "If they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory," (1 Corinthians 2:8), which our apostle also cites in his own case (1 Timothy 1:13). This put their sin in the category of those for which sacrifices were allowed in the past and which fell under the care of God, who knows how to have "compassion on the ignorant and on those who are out of the way." But one might ask, "How could they be excused by ignorance when they had so many means and evidences of conviction about the truth of his person as the Messiah and of his doctrine from heaven? Besides the consistent testimony of Moses and the prophets, his personal holiness and life, the effectiveness of his teaching, and the evidence of his miracles, all demonstrated and confirmed the truth of these things, such that they could only have been ignorant through willful obstinacy."

Response: First, these were indeed such means of conviction that their sin and unbelief against them had no real excuse, as the Lord himself expressed (John 15:22; John 12:47-48; John 10:36-38). Secondly, this ignorance only allowed for their repentance to be possible and their sin to be pardonable. Thirdly, this is only true until God has used all the means of conviction that he intends, and no longer. He had not yet done so. He had yet to provide two more testimonies to the truth which he would graciously afford: firstly, his resurrection from the dead, which was always afterward cited as the principal evidence of God's approval of him (Romans 1:4); and secondly, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in his miraculous operations (Acts 2:32-33; Acts 5:32, 1 Timothy 3:16). But wherever and whenever God has granted all the means of conviction that he desires, be they ordinary or extraordinary, if they are rejected, there is no hope (Luke 16:29-31). On the other hand, the sin of rejecting Christ and the gospel after professing them is absolutely willful and done with a high hand, against all the light and conviction that God will give of the truth to anyone in this world.

These individuals had experienced the truth, goodness, and excellence of the gospel, which those others had not and could not have. They had "tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come" and had received great satisfaction in the things they were convinced of, as was explained previously. Therefore, in their rejection of Him and His teachings, an unconquerable hatred and malice must be acknowledged to be prevalent. People must be cautious when they begin to sin against their own experiences, as evil lies at the door.

During the crucifixion of the Lord Christ, God still had a plan for mercy and grace, which He would communicate to mankind through the dispensation of His Spirit. Therefore, there was a way set open for those who were guilty of that sin to repent and receive pardon. However, now that this opportunity has been taken away, only severity remains.

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit was present in the sin of these individuals, for they had either experienced or witnessed the mighty operations of the Holy Spirit giving testimony to Christ and the gospel. Therefore, they could not renounce the Lord Christ without ascribing these works of the Holy Spirit to the devil, who acted them out. Our apostle says, "No one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus anathema," or "accursed," in 1 Corinthians 12:3. To call Him anathema is to declare and avow that He was justly crucified as an accursed person and a public pest. These individuals who went over to the Jews, in support of what they had done against Him, did just that. No one can do this while speaking by the Holy Spirit, and whoever does so is influenced by the spirit of the devil. If they have known the testimony of the Holy Spirit to the contrary, they do it in spite of Him, which makes the sin irremissible.

03. CHAPTER 2.

CHAPTER 2.

PARTIAL APOSTASY FROM THE GOSPEL — PRETENSES OF THE CHURCH OF ROME AGAINST THE CHARGE OF THIS EVIL EXAMINED AND REJECTED.

APOSTASY from the gospel can be either total or partial. We have discussed the former as a grave and prominent example. When individuals deliberately and maliciously (because they cannot do it deliberately without doing it maliciously) renounce Jesus Christ as a deceiver and criminal, and side with the Jews who crucified him, they enter that portion of hell and darkness that is specifically reserved for this sin. It would be preferable for these individuals if their guilt was no more severe than that of those who actually "with wicked hands slew him and hanged him on a tree." However, by disregarding all the means of conviction and evidence of truth that God provides in this world, they position themselves outside of that divine mercy and pardon that some of the others experienced. Many people in the world today, with evil hearts and blinded minds, pursue carnal desires and willingly and obstinately embrace Islam, openly renouncing Christ and the gospel. These individuals have nothing left but "a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries."

I am not suggesting that all individuals who are driven to this abomination are subject to the same dreadful fate since there may be various circumstantial differences that, while not changing the nature of the crime, could result in different outcomes. Alleviating circumstances, such as unexpected temptations accompanied by fear and terror that disrupt the influence of light and conviction of truth, could provide an exemption from a decreetory determination under this verdict. Moreover, other cases may also be accompanied by such mitigating circumstances that, while preserving their minds and souls from wilful malice, provide room for the exercise of sovereign grace. I personally knew someone, and even conversed with him and assisted him in his spiritual pursuits, who turned to Islam while in India, was actually initiated into their superstitions through circumcision, and lived in this belief for a year or two. Yet, he was genuinely brought back to repentance and died believing in the Son of God.

Partial apostasy refers to any act or behaviour that reflects a certain degree of the nature of total apostasy. Even if it is to a lesser extent, it adds to the guilt of crucifying and shaming the Son of God again. This is because it is only in His gospel and church that Christ can suffer from men now. If an important principle of the gospel is abandoned or renounced, especially if many are forsaken, if the obedience required by the gospel is habitually neglected, or if people believe differently and live differently from what it requires, it constitutes partial apostasy whose guilt and danger correspond to the degree and extent to which it is committed. This is what we can accuse, and what the Lord Christ in His Word accuses, of every nation on earth where the gospel is publicly professed. People tend to be satisfied and pleased with their own condition, where they have found their own rest and contentment. Churches are content with their external structure and practices, particularly when accompanied by worldly benefits, and they vehemently argue that

everything is well, and the gospel is sufficiently adhered to as long as their external structure is maintained and their laws are upheld. The world is filled with endless disputes about these things, in which most people aim for nothing more than success in their specific disputes. Only a few remain who fruitlessly complain that under all these conflicts, the glory, power, and purity of Christian religion are lost in the world. It is known that Christ's judgment concerning churches and their good or bad spiritual condition is often very different from their own judgment of themselves. It was not only for their sake, but also as a warning to all others in all ages, that it was recorded for all eternity that when the church in Laodicea declared without hesitation that she was "rich and increased with goods, and had need of nothing," the Lord Christ, "the Amen, the faithful and true witness," declared her to be "wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked." The fact that things are not in a better state in many, if not most churches in the world today, is too evident to be denied with any claim to reverence for the Word of God, and this will be demonstrated later.

Certainly, the Lord Christ may say to the churches and nations where his name is still acknowledged in the world what God said long ago about the Jews, who were then his only church: "I planted you like a choice vine from the very best seed. How did you grow into degenerate wild vines?" (Jeremiah 2:21). To most of them, he might say what was said in another place: "How the faithful city has become a prostitute! She was once filled with justice and righteousness. Now murderers roam her streets. Your silver has become dross, your wine is diluted with water" (Isaiah 1:21-22). The enormity of the evil complained of, the secret mystery of its accomplishment, the unreasonableness, folly, and ingratitude of the act, and the strangeness of the event make the complaint an object of wonder. Indeed, if a person reflects on the nature of the gospel and the benefits it brings to humanity, they cannot help but be amazed to find so many people so quickly weary of it and so ready on all occasions to abandon it. For future glory and blessed immortality are only attainable through it, and all true freedom, tranquility, peace, and blessedness that our nature can experience in this life are communicable to our souls through no other means. In short, everything of advantage in any gracious communication from God to us, without which we are nothing but the worst and most malignant product of sin and misery, is confined to the gospel and its contents. Therefore, the carelessness of people in neglecting it and their wickedness in abandoning it, whether in its principles or obedience, can be justly expressed as God does in the lesser instance of the apostasy of the Jewish church: "Has a nation ever changed its gods, even though they are not real? But my people have exchanged their glorious God for worthless idols. Be amazed at this, heavens; be shocked and utterly appalled" (Jeremiah 2:11-12). And yet, as we shall later show, this is how it is among the majority of those who are called Christians in the world. The Roman Catholic Church vigorously asserts its exemption from this accusation by virtue of special privilege. However, it is not an internal privilege of efficacious grace in their minds and wills to preserve them and everything that belongs to them in saving faith and obedience, which alone constitutes compliance with the gospel. Instead, it is an external privilege of indefectibility that supposedly keeps them in the state required by the gospel, though they know not how, but as it were, whether they want to or not!

There is no party or society of people under heaven that can use this excuse without violating common decency, considering the obvious facts to the contrary. Just like the prophets accused the Jews of apostasy from the law and its required obedience, threatening destruction for their sins, they defended themselves against a conviction of guilt and fear of punishment with an

unreasonable, even outrageous confidence in church privileges, which they not only appropriated but confined to themselves, shouting, "The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, are these." They believed this was enough to refute the prophets' accusations, to vindicate their innocence, and secure their peace. The prophet's reply to them would equally apply in both cases, "Behold, you trust in lying words, that cannot profit. Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you know not; and come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations?" Jeremiah 7:8-10. A plea of innocence and hope of impunity, under an evident guilt of the highest immoralities and the vilest of superstitions, is equally foolish and impudent. The same has happened to the Church of Rome, as it did to the one from whom she falsely claims to derive her incredible privilege of indefectibility. When our Lord Christ prophesied that all men would forsake him, he alone undertook, with the greatest confidence and in a unique manner, to the contrary for himself. But all the prerogative that he claimed was only that when all the other disciples forsook their Master and fled, as he had predicted, he alone forsook him and denied him. And this impossibility of failing, which this church appropriates to itself as its unique and incommunicable privilege, has possibly been a means of, but certainly is accompanied by, a particular apostasy above all other churches in the world. Nothing can be more vain in itself, nor more detrimental to the souls of those who are under the power of such an idea, than this claim when all facts testify openly to the contrary. The principal nations of its communion are now involved in fierce, bloody, and unjustified wars, which are accompanied by a convergence of all those evils and wickednesses that tend to make mankind sinful and miserable. Is this the love and peace that ought to exist among the disciples of Christ, according to the gospel rule, and without which they cannot have any evidence in themselves or give any testimony to the world that they are so? Does this answer the promises to be fulfilled in the days of the Messiah, Isaiah 2:2-4, or the countless precepts given by Jesus Christ himself regarding unity, love, and peace? "But wars," they say, "are lawful, and so no argument that those engaged in them are revolters from the rule of the gospel." I say, it may be so, but it is much safer to judge all wars as unlawful than to justify all the wars that are raging in Christendom or to suppose that they are consistent with the rule or doctrine of the gospel. Many things must concur to reconcile any of them with the obedience we owe to the Prince of Peace, and none of them are of such a nature or necessity that they could not have been prevented if the gospel had its proper effect on the minds of all who are called Christians and its due authority over their consciences. Nevertheless, in a church that claims not to have fallen away or apostatized from the evangelical rule, it is reasonable to expect a different representation nor doth the present state of things amongst them answer the various promises of the communication of the Holy Spirit, with his gifts, graces, and effects, which were to accompany the profession of the gospel.

Furthermore, the majority of those who adhere to the beliefs of the church, as well as many of those who lead it, live lives that openly contradict the teachings of the gospel. It can be said of them, as one of them said of a part of the New Testament, "Either this is not the gospel, or we are not true Christians." In essence, if the kingdom of Christ, which was once a realm of light, truth, and holiness; characterized by separation in principles, affections, and behavior from the world; communion with God and loving-kindness among men; and righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, can become, and has become, a kingdom of darkness, pride, ignorance, ambition, persecution, blood, superstition, and idolatry, then only in that sense can it still exist among them,

and they have not deviated from its laws and governance.

Moreover, the behavior of the majority of those who belong to and lead that church is in direct contradiction to the rule of obedience laid out in the gospel. One could generally say of them, as one person said of a section of the New Testament, "Either this is not gospel, or we are not Christians." In summary, if the kingdom of Christ, once a kingdom of light, truth, and holiness, characterized by separation in principles, affections, and conversation from the world, communion with God and loving-kindness among men, righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, can become and has become a kingdom of darkness, pride, ignorance, ambition, persecution, blood, superstition, and idolatry, then it only visibly remains among them, and they have not apostatized from its laws and governance.

However, they can easily absolve themselves of the guilt of this accusation, for even though the aforementioned things are partially acknowledged (why deny the sun shines at noon?), the peace, love, unity, holiness, and righteousness that should be present in the church according to the gospel are found among them on other grounds. The whole church and all its members agree and are united under one head, the pope of Rome, which is the only evangelical unity required of Christ's disciples. Moreover, the holiness of worship, the saints who have been among them, their current retired devotionists, and the generosity of many, demonstrated through acts of piety and charity, sufficiently answer the sanctification, holiness, and love, the conformity to Christ in heavenly-mindedness and obedience that the gospel demands. However, this is only an account of the true nature of the apostasy of the latter times, which the apostle foretold in 2 Timothy 3:1-5, "In the last days, perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." Under the influence of the most disgusting and outrageous lusts, people create an external shape, image, and representation of holiness. They delineate a form of religion by replacing other things in its place instead of its life and substance, which are lost. Christianity's power is openly denied in their behavior, which is driven by all those lusts that are contrary to it. The grace of God in the gospel teaches those who receive it to "deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." People cannot renounce this more completely than by being "foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving diverse lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another." Such people are far removed from being "saved by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit." When people live in this state and condition, which is a complete denial or renunciation of the power of godliness or religion, if they create a scheme, form, and appearance of it to fill the absence of it by applying the names, offices, and properties of gospel effects to outward, lifeless duties or their appearances, the predicted apostasy is entirely accomplished. This is to let David go, and to foist an image covered with goats' hair in his stead; or at best, like Rehoboam, to make brazen shields in the room of those of gold taken away by Shishak. No otherwise doth the church of Rome deal in this matter. The power of faith, love, peace, holiness, conformity unto Christ, self-denial, and all the principles of a heavenly conversation, being lost and denied among the generality of its members, and all the real glory of Christianity thereby forfeited and despised, they have set up a form or image of it, wherewith they content themselves, and

attempt to deceive others. Instead of that mystical, spiritual union with himself and among themselves which Christ prayed for and purchased for his disciples, they have substituted the morphosis or mormo of an agreement in professing subjection to the pope of Rome. For that heavenly love of one another in him, and for his sake, which he renews the souls of believers unto by his grace, we are presented in their profession with outward works of charity and bounty, measured and valued by the advantage which redounds unto the principal actors in this show. Peace (the great legacy of Christ unto his followers) with God in their own minds, with the whole creation not shut up under the curse, that comprehensive grace and mercy wherein is comprised all the blessedness which in this world we can be made partakers of, is preserved in the flourishing prosperity and temporal successes of the court of Rome. The internal, effectual operations of the Spirit of grace have the outward dispensations of ordinances shuffled in their place and stead; regeneration is baptism; growth in grace is episcopal confirmation; the application, by faith, of the blood of Christ, once offered in a holy sacrifice for us, must give way unto the daily sacrifice of the mass offered for the sins of the quick and the dead; disciplines and some outward bodily severities must supply the place of the mortification of sin, the power whereof is never more lost and denied than it is under the highest external pretenses of it. So the whole work of the Spirit as a Spirit of grace and supplication in the church must be, and is unto themselves, satisfactorily represented by reading, saying, chanting with voices and musical instruments, prayers and praises invented and composed by they know not whom, and in a language which the most of those who are obliged to comply with them understand not at all. And even the worst aspect of their image is in what they have chosen as the portrayal and representation of the rule and discipline of Christ in the gospel; for, instead of embracing that humble, holy, meek, diligent attempt to keep all the faithful in obedience, love, unity, and fruitful living, by applying the commands of Christ to their souls and consciences through his Spirit, and with his authority, they have established a worldly domination over God's people. In this exercise, more force, fraud, extortion, oppression, violence, and bloodshed have been committed than possibly in the secular government of any tyrannical state in the world.

Other instances of a similar nature could be given. This is that "morofwsij thj eusebeiaj," or "alhqeiaj thj kat eusebeian," that figure and representation of evangelical truth and holiness by which these people seek to justify themselves and conceal from others that apostasy from the gospel which their predominant lusts have led them into and still hold them under, just as it was prophesied to occur in the latter days.

They argue that, regardless of how others may view their prevalent evils, which appear inconsistent with the gospel's teachings, the promise of the Spirit to guide into all truth is not only granted to them but confined to them, so that they are eternally secured in faith and belief, despite any other failings they may have. If they could prove this claim, it would settle all the disputes between us, as I see it. If they could show that they alone inherit the promised Spirit of Christ, exclusively from all others, that he dwells, resides, works, and guides in and among them alone, then we would concede the argument to them. But their claim is ineffective and contemptible, for it amounts to nothing more than this: they are "the church," and the promise of giving the Spirit is made and fulfilled to them alone. This only begs the question that is at the heart of the dispute between us, and it leads to endless disputes. If, on the other hand, they argued that they are the only church of Christ because they alone enjoy the promise of the Spirit, the assertion would be

undoubtedly certain, for it is the presence of Christ by his Spirit that gives being or existence to the church. The truth of the assertion could easily be determined by examining whether the Spirit resides with them in a unique way. When those of the Church of Rome can prove that they enjoy such gracious operations of the Spirit as no one else does, or that they are furnished with such spiritual gifts, either ordinary or extraordinary, that no one else has, they shall not only free themselves from the charge of any dangerous apostasy from the gospel but also have all that their hearts can wish.

However, this claim has been proven false numerous times through various means of proof in examining causes and effects. It has been demonstrated undeniably that no such promise was ever exclusively made to them, much less with the security they imagine. In fact, in practice, instead of being "led into all truth," they have departed from almost all truth. Therefore, there is no need to insist on this claim again. Furthermore, such a promise is completely incompatible with the glory and honour of the gospel of God. The word of the gospel, that is, the truth contained therein, is the only external instrument for reconciling sinners to God and for them to walk in obedience to his glory. It has no other purpose. Granting the possession of this truth irrevocably, without producing the desired effect or continuing it when it is not produced, is not consistent with other fruits of the wisdom of God in the dispensation of his grace. As for the gospel, the nature of its doctrine, will, and may be interpreted by its fruits and effects in the lives of men. Granting them the assurance of its truth based on a condition of sin and continuing to be in a state of enmity with God exposes the doctrine and obedience contained in it to just criticism and reproach.

Therefore, despite these and any other claims of a similar nature, we can safely proceed to demonstrate how the majority of Christians have partially departed from the gospel, and we can examine the ways, means, causes, and reasons behind it.

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04. CHAPTER 3.

CHAPTER 3.

APOSTASY FROM THE MYSTERY, TRUTH, OR DOCTRINE OF THE GOSPEL — PRONENESS OF PERSONS AND CHURCHES THEREUNTO — PROVED BY ALL SORTS OF INSTANCES.

There are three essential components in the gospel: 1. The mystery of its doctrine, which is the subject of faith; 2. The righteousness of its teachings, which form the basis of our obedience; and 3. The purity of its worship practices, which test our faith and obedience in relation to their declaration. We need to examine these aspects with regard to the facts, reasons, causes, and circumstances of the apostasy from them that exists in the world. We can find examples of this in each of the mentioned components in our current times, which are both regrettable and foreboding. However, I won't limit myself to the present era or to events that have occurred among us, but will consider matters in relation to the entire history and development of religion since the initial preaching and announcement of the gospel.

First, the mystery of the gospel's truth or doctrine, which is the focus of our faith, forms the foundation of its teachings and practices, the holiness it demands, and the worship it prescribes. If this is abandoned, the other elements cannot be maintained. People may claim to follow the truth but not actually obey it (Titus 1:16, 2 Timothy 3:5); however, without genuinely believing it, no one can obey as they should. The obedience the gospel calls for is the "obedience of faith" (Romans 1:5) or being "obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7). It is this "grace of God" alone that teaches people to reject all ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously, and devoutly in the present world in a way that is acceptable to God (Titus 2:11-12). Therefore, whenever this is rejected, renounced, forsaken, or deviated from, there is and will be a departure from all other aspects of the gospel. This is what we must investigate. In our examination, we will find that all sorts of people and churches have always been highly prone to deviate from the mystery and truth of the gospel's doctrine. They have done so accordingly, and those in the world today continue to share this tendency and inclination. While it is clear that no evil practices are tolerated based on this assumption, it would be desirable for those who feel secure in this matter, based on principles they find satisfactory, not to be too harsh in their criticism of those who cannot help but be concerned for themselves and others. The great apostle Paul himself considered the primary accomplishment of his successful ministry to be that he had "kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:6-8). He says, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day." Of all the achievements that paved the way for the triumphant glory he was now anticipating, he specifically emphasized that he had "kept the faith." He didn't do this without a fierce battle and struggle, highlighting the importance and difficulty of something that many assume is common and easy, requiring little vigilance or care. The frequent and serious charges, along with the heartfelt

exhortations he gives to Timothy, demonstrate the importance he placed on this matter, the challenges it posed, and the risks of failure associated with it (1 Timothy 6:20-21; 2 Timothy 1:13-14). The same apostle also explicitly mentions some people's tendency to abandon the truth of the gospel. Therefore, he advises that they be rebuked firmly so that they may be "sound in the faith, not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men, turning from the truth" (Titus 1:13-14). There would be no need for some to "earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude 1:3) if others were not so ready to corrupt and turn away from it.

Examples of this situation and outcome among all the churches worldwide, since their initial establishment through the gospel's doctrine, will provide more evidence for our claim and a clear explanation of the matter of fact we are investigating. Although I want to focus on the full revelation of Christ's mystery, I will not discuss the Jewish church under the Old Testament. However, it is well-known that from their first transgression in making the golden calf, where, as God laments, they quickly deviated from the path, they were continually prone to all sorts of apostasy. In the end, the majority of them fell away from Abraham's promise and covenant due to their unbelief, as the apostle Paul describes in Romans 11. It is worrisome that the appearance and claims of some Christian churches to have achieved better results have the sole advantage that their actions and practices are not recorded by the Spirit of God, as was the case with the Jews. But I will not focus on that example.

Among all the churches that exist or have ever existed, those gathered and established by the apostles themselves had the greatest advantage in understanding the gospel's mystery and truth and the most compelling reasons for steadfastness and perseverance in it. Considering the ability of their teachers to reveal "all of God's counsel" and their faithfulness in "not withholding anything that was profitable for them" (Acts 20:18-21; Acts 20:26-27), their authority as being sent directly by Jesus Christ, and their absolute infallibility in all their teachings, one would rationally think there would be no opportunity or excuse for anyone to deviate from the doctrine they were taught or for Satan or deceivers to influence them. Undoubtedly, most of us assume that if we were taught by the apostles themselves, nothing could ever tempt us to doubt or waver, much less abandon any truth we were taught. However, this thought is not unlike the rich man's belief in hell, who assumed that if someone rose from the dead to warn his siblings, they would repent and turn to God. But just as Abraham told him, "if they would not believe Moses and the prophets, neither would they believe if someone rose from the dead," we would not be more steadfast in the gospel's doctrine as revealed in the Scripture if we had been taught by all the apostles together. We can find an example of this tendency to abandon evangelical principles in most of the churches called and gathered by the apostles, whose faith and practice are documented in their writings. The church of Corinth was founded by the apostle Paul and nurtured by Apollos, the great evangelist. There is no doubt that they were thoroughly educated in all the gospel's principles, as evidenced by the abundance of spiritual gifts they received, more than any other church. However, within a few years, before Paul wrote his first letter to them, which was no more than five or six years at most, many of them fell into the fundamental error of denying the resurrection of the dead. As the apostle explains, this completely nullified Christ's death and resurrection, making what remained of their faith utterly pointless (1 Corinthians 15:12-18). The churches of Galatia provide an even more striking example. They were converted to Christ's faith and established in their church state through the ministry of the same apostle. Although Paul instructed them in all of God's counsel, it

is likely that he focused on establishing them in the knowledge and faith of God's grace in Christ and the free justification of believers by faith in him or his blood alone. Paul consistently stated that this was his primary goal and objective in his entire ministry. They received this doctrine with so much joy and satisfaction that they regarded the apostle as an angel of God, welcomed him as Jesus Christ, and valued him more than their own sight (Galatians 4:14-15). Yet, despite all this, they suddenly abandoned the doctrine of grace and justification by faith alone to pursue righteousness through the works of the law (Galatians 3:1). Despite the clear demonstration of the truth they had received and their experience of the word's power (mentioned in verse 2), they abruptly fell away from it. As the foundation of this apostasy lay in the uncured folly and vanity of their minds (as we shall see later is the case in all similar situations), the strange and perhaps universal nature of the event led the apostle to wonder if there was some unusual fascination or spiritual witchcraft at play. We have witnessed individuals among us who, within a day or two, have renounced all the principles of truth they have been taught and embraced a set of notions diametrically opposed to them, leading some to believe there has been a genuine diabolical fascination involved. This apostasy of the Galatians was so severe that the apostle definitively declared that Christ and all the benefits of his death were renounced in the process.

Therefore, although we may be troubled by it and lament the fact that various individuals are so quick to abandon the same truth in the same manner, we should not find it strange or be disturbed by it, given that entire churches called and instructed in the truth, and specifically by the apostle himself, fell away in a short time after their initial establishment.

It is highly likely that those who tried to deceive the Colossians with "philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition" (Colossians 2:8) had significant success among them. They were enticed and misled by things that diverted them from "holding on to the Head" and led them to the intricate speculations of men "inflated by their unspiritual minds" (verses 18-19). Similar situations can be observed in most of the other churches to which the epistles are addressed. In the letters to individual people, such as Timothy and Titus, Paul warns them of everyone's tendency to turn away from the truth, providing specific examples of individuals who had done so themselves and actively sought to undermine the faith of others. The apostle John lived long enough to witness more of these tragic departures from the truth and abandonment of the gospel's mysteries. As a result, in his letters, he explicitly describes the apostasies occurring among those professing the gospel, the deceivers, their pretenses that promoted the apostasies, and the dangers and various duties believers needed to be aware of for their preservation. Jude's letter is written for the same purpose. It is also well-known that most of the churches that received Jesus Christ's visitation, during which he examined and judged their state and condition, their stability in and deviation from the truth, were found guilty of some degree of backsliding and apostasy, for which they were sternly reprimanded.

We can never truly comprehend the deep negligence and complacency of most churches and followers in the world concerning their commitment to the mysteries and truths of the gospel. Some believe they have a privilege that prevents them from ever deviating or being mistaken about these truths, even though they have been immersed in all kinds of wickedness and spiritual complacency for the past sixteen hundred years. Others are reckless and careless under their profession, barely distinguishing between truth and error; or, at any rate, they assume that remaining true to the teachings they have received is not a significant accomplishment. These

attitudes have led most churches and communities to fall under the power of the apostasy that will be revealed later. However, if the churches established by the apostles themselves were prone to such defections, and many of them did, at least temporarily, abandon the most crucial doctrines of the gospel (from which they might never have recovered if not for the timely intervention of apostolic authority and wisdom), can we, without their advantages or some of the evidence of truth they had, and with all the same internal and external causes for apostasy to test us, expect to be preserved unless we vigilantly and cautiously attend to all the ways and means by which we can be protected? But more on this will be discussed later.

Next, we may inquire about the state of the churches after the completion of the sacred records and the death of the apostles and all other divinely inspired individuals. Some would have us believe that everything was well, at least for a long period, and some even believe that things are still fine to this day. Everything that was believed and practiced among those early churches must be considered almost as sacred as the gospel itself and made a part of the rule of our faith and worship. It seems that those very churches, which were so prone to errors and following their own ideas or complying with others' inventions during the apostles' time, and while under their supervision, suddenly experienced a transformation when no longer under apostolic care and oversight. They became steadfast and unshakable, never deviating from the truth and rule of the gospel. Personally, I have as much respect and reverence for the early churches of the first, second, and third centuries as I believe anyone alive can justly have; but the notion that they never deviated from the grace, mystery, truth, or rule of the gospel, that they never allowed "empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world," is contradicted by substantial evidence. Only those who strongly wish this to be true and have their gullibility at their disposal can believe it. Therefore, I will briefly investigate what was prophesied to happen among those churches and what actually transpired. The apostle Paul tells the elders of the church of Ephesus that "he knew that after his departure, savage wolves would enter among them, not sparing the flock," Acts 20:29. Although he compares them to devouring wolves, he does not mean bloody persecutors using external force; the expression "shall enter in among you" indicates their admission into the church's society and conversation under the pretense of sharing the same religious beliefs. They are, therefore, heretics and deceivers who lie in wait to deceive through various tricks and cunning schemes, not genuinely belonging to the church or the flock of sheep, but being predatory wolves. The same individuals are referred to by Peter as "false teachers" who would "secretly bring in destructive heresies, denying the Lord who bought them," 2 Peter 2:1. The apostle also adds, "even from your own number, men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them," Acts 20:30. I do not believe that the apostle, in that expression "even from your own number," specifically meant any of those who were personally present with him; at least, it is not necessary for us to assume so. Rather, those who would quickly succeed in their role and position are meant. All the twisted teachings they would propagate, being contrary to the gospel doctrine, would involve various degrees of apostasy. The fact that they succeeded in this endeavour, and that the church was contaminated and corrupted by them, is evident from the fact that not long after, the church is accused by Jesus of having fallen in various ways from its initial purity, Revelation 2:4-5. He also assures Timothy that the time would come, and soon (as suggested by the preventative measures he prescribes, 2 Timothy 4:1-2), when people "will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn

their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths," verses 3, 4 – a clear prediction of the deviation from the gospel truth and purity that would afflict the churches, and indeed did so. He emphasises the danger of this more forcefully, as if inspired by prophecy, in 1 Timothy 4:1-2, "The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons." By the phrase "The Spirit clearly says," the apostle does not mean a plain, distinct revelation made only to himself, but rather that the infallible Spirit of God, which guided him and the other apostles, consistently testified to the same thing. It is a phrase not unlike the one he uses in Acts 20:23, "The Holy Spirit testifies in every city;" meaning that in all places, those who were divinely inspired agreed on the same prediction. The apostles, I believe, consistently informed the churches that after the gospel had been accepted and professed for some time, there would be a significant apostasy from the truth and worship of it. Jude tells them in verses 17 and 18 that "the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ warned them that in the last days there would be mockers who would follow their ungodly desires." All the apostles agreed on this prediction and cautioned the churches about it. John expresses this in 1 John 4:3, "This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard was coming." He speaks of the coming of the antichrist and the accompanying apostasy from the faith as something they had been fully instructed about. The apostle Paul also mentions it as something they were not only warned about but also given specific details; details that may not have been appropriate to mention publicly at the time, for fear of causing offence. "There must," he says, "be a falling away," or an apostasy from the faith, led by "the man of sin." And he adds, "Don't you remember that when I was with you, I used to tell you these things? And now you know what is holding him back," 2 Thessalonians 2:3; 2 Thessalonians 2:5-6. He had both informed them of the apostasy and shared one particular aspect of it, which he does not mention now. This being the significant testimony of the Spirit of God in those days – that the visible church would fall away from the faith – one of the main ways Satan accomplished this was by promoting a contrary revelation and principle, for example, that this or that church, such as the Church of Rome, was infallible and incapable of defect, and could never fall away from the faith. In this way, he wiped out the earlier warnings given by the Spirit to the churches, making them feel secure and undermining the purpose of the prediction. By doing so, he not only led people imperceptibly into the greatest apostasy, but also taught them to stubbornly cling to their actions and confidently justify themselves in doing so. However, the Holy Spirit gave many other warnings about the churches' eventual deviation from the gospel's mystery; warnings that, when neglected by complacent believers and with their faith being weakened and attacked by countless schemes, led to their apostasy. With these things being so explicitly foretold by the Spirit of God, we can briefly investigate the outcome of the predictions mentioned and whether they indeed came to pass or not. A general account of the state of the church after the days of the apostles is given to us by Hegesippus, who lived in the next era after them, as recorded by Eusebius in Book 3, Chapter 32. Describing the martyrdom of Simon, the son of Cleopas, he adds: "Until these times, the church remained a pure and uncorrupted virgin, with those who tried to corrupt the rule of saving truth, if there were any, hiding in obscurity. But after the holy group of apostles met their respective ends, and that generation had passed away, the ones who had heard divine wisdom with their own ears, a conspiracy of wicked error began to take place due to the seductions of those teaching strange doctrines. And when none of the apostles were left, they started to openly oppose the preaching of the truth with their falsely named knowledge."

We have already seen that there were many deviations during the days of the apostles themselves. However, as they were jealous over all the churches with godly jealousy – having "espoused them to one husband" and taking care "to present them as a chaste virgin unto Christ" (words Hegesippus alludes to) – they watched against all ways and means whereby, as "the serpent deceived Eve through his cunning, their minds would be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ," by teaching other doctrines than what they had received from them, as Paul speaks in 2 Corinthians 11:2-4. Due to their wisdom, diligence, and watchfulness, for the most part, the churches were soon brought back from their wanderings and recovered from their mistakes. Hence, this holy man declared the church a pure virgin during the days of the apostles and their oversight, at least in comparison to what came after; for he admits that they became considerably corrupted and defiled soon after, meaning they had fallen away from "the simplicity that is in Christ." It is possible he was referring to the very things that later ages used as their example. Indeed, things quickly progressed to a state in the world, which mostly continues to this day, where people desired no greater justification for their religious practices than the shadow or appearance of anything that had been used or had prevailed among those churches, even though they were evidently deviating from the simplicity that is in Christ. This account provides a general testimony of the fulfilment of the predictions mentioned earlier, concerning a decline from the power, purity, and simplicity of the gospel. Whatever is intended here, it must be seen as the very beginning and entrance of the apostasy that followed, which can barely be noticed in comparison to the excess it quickly led to. Specifically, the aspects of the sacred predictions mentioned can be divided into four categories: 1. "Men from among themselves speaking perverse things." 2. "Grievous wolves entering in, not sparing the flock." 3. Weariness, and "not enduring sound doctrine," but turning the mind towards fables and away from the truth. 4. A gradual, secret, mysterious work of a general apostasy in the whole visible church. It could be easily demonstrated by instances how all these had their particular fulfilment, until the entire apostasy foretold was formed and completed. We may give some brief remarks on them all:

It cannot be denied that many of the principal teachers in the first ages of the church after the apostles, especially among those whose writings remain for posterity, embraced and taught various things in neglect of the gospel and its simplicity. These teachings were perverse, curious, and contrary to the form of wholesome words committed to them. They appeared to be less duly conversant in evangelical mysteries with reverence and godly fear than their duty required. Instances of this could be drawn from the writings of Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement, Origen, Tatian, Athenagoras, Tertullian, Lactantius, and others. However, I shall not reflect with any severity on the names and memories of those who continued to adhere to the fundamental principles of Christian religion. Through curious speculations, philosophical prejudices and notions, distorted allegorical interpretations of Scripture, and openly false opinions contradictory to the word of God, they significantly corrupted and debased the pure and holy doctrine of Jesus and his apostles. The "grievous wolves" predicted, who were to "spoil the flock," are seen as heretics of various kinds. On this account, it would seem almost unbelievable how many people of all sorts fell away from the mystery and truth of the gospel after it had been declared and professed by them, which fully confirms the assertion made earlier. Generally, they can be divided into two categories:

(1.) Of those who, in a disregard and contempt of the gospel they had received and professed, fell away into foolish, extravagant, heathenish imaginations, unintelligible endless fantasies, for the most part (as is assumed) accompanied with wicked practices. Although they retained the name of Christians, they completely and absolutely fell away from Christ and his gospel. Such were the Gnostics in all their branches and under their various names, Marcionites, Manichees, and others almost innumerable. Epiphanius, Augustine, and Philastrius have filled up their catalogues with the names, origins, opinions, and lifestyles of these groups. It may be said, "They were all people of such great abominations that they deserve no consideration among those who embrace the Christian religion." However, the more abominable their beliefs and actions were, considering the multitudes of professed Christians who fell into them, the more effective is the testimony they give to the truth of our assertion. If there were not an indescribable tendency in the minds of people to abandon the mystery of the gospel and if it were not promoted by unimaginable folly and secret hostility against the truth, would it have been possible that so early in the church, starting immediately after the death of the apostles, such a large number of professed Christians would openly renounce those sacred truths for such harmful, foolish imaginations? These are the people who were explicitly prophesied to "bring in destructive heresies, denying the Lord that bought them, and bringing upon themselves swift destruction, many following their harmful ways; by reason of whom the way of truth would be spoken evil of," 2 Peter 2:1-2. The heathen attributed all their impious opinions and practices to Christianity, as is evident in Origen's reply to Celsus, among others; thus, because of them, "the way of truth was spoken evil of."

(2.) There was another type of heresies, and thus a real apostasy from the mystery of the gospel, whose authors and followers still claimed adherence to and profession of it. These can be grouped into two categories: [1.] Concerning the person; and [2.] Concerning the grace of Christ. The first category mainly involves the Arians, who denied Christ's deity, while the latter category involves the Pelagians, who opposed his satisfaction, merit, and grace. The first of these spread like a flood from the mouth of the old serpent and carried everything before it like a torrent; the latter insinuated itself like poison into the very core of the church. The first, like a burning fever, caused immediate death; the latter, like a gangrene or a chronic illness, slowly consumed the vital essence of religion. In the first category, we have a tragic example of the instability of believers and their readiness to abandon the saving mysteries of the gospel. In just over half a century after its initial emergence, the majority of Christians in the world – bishops, priests, and people – fell under its influence. In their public declarations, they renounced and denied the true eternal deity of the Son of God. Having gained the support of some emperors, such as Constantius and Valens, and the approval of numerous church leaders who jointly promoted this heresy by force and deception, almost the entire world, in terms of outward profession, was led into this apostasy for a time. Some nations (such as the Goths and Vandals) continued in this state for several ages afterward. As for the latter category, or Pelagianism, it discreetly, subtly, and progressively infiltrated people's minds to the extent that, fundamentally, it remains a significant part of the religion professed by the majority of Christians today and is still gaining ground in the world. This is the second way of the apostasy of believers as foretold by the Holy Spirit, which occurred in such a way that the wounds inflicted on Christianity have not healed to this day.

Another way was that people would become tired of sound doctrine, and not being able to tolerate it any longer for reasons to be discussed later, they would turn their attention to fables and be led

away from the truth. This also came to pass as prominently as the previous examples. Around the third century, it was when monkish fables began to appear in the world. These individuals, instead of focusing on the doctrines of God's grace, justification by Christ's blood, faith and repentance, new obedience and walking before God according to Christ's commands and the rule of the gospel, filled their minds and satisfied their curiosity with stories of dreams and visions, angelic perfection in themselves, self-invented devotions, uncommanded mortifications, and a thousand other foolish superstitions. By such fables, countless souls were led away from the truth and simplicity of the gospel, believing that religion consisted solely in these things, and dismissing the entire doctrine of our Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles in comparison. These are specifically prophesied and described in 1 Timothy 4:1-3. The hypocrisy and lies, fabulous stories and doctrines of demons, of these individuals, so infiltrated and infected the Christian community with the belief in vain delusions and the practice of foolish superstitions, that little or nothing remained sound or healthy among them.

Lastly, the secret workings of the "mystery of iniquity," through all these ways and countless other schemes used by the cunning of Satan, the vanity of human minds, and the desires of their hearts, brought about the tragic apostasy which the world suffered and was destroyed by when it reached its peak in the Papacy. The rise and progress of this widespread defection, its methods, means, and stages, its successful advance over several ages, have been exposed and revealed by many to such an extent as the nature of such a mysterious work can be uncovered in this world, that I will not need to repeat any instance of it here. In short, the doctrine of the gospel became so corrupted, and its worship so adulterated, that the waters of the sanctuary seemed, like the River Jordan, to flow into a dead sea, or, like the waters of Egypt, to be turned into blood, providing no refreshment for people's souls. Thus, the prophetic parable of our Savior was fulfilled, as described in Luke 19:12-15, etc.

Before I proceed to discuss specific examples among ourselves, I will further confirm our general assertion by considering the second chance, if I may say so, that God gave the gospel in the world, the second trial he made with many churches and nations, and the outcome and success of it.

During the time spoken of, the church was driven into hiding, in terms of its visible profession, where it was secretly nourished by the Spirit and word of God, and the few witnesses to the truth who remained prophesied in sadness, often sealing their testimony (which disturbed and tormented the world) with their blood. But when the time came for God to graciously visit the remnant of his inheritance, he stirred up, gifted, and empowered many faithful servants of Christ, through whom the work of reformation was successfully started and carried on in many nations and churches. It is true that they did not achieve the purity and peace of the apostolic churches, nor was it absolutely aimed at by some of them. This quickly became apparent through the significant differences among them in both doctrine and worship, leading to mutual disputes and divisions that became the main obstacle to the progress of their entire work, and continue to do so to this day. Nevertheless, it was a state of blessed and useful recovery from the apostasy into errors, heresies, superstitions, and idolatries that the entire professing church in these parts of the world had fallen into. This recovery manifested itself in several ways, such as: The doctrine taught by them was generally in agreement with the Scripture, which they vigorously defended against the corruptions of the previous apostasy, and the worship of the churches was freed from blatant

idolatry. The consciences of people, burdened, harassed, and tormented with countless vain fears, superstitions, foolish thoughts, and false beliefs, which had led them into bondage to their so-called guides of all sorts and forced them into services under the guise of religious duties, solely serving their worldly interests, were set free by the truth and directed towards gospel obedience.

Many were given the opportunity on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in him but also to suffer for him. As a result, no fewer numbers sealed their testimony with their blood under the control of those who supported the current apostasy than under the fury of the heathens during the initial introduction of Christianity into the world. The fruits it has borne in many nations, through the genuine conversion of many people to God, their edification and holy obedience, their deep spiritual consolation in life and death, along with many other factors, testify to the divine origin of this work.

It cannot be denied that many churches, through the reformation, were brought into a state of recovery from the deadly disease they had been under. However, everyone knows that great care and diligence is needed to attain perfect health and soundness in such a situation, and to prevent a relapse; if that were to happen, the last error would be worse than the first. It might have been justly expected of them, and it was their duty, to have continued the work of reformation until they achieved a complete recovery of spiritual health. But instead, things have turned out (whose fault it is, God knows) in such a way that not only has the work received little or no improvement among themselves, in terms of increasing light, truth, and holiness, nor has it been progressive or successful in the world towards others, but it has also visibly and clearly lost its force and gone backwards on all accounts. As a result, we have another sad example of how people are prone to abandon the truths of the gospel after being instructed in them. I will only mention the well-known doctrines of the reformed churches, particularly focusing on what has happened in recent years among ourselves with a group of people that previous generations were unfamiliar with, which I will discuss separately and in detail later.

It is not a secret that many, even multitudes, are ready in all places to abandon the entire Protestant faith and religion, throwing themselves into the defeated, compromised remnants of the old apostasy. Every slight reason, every temptation of pleasure, profit, favor, and promotion turns people towards the Papacy; and some follow the same path just to satisfy their vanity in curiosity, novelty, and conformity to what is fashionable among people. Some seek refuge in it as a sanctuary from guilt, as it offers quicker ways to pacify their conscience than the faith and repentance required by the gospel. Some, having lost all sense of religion while pursuing their desires, find themselves uncomfortable in their atheism or disadvantaged by its reputation, and seek shelter in the Roman guise. Others are genuinely entangled and overcome by the power and cunning of the numerous seducers who lie in wait to deceive. One way or another, for reasons known only to themselves and the one who uses them to subvert the faith, many people in all places fall back to the Papacy daily, and the old superstition seems to be gaining new ground, ready to be reissued in the world. It is even feared that in many places there is such a widespread inclination towards defection, or such indifference to all religion, that multitudes lack nothing but a leader to guide them back to Egypt. As they have lost all sense of the power, use, and excellence of the religion, or the profession of truth, in which they were educated and instructed, and have done so by surrendering themselves to their lusts and pleasures, which will inevitably produce that

cursed effect, they either embrace the Roman religion, to fill the void left by the absence of any religion they had left to themselves, or if they pretend to rise to such a level of reason as to reject the vanity and folly of that profession, and its inconsistency with all the principles of free, generous, and rational minds, they resort for a while to a sort of skeptical atheism. This, after providing them with a disappointing conversational diversion for a short time, degrades and corrupts their minds, and hands them back to what they once despised. In this way, the number of apostates grows among us every day.

However, there are other examples of people's tendency to abandon the faith that the church reclaimed during the first reformation. How significant has the impact been on our initial profession, or at least the alteration made therein (whether for better or worse, the great day will reveal), by the system of doctrines known as Arminianism, named after its author for distinction's sake! I am not obliged to believe what Polinburgh claims in his preface to the second part of Episcopius' works, namely, "That most of the prelates and learned men in England share their views and judgments," which, as stated by Episcopius, includes many Racovian additions compared to its original form. In fact, I believe that what he asserts is false and slanderous to the individuals he is referring to. Nonetheless, I also wish that too much support were not given by many to his insinuation. A recent writer, in a treatise he calls "A Sober and Compassionate Inquiry," etc., among other things of a similar nature, imagines that some people dislike the Church of England because of its doctrine. He further assumes that they do so because it "does not agree as closely with the Synod of Dort as they would like." To demonstrate the unreasonableness of this, he informs us, "That no single father or writer of the church, whether Greek or Latin, before St Augustine's time, agreed in doctrine with the determinations of that synod; and as for St Augustine, he was a devout, good man, but his piety was far more commendable than his reason." Consequently, he dismisses with indignation (as he rightly should) the idea that "a novel Dutch synod should prescribe doctrines to the Church of England and outweigh all antiquity." He concludes his discussion with some unworthy slanders cast on the divines of that assembly, who were considered the best the reformed churches of Europe (except for France alone) could offer at that time.

However, the focus of the current project at hand was prioritized more than the truth in these statements. It is just a pretence that those whom he criticizes dislike the doctrine of the Church of England. When you consider it as contained in the Articles of Religion, the Books of Homilies, and declared in the authenticated writings of all the learned prelates and others for sixty years after the reformation, it is clear that the doctrine taught, approved, and confirmed in this church was witnessed by the entire world, and the majority of those criticized by him adhere to it devoutly. It is a departure from this doctrine that some people are complaining about, not the doctrine itself. It will be challenging to reconcile the teachings of the person previously mentioned, or Curcellaeus, with that of this church, as explained and declared in the writings of the main figures who presided, lived, and died in the communion of this church. These writings serve as a measure of the church's doctrine in the eyes of all other churches globally.

If the doctrine established during the first reformation is continued and adhered to, there will be no differences or complaints regarding this matter. As for the disputes that have occurred, and perhaps always will, among learned individuals concerning some obscure and philosophical notions about the order of divine decrees, predetermination, human liberty's nature, and countless

other topics, they have never significantly disrupted the church's peace. Since very few, if any, people understand these concepts, the wider Christian community is unconcerned with them, both in terms of their faith and obedience. Differences about these matters will be resolved on the last day, and perhaps, in terms of the gospel's ultimate purpose, that is enough time.

However, the claim of this author that "no one church father or writer, Greek or Latin, before St Augustine's time, agreed with the determinations of the Synod of Dort" is of little significance in this matter. As I suppose he may not be stating this based on his own examination and experience, but rather on the suggestions of others, it is no different from the strong claims concerning the doctrine of the Holy Trinity itself with respect to the determination and declaration made at the Council of Nicaea. It would be better if too much support had not been given to this idea by Petavius and others, whose collections of ambiguous expressions from ancient church writers and observations on them are highly praised by modern Photinians.

It may not be easy for this author to positively declare any one ancient writer's judgment on all points of Christian belief, especially on those that had not received specific discussion due to oppositions made in their own days or before them. It is acknowledged by all that a general allowance must be given to writers' expressions when they seem to reveal their current thoughts on specific doctrines about which there had never been any controversy in the church. The precise meaning of the words used to express their thoughts is never established until the things they signify have been thoroughly discussed. As a result, the same words have had different uses and meanings in various ages. By this rule, it may be more accurate to say that none of the ancients before Augustine held different views except Origen and those influenced by him, as he is widely accused, on clear grounds, of paving the way for both Arianism and Pelagianism. The criticism of Augustine, namely, "that his piety was far more commendable than his reason," is at least as new as the Dutch synod. The intention is not to praise his piety but to discredit his reason. I must take the liberty to say that either this author has not been very familiar with the writings of this great and holy person or is a poor judge of the rational abilities of those whose writings he has studied. This confidence in delivering a judgment so contrary to the common opinion of the majority of learned men from all backgrounds in the church for twelve hundred years suggests strong bias and prejudice. However, it is somewhat comforting that the opponents of the truth he dealt with were never able to discover or exploit the weakness of his reason. It was sufficient for the work God intended for him, which was not only to curb and suppress the many cases where various cunning individuals apostatized from the gospel truths in his own time and before but also to pass on the light of truth, clearly discovered and vigorously defended, to future generations for the benefit of the church in all ages.

People may freely scorn the individuals they currently contest, against whom they have all the advantages that may encourage them to do so, and they have so much support in casting derogatory reflections on the main early reformers that they do not think they are overstepping the bounds of Christian modesty. However, I cannot guess the reason for their confidence in such judgments of Augustine's rational abilities, although I can easily speculate on the cause. Nonetheless, it need not be given much attention, considering that a more severe judgment has recently been passed on St Paul himself by a writer of the same mindset and opinion.

There is little reason to fear, as I suppose, that a "novel Dutch synod," as it is called, though composed of representatives from all the main reformed churches in Europe (except France), "should prescribe doctrines to the Church of England." In that synod, the Church of England rather prescribed doctrines to the Dutch than received any from them; the leading theologians with the most influence and authority in that assembly were those of the Church of England, sent there by public authority to demonstrate the doctrine of this church and guide the Dutch towards the same beliefs.

However, returning to the topic at hand, it is to be feared that just as Pelagianism, in its initial form, subtly and gradually infiltrated the lifeblood of the church in those days, proving toxic to it, so, under its new polish and veneer, it will be accepted until it spreads into the veins and vitals of the current reformed church-state globally. I know that some, claiming a zeal for holiness and reformation of life, yet with shameful bias, accuse those doctrines as a primary cause of the decline in piety, which they cannot deny were generally believed and embraced when piety was at its peak in this nation. But this is part of the treatment the Church of England receives nowadays from her wayward descendants. The teachings of all the ancient bishops must be denounced as the means of the decay of piety; and, increasing the astonishment, it did not have this effect until it began to be publicly abandoned and renounced! Whether they are the cause of the other or not, there is a clear coincidence between the origins of our visible departure from piety and the adoption of these novel opinions, contrary to the faith of the first reformed churches, and both occurring at the same time among us. But there is an even greater abomination taking hold among us, resulting in the complete destruction of some people's faith and the corruption of others' minds away from the truth of the gospel. This is the contagion of Socinianism, which stealthily infiltrates the walls and timber of the house, from which it cannot be removed. It emerged in the world some time before the other source of partial apostasy previously mentioned; however, for a considerable time, it lay fermenting in some obscure places in Poland and neighbouring countries. When the books and writings of the authors and promoters of the opinions labelled with that name eventually became known and read elsewhere, they were consistently and thoroughly refuted by learned individuals of all sorts, leading to the justified hope that it would not gain much success or progress in the world. But—

"The contagion of the defeated nation spreads wider and overwhelms its victors." The vanity of people's minds, their weariness of sound doctrine, which they can no longer tolerate, whatever they embrace, has allowed this to gain a foothold, either in part or in whole, among many who once professed the faith of the gospel. The entire system of these people's opinions is essentially a collection of errors that previously troubled the church and destroyed the faith of many. The principal and most significant of these can be grouped under two headings - 1. Photinianism; and 2. Pelagianism. The first category includes their denial of the Trinity and, consequently, the divine person and incarnation of the Son of God. The second category encompasses their opposition to Christ's satisfaction, the true nature of his priesthood and sacrifice, justification by faith in his blood and the imputation of his righteousness, the efficacy of his grace, and the corruption of our nature due to the Fall. The denial of the resurrection of the same bodies, the eternity of the punishment of the damned in hell, and other imaginative ideas were also inherited from some earlier sources. The first part of their heresy has not yet gained much traction except among themselves, as the opposing doctrine is protected by law and the vested interests of those who benefit from its public

profession. However, it is to be feared that the reluctance of many to assert and defend those fundamental gospel doctrines that they oppose, their indifference towards them, and the shocking notions and strange interpretations that some have adopted and promoted concerning the person of Christ, stem from a hidden influence on people's minds due to the poison of their opinions and deceptive arguments. From the logical extension of their views have emerged the bold attempts of atheistic ideas and opposition to the Scripture, both in its literal form and meaning, which have recently been circulated in public writing. Imported from neighbouring countries, these ideas have found no shortage of enthusiasts among us. But as for the latter aspect of their beliefs, or their Pelagianism, it has spread among many people who once held different views and are still committed to those beliefs. The unreasonable elevation of reason in religious matters that we see today, the new ideas people have about Christ's satisfaction, which, while pretending to acknowledge it, actually undermine it; the harmful notion that the person of Christ has little role in religion beyond revealing and confirming the gospel; teachings about the possibility and even ease of yielding acceptable obedience to all evangelical commands without the help of effective grace, about the powers and incorruption of our nature, about justification through our own obedience, about the compatibility of gospel mysteries with unregenerate reason or an unsanctified mind, about regeneration consisting solely of reforming our lives; along with the rejection of any real internal efficacy in converting grace, and the substitution of morality for grace, the denial of any influence of grace from Jesus Christ for true holiness; and many other opinions that people take pride in, to the detriment of the doctrines received and established in the reformed churches of the past – all these are borrowed from the repositories of their imaginations, or retrieved from their rubbish heap.

I don't know how far this infection may spread. The resurrection of the same bodies, the existence and activity of the soul in its separate state, the eternity of hell's torments, the nature of Christ's priestly office as distinct from his royal office, are beginning to be either questioned or weakly defended among many. There are many other harmful opinions about the Scriptures, the nature of God, his attributes and decrees, the two covenants, our union with Christ, and the gifts and operations of the Spirit, which some put forth as pure mysteries and revelations of truth, and pride themselves on being the originators or defenders of such ideas. All these came from the same source or are the result of the same corrupt fountain of Socinianism.

I believe we have sufficiently demonstrated the truth of what we previously observed about the tendency and readiness of people to abandon and fall away from the mystery and doctrine of the gospel after it has been revealed and accepted by them. We have also established the fact that such a defection has occurred and continues to happen in the world today. We now need to investigate the reasons and causes of this phenomenon. However, I must note that the primary example we have in mind, which is happening among ourselves, will be examined separately, as we will explore the specific reasons for it, in addition to the more general reasons that apply equally to all apostasies of this kind.

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05. CHAPTER 4.

CHAPTER 4. THE REASONS AND CAUSES OF APOSTASY FROM THE TRUTH OR DOCTRINE OF THE GOSPEL, AND THE INCLINATION OF ALL SORTS OF PERSONS THEREUNTO IN ALL AGES, INQUIRED INTO AND DECLARED — UNCURED ENMITY IN THE MINDS OF MANY AGAINST SPIRITUAL THINGS, AND THE EFFECTS OF IT IN A WICKED CONVERSATION, THE FIRST CAUSE OF APOSTASY. For an introduction to the following discussion, I will establish a principle that I assume everyone will agree with: namely, that a departure from the truth of the gospel once professed is a sin of the highest guilt and one that will result in the most harmful consequences. In the past, God frequently complained through his prophets that his people "had forsaken him" and had turned away from him - that is, from the doctrine and institutions of his law, which were the only means of connection and communion between him and them (Deuteronomy 28:20; 1 Samuel 8:8; 2 Chronicles 34:25; Jeremiah 5:7; Jeremiah 5:19; Jeremiah 16:11). To convince them of their terrible folly and wickedness in this regard, he asks them what wrongdoing they had seen in him, what unfairness in his ways, and what disappointments they had encountered that would cause them to grow tired of his laws and worship, to the point of abandoning them for things and practices that would ultimately lead to their temporal and eternal ruin (Jeremiah 2:5, Ezekiel 18:25). For if there was nothing in God's laws and ways that they could legitimately complain about; if they were all holy, just, and good; if there was great reward in obeying them; and if through them God brought them good and not evil all their days, then there was no justification or excuse for their foolishness and ingratitude.

It is universally acknowledged that their defection from the law and institutions of God represented the highest level of folly and the greatest imaginable wickedness. This acknowledgment even comes from those who, at the same time, are guilty of an even greater sin of the same kind. For people's judgments are often so swayed by their current interests or corrupted by the power of their depraved affections that they justify themselves in committing worse evils than those they condemn in others. But as it was with the people of old, the same applies to those who deviate from the mysteries or reject the doctrines of the gospel, after they have been accepted and professed by them or have done so at any time. In fact, their guilt has even greater consequences than the idolatrous revolts of the Jews of old, because the gospel is a clearer revelation of God and much more glorious than that made by the law. There is therefore no reason to be found within the gospel itself for anyone to abandon it, either in its doctrines, commandments or the worship it requires. Nothing can be attributed to the gospel or anything contained in it or produced by it, which should encourage anyone to defect from it. The gospel is, in itself, a blessed outpouring from the eternal source of wisdom and truth, and bears more marks and characteristics of divine excellence than the whole creation combined. It has no proper effect on the souls of people other than being the means and causes of their release from their original departure from God, with all the evil that followed, which is all that is evil. The recovery of lost humanity from a state of darkness, bondage, and misery into one of freedom, light, and peace, the present favor and future enjoyment of God, with order and mutual usefulness in this world while they remain in it,

is the primary and immediate purpose of the gospel's truths. Moreover, there is nothing truly good, holy, just, kind, or useful among people that is not influenced by the gospel's truths and derived from them.

There have been some in every age, who, claiming to have the liberty the gospel offers, have in reality been slaves to corruption, and have turned the grace of God into debauchery. Some have accused the main doctrines of the gospel of freeing people from the necessity of holy obedience and the utmost use of their own efforts in that regard. There are those who, given over to a sensual lifestyle, live under the power of darkness, pursuing worldly goals and view the gospel as only tormenting them before their time. Some even believe that the world would be a more peaceful and orderly place without the gospel, blaming it for the disturbances people themselves create through envy, anger, and malice, as well as the persecution of others.

It is well-known that some have falsely claimed certain privileges granted by the gospel to justify their cunning acquisition and violent possession of worldly power, grandeur, and wealth, expressing themselves in ambition, cruelty, luxury, and the pride of life. However, the wickedness and folly of all these abominations, the cursed schemes of the father of lies and source of malice, will be, if God permits, exposed elsewhere. For now, I will assume that the gospel is a glorious representation of divine wisdom, goodness, grace, and love, and that it only produces effects for which God is the immediate author and will be the eternal rewarder. Therefore, the reasons and causes for apostasy from the part of the gospel currently under consideration – that is, the mysteries and truth of its doctrine – must be sought in the minds of those who abandon it, along with any external factors that accompany them.

It is not unnecessary to engage in such an inquiry, as the current state of the Christian world is such that if it were assumed that the lives of professed Christians accurately represented the gospel, and that the majority of people were led and influenced into the way of life and behaviour they openly pursue by the gospel's doctrines and principles, it could hardly compete with pagan philosophy for usefulness to the glory of God and the benefit of mankind. It is not the gospel, but rather apostasy from it, that has produced so many unfortunate effects in the world, and which, by engulfing humanity in wickedness, paves the way for their misery and ruin. In defending the gospel, this will be somewhat demonstrated in the revelation of the causes and reasons for this apostasy. For regardless of what people claim, unless they have first abandoned the gospel in their hearts and minds, they would not, and could not, also abandon all rules of holiness and morality in their lives.

Moreover, the prevalence of this defection is so significant, and the neglect of people (either focused on their private matters, desires, and interests or captivated by the power of this apostasy to the approval of the most significant and most dangerous evils) is so apparent and disgraceful that every sincere attempt to warn them of their danger, to encourage them to fulfil their duty, or guide them in its performance, with the aim of obstructing the progress of this outcome of hell's counsels and defeating it, should receive a fair reception from all those who hold a proper regard for the interest of Christ and the gospel in the world, or the eternal concerns of their own souls.

These are the general aims of the following discussions; and if someone with greater abilities for this work is inspired by this, or takes the opportunity from it, to conduct a more diligent inquiry into the causes and reasons for the defection from the glory and power of Christian religion that

prevails in the world, and subsequently prescribes more suitable and effective remedies for healing this widespread ailment, I will be thoroughly satisfied with the success of this attempt and essay. The reasons that come to mind are as follows:

I. The deep-rooted enmity that exists in the minds of people by nature towards spiritual things, remaining uncured despite professing the gospel, is the original and primary source of this apostasy. As the apostle tells us, "the carnal mind is enmity against God," Romans 8:7; meaning the revelation of God's will and mind in Christ, along with the obedience he requires. The nature of this enmity and how it affects the minds of people have been extensively discussed elsewhere, so I will not repeat it here. It is enough for our current purpose that people, for various reasons, may adopt the profession of the gospel's truths while this enmity towards spiritual things remains uncured or even dominant in their minds. This was the case with those the apostle complained about, who, through their wicked lives under their profession, showed themselves to be "enemies of the cross of Christ," Php 3:18; as well as those who, "professing that they know God, yet in works deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and to every good work reprobate," Titus 1:16.

Thus, when the gospel was first preached, many were convinced of its truth and adopted its profession, mainly due to the miracles performed to confirm it, even though their hearts and minds were not at all reconciled with its content. See John 2:23-24; Acts 8:13.

Some people are persuaded enough to acknowledge its truth due to the efficacy of its dispensation as a divine ordinance for their conviction and instruction, yet they don't let go of their enmity towards it. For example, John was among the Jews as "a burning and a shining light," and they rejoiced for a while in his ministry, John 5:35. So much so that the majority of the people were initiated into his doctrine with baptism as a token and pledge, Matthew 3:5-6. However, although all of them confessed their sins according to his direction, very few actually abandoned their sins as was their duty. When both preaching and miracles were combined in an exceptional manner, such as when Jesus preached after feeding five thousand with five barley loaves and two small fish, people were so affected by his doctrine about "the bread of life that came down from heaven," that they cried out, "Lord, always give us this bread," John 6:34. However, since their natural enmity towards spiritual things remained uncured, when Jesus continued to instruct them in heavenly mysteries, they raised objections to his teaching (verses 41, 52, 60) and immediately abandoned both him and his teachings (verse 66). Jesus explained that the reason for their defection was their unbelief and that it had not been granted to them by the Father to come to him (verses 64-65), which means that the enmity of their carnal minds was still present. Hence, what they considered a difficult and incomprehensible saying (verses 52, 60), his true disciples understood to be "the words of eternal life" (verse 68).

Over time, many people become predisposed to the truth of the gospel through their upbringing and the external means of instruction applied to them. However, despite this advantage, they may still remain under the influence of this corruption in their minds. When people embrace the truths of the gospel through these or similar means, their minds are affected in various ways, prompting them to move and act towards the gospel's ultimate goal. There are three parts to this goal: The gospel aims to prevent people from finding rest and satisfaction in themselves, both in terms of their present peace in their current state and their hope for future happiness through their own

efforts. This is because neither of these outcomes is achievable in our fallen, apostate state. Therefore, the gospel's initial work is to influence, guide, and direct people's minds to renounce these aims and instead seek righteousness, life, peace, and happiness through Jesus Christ.

Another part of the gospel's purpose is to renew our minds, wills, and affections in the image or likeness of God. It does this by presenting spiritual things to us in such a way that we are transformed into their likeness, or so that the substantial image of these spiritual things is imprinted on our entire souls (2 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 4:23-24; Colossians 3:10). The gospel also engages the entire soul, with all its powers and faculties, throughout its entire range of activities, or in everything it does, to live for God in all aspects of holy obedience (Romans 12:1). But when this work, or any part of it, is urged on people's consciences and practice, they don't appreciate it to any extent. The uncured hostility we're talking about rises in opposition to all these things. It starts to think that it has allowed a troublesome guest to enter, who came in, as if to stay temporarily, but now wants to be a judge. While the mind is occupied only with the notions of truth in speculation and reasoning, it is satisfied and pleased with them; in fact, it will agree to be guided by them in various matters and duties that it can perform while still relying on its old foundations of self-sufficiency and satisfaction (Mark 6:20). However, when the gospel, in pursuit of the aforementioned goals, presses people to abandon their old foundations and natural principles completely, to bring about a comprehensive change in their powers, faculties, operations, and goals, and to make them new creations, it becomes irritating to the prevailing hostility within them. This hostility, in turn, stirs up all the mind's lusts and the flesh, all the deceitful tactics of the old self and the powers of sin, and all carnal and unrefined affections in opposition to the gospel. Consequently, spiritual truths are first neglected, then scorned, and finally, easily abandoned.

Indeed, people may be convinced of something as truth, either on rational grounds or through natural or spiritual motives, and may give their assent to it, but when it comes to putting that truth into practice, their will and affections will not comply. So it is said of some that they did not see fit to acknowledge God or to hold on to the knowledge of Him (Romans 1:28). The ingrained ideas they had by the light of nature, along with their contemplation of creation and providence, provided them with thoughts and perceptions of God's existence and power (verses 19, 20). In this respect, they are said to "know God," meaning the essential properties of His nature – "His eternal power and Godhead" (verse 21). This knowledge, these notions and conceptions, immediately directed them to glorify Him as God through holy worship and obedience, as expressed in the same verse. But they did not like this, due to the corruption of their minds and affections, and therefore would not retain this knowledge of Him. Instead, they surrendered to all sorts of abominable idolatries and animalistic lusts, which were incompatible with this knowledge, as the apostle extensively explains. Therefore, even concerning divine things conveyed to us by natural light and those that are unavoidable for all humankind, the will, the affections, and the practical understanding are more tainted and corrupted than the mind's prescriptive and directive powers. Hence, the entire world, which had nothing to guide it but the light of nature, turned away from its guidance and lived contrary to it. They all rebelled against the light they had, and without God's special grace, all humanity will do the same. In the same way, this applies to truths communicated through supernatural revelation. It is said of those who were to carry on the great apostasy from the mysteries and worship of the gospel that "they did not receive the love of the truth, so that they might be saved" (2 Thessalonians 2:10). They acknowledged the truth itself in terms of its

profession for a time, but they never had, nor sought, the kind of appreciation or love for it that would lead them to obedience or the use of it for its intended purpose, so they might be saved. This made them prone to abandoning and renouncing the profession of the truth on any occasion or temptation, exchanging it for the vilest errors and grossest superstitions. In such a state of mind, people's corruptions will overcome their convictions. First, they will suppress the truth in terms of its operation, and then reject it in terms of its profession. Let other notions be proposed to them that better suit the vanity of their minds or the sensuality of their affections, and they will readily accept them.

There are examples among all sorts of people showing that when they have adopted beliefs and opinions, even false, vain, and foolish ones, and have them deeply embedded in their minds through powerful interests or entrenched prejudices, neither the evidence of truth nor the fear of danger can persuade them to renounce or abandon those beliefs. All false paths in Christianity and the path of Islam give us examples of this. However, we have two general instances that may well fill people's minds with astonishment. The first is that of the Jews, who, for so many generations, despite all manner of difficulties and calamities, continue to stubbornly persist in the most irrational unbelief and apostasy from the faith of their forefather Abraham and the expectations of all their ancestors that anyone could imagine. For many generations, the number of Jews who have been so convinced of their error as to genuinely and sincerely embrace the gospel is scarcely one per century. The other instance is the Roman Catholic Church. It is well known that this religious community is abundant with otherwise wise and learned individuals, including kings and rulers of the earth who adhere to it. They continue to do so, and will do so, despite the numerous and evident errors, impieties, superstitions, and idolatries of that church. There are enough other examples to prove that no religious opinions can be so foolish or contemptible that some people will not stubbornly cling to them, despite all efforts to help them, either in God's way through rational and spiritual convictions or in the world's way through persecution.

It may be that more people will be found to be stubborn in error when faced with trials, difficulties, dangers, and opposition than those who will be constant in professing the truth. This applies to those who, along with an external profession of the truth, have not embraced its internal power and effectiveness, nor have the love for it in their hearts. Both groups form their notions and understanding of things in the same way, based on apparent reasons, even though the understanding is deceived in one and not in the other. However, once an error is accepted as truth, it takes a firmer root in the minds of people than the truth can while their minds remain carnal. The reason for this is that all errors are somehow suited to the mind in its depraved state, and there is nothing in error that is hostile to it. The mind does not dislike error in itself or in its effects because, having fallen from the first Truth and Goodness, it wanders and delights in wandering through twisted or side paths of its own. As the saying goes, "God made humans upright, but they have sought out many schemes" (Ecclesiastes 7:29). The mind finds pleasure in these paths and conforms to them, as there is something in every error that appeals to the vanity, curiosity, pride, or superstition of the carnal mind. However, the case is different with evangelical truths, which the mind dislikes due to its innate hostility towards the things they propose and present. Therefore, it is often easier to draw away thousands from the profession of the truth, who have no experience of its power and effectiveness in their souls, than to turn one person from an

erroneous path, especially if they are entrenched in it due to self-interest and prejudice. This is the current situation in the world. Every group or party of false believers, such as Catholics and others, successfully draws multitudes of ordinary believers away from the truth they had acknowledged, but we rarely hear of anyone being rescued from their traps. Seducers could not ask for a greater advantage than to be allowed to work among those who outwardly profess the truth but harbour an internal hostility towards it. They will be able to attract converts to their hearts' content. This was the fundamental cause of the apostasy from the doctrine and truths of the gospel, which has prevailed in almost the entire visible church. If most people had embraced the truth with love and had not harboured a secret enmity in their hearts and minds against it, if vain, curious, and superstitious things had not appealed to the prevailing principles of their minds and affections, they would not have so easily and universally forsaken the gospel for human traditions, nor abandoned Christ to follow Antichrist, as we know they did. However, when an external profession of the truth became transmitted from one generation to another, and the spirit and power of it were wholly neglected, people were merely waiting for opportunities to gradually part with the truth and give it up for anything else suggested to them. Many, in the meantime, employed their intellect to find out inventions that catered to their desires and corrupt affections. That those who were swept away by the great apostasy outwardly manifested this attitude in their lives and actions will be shown later; had it not been so, the event in question would not have occurred. This danger currently affects individuals, churches, and nations that today profess the gospel. If a pressing trial or strong temptation or a combination of various means of seduction confronts those who have received the truth but not its love and power, they may struggle to avoid a general apostasy. When external attempts are made upon them, they also face treachery from the deceitfulness of their own hearts, as their untreated hostility towards the truth waits for an opportunity to part with and reject it. Anything that frees them from the effectiveness of their convictions or the power of the traditions that hold them captive to the profession of the truth will be gladly embraced and complied with. The danger of this situation is evident in the open dislike of the rule and guidance of the truth that most people demonstrate throughout their lives.

It is clear, then, that unless this hostility is conquered or expelled from the mind, unless the mind is freed from its corrupt influence and effects, unless the truth achieves real power and effectiveness on the soul, unless it is learned "as it is in Jesus," allowing people to "put off their old selves, which are being corrupted by deceitful desires, and are renewed in the spirit of their minds, putting on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness;" unless they love and value it for the effects of spiritual peace, power, and freedom it produces in them, there will be little consistency or perseverance in their profession when temptations coincide with opportunities for revolt. For who can guarantee that what has previously occurred among the majority of humanity will not happen again in any place where the same causes converge?

Having identified this first cause of defection from the gospel, we can easily discern the only true and effective ways and means of preserving and maintaining the true religion in any place or among any people where it has been professed, particularly if temptations to revolt abound and the situation is made dangerous by advantageous opportunities. Love of the truth and experience of its power in people's hearts will produce this effect, and nothing else will. All other means, where these are lacking, have failed in all places worldwide and will do so again when a time of trial comes. True religion may be established by law, supported by authority, have a long-standing

tradition or be so ingrained in people's minds that many promise the firmest stability in its profession; however, there is no guarantee in such things, and we will soon see all the hopes built upon them vanish into nothing. Convictions or traditions, where a secret enmity is retained, may create a commotion and noise for a while, but every gust of temptation will sweep them away. If it were not so with most people, would it have been possible for so many nations to fall into Arianism in less than a generation after the truth had been known and professed among them for so long? Or would it be possible for the majority of this nation to revert to Catholicism after a blessed reformation, as in the days of Queen Mary, when many who had professed the gospel cast others into flames for continuing to do so?

It is widely complained that Catholicism is increasing in this nation, and some express their fears of its further prevalence, perhaps not without reason. Although there are several other ways people may and do apostatize from the truth, those who take any other measure of things besides their own secular interests, with the corrupt affections of their minds, in anger, envy, and revenge, see this as the most dangerous. It is most compliant with the dominant desires of the present age and most comprehensive to accommodate the majority of people. Besides, by what it has done in the past, it sufficiently shows what it is likely to do again. Therefore, many are working diligently to prevent its spread, as it would prove disastrously ruinous to the nation and their descendants if it were to prevail. To this end, some call for the aid of authority to enact strict laws to prohibit it. This, according to the opinion of recent ages, some believe to be the most effective means for preserving the truth; for if they can destroy all who think differently, the rest of humanity will appear peaceful to those who benefit from it. Some write books refuting its errors, and they do so with good purpose. But in the meantime, if there is any truth in reports, the work is progressing as effectively as if no opposition had been made to it; and we can be sure that these and similar means, if left on their own, will never keep Catholicism out of England if it ever has an advantage and opportunity for a return, nor prevent the entrance of any other false religion. As for the use and severity of penal laws, I do not interfere with it, as it is a matter for the wisdom of our leaders. However, I must say that it does not seem to be to the advantage of truth, or at least not to the reputation of those who profess it, that they should only be able to preserve its position among people in this way. It cannot be honourable for any religion that, while claiming all the advantages and rights of truth and being in actual possession of all external benefits and support, it cannot secure itself or maintain its profession without outward force and violence, which are so far removed from the first introduction and planting of truth in the world. But these matters are not our present concern. As for refuting the errors, superstitions, and idolatrous practices of the Catholic Church in books of controversy, it is undoubtedly a good, useful, and necessary work in its kind; but after all is said and done, these things reach only a few, and not many will divert from other matters to seriously consider them. Therefore, another way must be chosen and pursued to secure the truth and interest of Protestant religion among us, and this is none other than effectively communicating the knowledge of it to people's minds and implanting the power of it in their hearts. This is the only thing that will root out the hostility towards evangelical mysteries and spiritual matters which leads people into apostasy.

Unless people know what they should value religion for and what benefits they genuinely receive from its profession, it is unreasonable to expect that they will remain committed when faced with a trial. If they start to think, "It's pointless to serve God like this" or "What benefit is there in following

His ordinances?" they will easily accept the burden of any falsehood or superstition that claims to provide them with greater advantages. At some point, this will be the case for those with a dominant hostility towards religion. On the other hand, when God, through the gospel, "shines in the hearts of people, giving them the light of the knowledge of His glory in the face of Jesus Christ;" when they find their consciences set free from the unbearable burden of superstition and tradition; and when the word of truth they profess leads to their rebirth in the hope of eternal life, their inner selves being renewed and their lives reformed as a result; and when their expectation of a blessed eternity is well-founded and securely anchored in it, they will, through the effective help of Christ's Spirit, remain steadfast in their profession, regardless of what may happen to them. On these terms and with these experienced evidences of truth and goodness, the gospel was first embraced by people, and the reformation of religion was first introduced in this nation. Although various other factors contributed to its acceptance and establishment, if the minds of many had not experienced its power and effectiveness for the purposes mentioned, it would never have achieved lasting presence among us. The mere external form of true religion cannot compete with the appearance that error and superstition present to people's minds, as they know how much they need it.

These things, I know, are dismissed by some. They think they have more reliable methods and better solutions for preserving the profession of the gospel among us than its own power and efficacy. We don't need to guess what those ways are, as they continually declare them; but they won't be discussed here. However, it is to be feared that they may be filled with the results of their own imaginations when those things on which they have placed their confidence fail them. Therefore, if there is neglect in the ministry and others whose duty it is to promote these matters, the outcome will be sorrowful, perhaps beyond what is anticipated. If the majority of people are allowed to live without any evidence of familiarity with the power of the truth they profess or any tangible fruits of it in a holy manner of living, we may cry out, "Popery, Popery," as long as we want; but when temptations, opportunities, and interests align, their profession will fall from them like dry leaves from a tree when shaken by the wind. The apostle tells us that those who "went out from them were not of them, for if they had been of them they would have continued with them," 1 John 2:19. They were among them by the profession of the truth, or they could not have gone out from them; but they were "not of them" in experiencing the power of the truth and "communion with the Father and the Son;" for if they had, "they would have continued with them," remaining steadfast in their profession. This is what should be fixed in the minds of all individuals involved, of all who are passionate about the truth of the Protestant religion, or are obligated, to the best of their abilities, to provide for its preservation. When things have reached the appointed time and are moving towards their natural outcome, all other strategies and ideas will be ineffective. A diligent communication with the majority of people, through the dispensation of the word or preaching of it, about the power of the truth they profess in all its blessed effects – allowing them to have an experience and inner witness of the reasons why they should remain constant in its profession – will alone secure the continuation of the gospel in future generations. All other means will be ineffectual for that purpose; and to the extent they are or may be effective without this, it will be of no advantage to the souls of people.

There is always a danger of defection among professed Christians from the truth, as has been shown before. The fact that this danger currently has many unique circumstances making it

particularly dangerous is likewise acknowledged by all those who seriously consider these matters. And it won't, I assume, be disputed that every person, as they are called and warranted by special duty, is obliged to make their utmost efforts to prevent a revolt from the truth. The whole inquiry is, what is the best way, means, or strategy to be employed for this purpose? And I say, it is only through the diligent ministerial dispensation of the word, combined with such an exemplary zeal and holiness in those who dispense it, as well as all other things required for the completion of that work, that the hearts of the people can be reconciled to evangelical truths, a delight in obedience can be instilled in them, and the power of the word can be implanted in their entire souls. A lack of this was what lost the gospel in previous eras and will continue to do so wherever it is, in this or future ages. And I believe I won't stray too far from my current topic if I support this opinion with a few simple considerations; for:

It is the way, the only way, which God has ordained and which he blesses for this end and purpose. No one will claim, I suppose, that God has appointed any other way to bring people to the profession of the truth other than through the preaching and dispensation of the word alone. When individuals are influenced or convinced by this, to the extent that they commit themselves to its profession, it will be challenging to find an ordinance of God of another kind for their preservation therein. When the apostle took his last farewell of those who were converted by his ministry in Ephesus, he "commended them to the word of God's grace, which," as he judged, "was able to build them up, and to give them an inheritance among all those who are sanctified," Acts 20:32.

One might think it would be more challenging to convert people from Judaism or Paganism, or any false religion, to the profession of the gospel, than to keep them in that profession once they are introduced to it. In the initial work, there are all sorts of prejudices and difficulties to contend with, and no advantage from any recognized principles of truth. In contrast, preserving people in the profession of truth they have already received and acknowledged seems to be more straightforward and easier on many accounts. If, therefore, the dispensation of the word, as God's ordinance for that purpose, has been a sufficient and effective means for the former, what reason can be given that it should not also be so for the latter, without further force or violence?

It will be argued that the first preachers of the gospel were equipped with extraordinary gifts, making their ministry effective in initially converting the nations. However, since those gifts have ceased, the efficacy of the ministry has as well, and therefore it requires external support that the former did not. I say, for my part, I wish it all the assistance that those entrusted with it could desire, provided no force is imposed on the consciences or persons of others. But why shouldn't we believe that the ordinary gifts of the ministry are as sufficient for the ordinary work as the extraordinary gifts were for the extraordinary work? To be honest, the difference lies in individuals in carrying out their duty, not in the things, gifts, or duties themselves. If all those who are called, or claim to be called, to preserve the truth of the gospel in the work of the ministry were as conscientiously diligent in fulfilling their duty, as well-equipped according to the gospel's rules with the ordinary spiritual gifts necessary for their work and calling, and as fully represented the purpose and nature of their message to people through a holy conversation, as the first individuals appointed to convert the nations were and did, according to their greater measures of grace and gifts, the work would have a proportionate success in their hands compared to what it had at the beginning. However, while those entrusted with this responsibility neglect the use of this means,

which is God's ordinance for the purpose of preserving the truths of the gospel among people; while they either believe that the primary aim of their office is to qualify them for worldly advantages, and to grant them external peace therein, along with the enjoyment of those things which seem desirable to most people in this world; and meanwhile, consider it suitable to resort to other methods for preserving the truth, which God has neither appointed nor sanctified for that purpose, it is no surprise if faith and truth vanish from among people. The Apostle Paul foresaw that a time would come when some people would "not endure sound doctrine, but after their own desires would gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear," who would "turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths," 2 Timothy 4:3-4. We can see the approach he recommends for preventing this evil from leading to a general apostasy. It should also be noted that the advice he gives in this case, though initially directed to one individual person directly involved, applies to everyone who is or will be called to the leadership or ministry in the church. He proposes this course in verses 1, 2, and 5 of that chapter: "I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and careful instruction. Watch in all things, endure hardships, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry." This is the approach and way he prescribes for preserving the truth against the corruption of people's minds and the cunning of deceivers. He gives this duty's charge with such great solemnity and emphasizes it with many emphatically expressed motives, revealing how crucial he believed it to be.

Perhaps this method of preserving the truth and saving people's souls through constant laboring in the word and doctrine, while enduring all the difficulties that accompany it, is not considered as advisable as it once was. For what good would people's lives or advancements do for them if they were obliged to labor in this exhausting type of preaching? But if that's the case, they must eventually be willing to part with the truth and all the benefits they gain from professing it. For no matter how people may try to turn things around, explore their methods, and multiply their strategies to secure religion according to their understanding, even if they can chain their idols, as the pagans did with their gods in the past to prevent them from leaving, and establish a profession of lies, the truth of the gospel, for any useful purpose, will be preserved in a nation, church, or people only through this means of God's appointment. This is such a method and strategy for preserving the truth and the profession of the gospel that no one can have the audacity to complain about or object to. In all places and among all sorts of people, there is a claim of zeal for retaining what they perceive to be the truth or correctness in religion. However, the means they have chosen for this purpose have mostly been full of scandal for the Christian religion. They are so far from being rational means of preserving people in it that they effectively deter them from it. Such is the external force that has been tested in this nation, as elsewhere by all sorts of people; and wise individuals can easily observe what it has led to. In the meantime, it is blatantly evident that, regardless of how good the intended outcome may be, the means used to achieve it come with much harm. I am unsure of the peace or satisfaction those who pursue this approach have within themselves. It is beyond my comprehension how the minds of any Christians can be entirely at ease, rejoicing in God through Jesus Christ, while causing others to be terrified, pursued, ruined, and destroyed solely for their faith and hope in Christ Jesus. However, I do not know the principles of other people's minds, the makeup or constitution of their consciences, the rules of their walk before God, or the dominant prejudices and interests that influence them beyond all

evidence of reason to the contrary. Therefore, they may have satisfactory peace in this way, even though I don't understand how. On the other hand, those who are subjected to and forced to suffer in this course of action become alienated from those who inflict suffering and their profession. As a result, we see the mutual animosities, hatreds, disputes, harsh reflections, and dreadful scandals that accompany this approach. We witness the clamors and conflicts raised about it today, the arguments presented against such actions, and how difficult it is for human nature to endure all extremities for what people are fully convinced they deserve well in from mankind. Moreover, no one can guarantee that, at some point, wheat will not be plucked up instead of tares. But as for the method now proposed, of preserving the truth through diligent, effective dissemination of the gospel's word to the general population, who can claim to be provoked by it or take offense at it? No mortal will be harmed by it in anything they dare admit to being concerned about. The devil, indeed, will be enraged by it, not only because it aims to destroy his influence and kingdom in the end, but also because he has no part in it, nor can he intervene with his efforts. He is a spirit as restless and active as he is malicious, and he does not like to be excluded from any business happening in the world.

Therefore, although he equally hates the truth in the hands of all people, in the method of preserving it mentioned before, he can and does visibly involve himself and his effective workings in it, making him quite satisfied with it. For what he may potentially lose on one side regarding truth, he gains ten times more on the other in the loss of love, peace, holiness, and all the fruits of goodness, meekness, and kindness that should exist among people. As long as he has a hand in promoting this loss and has the opposite fruits to feed on, he is not overly concerned with the profession of truth in one way of worship or another among people.

Therefore, even if he is or will be enraged at this way of preserving the truth, we know that Christ's kingdom will only be maintained in the world through conquering his rage. As for those who share the same goal with him, their hidden wrath and envy will only torment and consume themselves.

Apart from a few instances of violence and bloodshed, involving the loss of human lives, as among the Waldenses, Bohemians, and some others, which were never entirely successful, and government revolutions accompanied by similar cruelties, as in the days of Queen Mary in England, which only lasted a short time, no example can be found of any church or nation turning away from the truth without there being a neglect of instilling the power of the gospel into people's minds and hearts by those responsible for this task. This sinful neglect was always what paved the way for apostasy. Therefore, the foundation of any meaningful profession of the gospel among us depends on this.

If God is willing to inspire all those involved in this duty to work effectively in it, and to show people the power of the gospel through their own holy, humble, useful, and fruitful interactions with them, and if He is also willing to provide them with the gifts of His Spirit, enabling them to successfully carry out their duty, the truth of the gospel would certainly become unshakably established among us. It might be that it is not appropriate for this time that any of those who are called and enabled for this work, being willing to devote their utmost in defense of the truth, especially in this way of preserving it by imbuing people's minds with a sense of its power and worth, should be prevented from fulfilling their duty. But God's purposes in all things must stand, and He must be humbly worshipped, where "his judgments are unsearchable, and his ways beyond understanding."

Again, this deep-rooted and yet unaddressed hostility towards spiritual and heavenly matters becomes a cause and means of turning away from the truths of the gospel, by filling people's hearts with a love of sin and their lives with the results of it in wicked actions. For people are "alienated and enemies in their mind," in or "by wicked actions," Colossians 1:21. The hostility in their minds operates and manifests itself in wicked actions. And the alienation that comes with this hostility is from the "life of God": Ephesians 4:18, "Having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God," that is, from the spiritual, heavenly life of faith and holiness, which God requires, and of which He is the goal and focus. The truths of the gospel are the source, rule, and measure of this life. See Acts 5:20; Ephesians 4:20-21. Therefore, when people are "alienated from the life of God" and through the love of sin are given up to wicked actions, they can't help but secretly dislike and hate the truth, the spiritual and heavenly doctrine, which is the source and rule of holiness and which eternally condemns both the love of sin and the results of it in wicked actions. So, no matter what people claim or profess, while this hostility remains within them as a dominant principle of sin and wicked behaviour, they are, in practice and reality, enemies of the gospel itself. And where any individuals are in this state, it is easy to see how ready and prone they will be to abandon it whenever the opportunity arises, as no one will retain something in their minds that is useless to them and troublesome to their main inclinations any longer than they have a fair chance to let it go. That this mindset is an effective barrier to properly accepting the gospel, our Saviour explicitly states: John 3:19-20, "This is the condemnation, that light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, for fear that their deeds will be exposed." Wherever the power of sin remains and people are involved in practising it, to the point where their actions are evil, they will not accept the light of the gospel – that is, in its own nature and power, and for its proper purposes. And when they are, through conviction or other means, moved to comply with it, they do so only partially and hypocritically, and cannot do otherwise while their actions are evil. So it was with those who are said to believe in Christ. Being somewhat convinced of the truth of His teachings, they would not acknowledge Him because "they loved the praise of people more than the praise of God," John 12:42-43. The ruling power of this single sin of ambitious hypocrisy prevented most of them from even agreeing with the gospel; as our Saviour says to them, "How can you believe, who receive honour from one another, and do not seek the honour that comes from the only God?" John 5:44. With the rest, who could not entirely resist their convictions, it prevailed to the extent that they would not accept it sincerely, but only partially and hypocritically. Now, that which so effectively prevents most from allowing any admission to the gospel at all, and which allows none to receive it in a proper manner, will easily lead, where it remains in its power, to a total abandonment of it when the opportunity arises.

Seeing, therefore, that all those whose actions are evil, and who through the hostility in their minds give themselves up to wicked deeds in their lives, are genuinely alienated from the truths of the gospel, they are and will be ready at all times to turn away from them. For being under the control of sin, they gain no real benefit from these truths, but rather find them incompatible with their main interests and greatest joys.

Hence, we have the description the apostle gives of those who were converted to God through the gospel: Romans 6:17-18, "God be thanked, that you were the servants of sin, but you have obeyed from the heart that form of teaching which was delivered to you. Being then made free

from sin, you became the servants of righteousness." There is no obedience from the heart to the gospel, no possibility of being shaped by the teachings delivered in it unless we are set free from the service of sin.

We may, therefore, without hesitation, establish this as one main reason and cause of the turning away from the truth of the gospel that has occurred in the world and which is still regrettably progressing. People who love sin and live in sin, whose actions are wicked and whose deeds are evil, are all of them in their hearts alienated from the spiritual, holy teachings of the gospel, and will undoubtedly, in the face of any temptation or trial, abandon their profession of these truths.

What reason do we have to hope or believe that drunkards, those who swear, unclean individuals, the covetous, proud, ambitious, boasters, vain, sensualists, and similar enemies of the cross of Christ would stick to the truth with any consistency if a trial should befall them? "Look diligently," says the apostle, "lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright," Hebrews 12:15-16. Esau's birthright was his right to and interest in the promise of the gospel made to Abraham. Being a profane person, when he was hungry, he gave it away for one morsel of food. If others, says the apostle, are like him, profane individuals, fornicators, or those who live in any course of sin, if a temptation befalls them, and their desires call to be satisfied, they will for mere morsels of bread, for the smallest earthly benefits, part with their interest in and profession of the gospel. So he tells us of those who, having abandoned a good conscience, made shipwreck of the faith, 1 Timothy 1:19. After people have corrupted their consciences by living in sin, they may for a while continue their journey with full sails of profession; but if a storm comes, if a trial befalls them, if they encounter a rock or shelf in their way, they quickly make shipwreck of the faith, losing that, whatever else they strive to preserve.

What should secure such individuals to any consistency in their profession? While they are in this condition, it is entirely irrelevant to them, regarding their present or future advantage, what religion they belong to or whether they have any at all. It's true that one way of religion may harden them more in sin, create more prejudices against and hindrances to their conversion than another; but no religion can benefit them or yield them the slightest eternal advantage while they remain in that condition. It will make no difference at the end of days what religion wicked and ungodly sinners have followed, unless it's that the profession of the truth will prove an aggravation of their sins, Romans 2:11-12.

Moreover, when a temptation to abandon the truth befalls them, it has nothing but a few traditional prejudices to contend with. When they move away from those prejudices and begin to search within themselves for reasons to stick to the truth they have outwardly professed, they quickly find in their own hearts a dominant dislike and hatred of the light and truth they are urged to let go of; for every person, as our Saviour asserts, hates the light when their deeds are evil. This is what has caused the loss of the gospel to so many princes, nobles, and great individuals who, for a while, professed it. This is what is so alarmingly present today regarding the danger of a general apostasy. People from all walks of life give themselves up to the service of sin. The complaint of the prophet is not ill-suited to our situation, Isaiah 1:4-6. Many are openly wicked, beyond precedent or example among the heathen. Worldliness, pride, ambition, vanity, in all its variety of situations and objects, along with sensuality of life, have overrun the world. Most dreadfully, the sins of many are accompanied by the highest aggravation of all provocations – namely, that they

proclaim them like Sodom, do not hide them, but glory in their shame. In all these actions, people essentially, although not in words, announce that they are tired of the gospel and are prepared to abandon it; some for any pretence of religion, others for none at all. This is the most dangerous position that any place, church, or people can be found in; for whereas individuals are naturally prone to a spiritual revolt and defection, when this arises from and is encouraged by the love of sin and a life therein, God is also ready to give them up, as a punishment, to such delusions that will turn them away from the gospel. The apostle puts it this way in 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12, "They did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason, God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be condemned who did not believe the truth but took pleasure in unrighteousness." Where people, under the profession of the truth, will continue to be profligate in sin and take pleasure in unrighteousness, God will not always allow the gospel to be exploited to provide them with support in their wickedness but will judiciously give them up to such delusions that will sweep them away into open apostasy from it. This was the main cause of the widespread and almost universal apostasy that occurred before the Reformation. The majority of Christian people, through various means and situations, had become worldly, sensual, wicked, and stubborn in sin. The complaints about this are left on record in the writings of many from those days. It was futile for anyone to try to bring them back to conformity with the gospel, especially considering that most of their guides were no less tainted than they were. Chrysostom was almost the only person, or at least the most prominent, who dedicated his ministry to counter, if possible, the rising tide of impiety and wickedness among all sorts of people; but instead of success, his holy efforts ended in his own exile and death. All levels and orders of people took on the role of defending public sinning against him, leading to his downfall. As a result, there were only two ways to deal with the majority of people in such a condition. One was, following the apostle's advice, to "turn away" or withdraw from them (2 Timothy 3:5), thus leaving them out of the church's communion. The other was to adapt religion to their temperament and desires, thereby preserving an appearance of Christianity among them. The majority of their leaders, prioritising their interests over their duties, chose the latter approach and gradually promoted it. From this point, opinions and practices were invented, advanced, and incorporated into religion that might accommodate people in their desires or provide support and supposed relief to those determined to live in their sins. Such practices included auricular confession, penances, absolutions, commutations of all sorts, Masses for the living and the dead, the church's treasury of merit and power of pardon, intercession and help of saints, and especially purgatory, along with all its related aspects. This led to the completion of the apostasy; for as people became more carnal and wicked, the only way to maintain their profession of the gospel seemed to be by corrupting its entire doctrine and worship so that their desires might be somehow accommodated. To this end, external things were substituted for internal ones, with the same names assigned to them; ecclesiastical things took the place of spiritual ones; outward offices, orders, and multiple sacraments, along with their efficacy through the act performed, replaced genuine conversion to God, purity of heart, and strict, universal holiness; disciplines and physical hardships replaced evangelical repentance and self-denial. It would be impossible for people's desires to be more highly accommodated while still maintaining a pretence of religion. In this way, wickedness of life led to apostasy from the truth. The entire papal apostasy can be reduced to two main aspects: first, adapting the doctrine and worship of the gospel to the carnal minds and desires of people, along with the resulting state of their consciences; and secondly, adapting the desires, ignorance,

and superstition of people to the interests and worldly advantage of the pope and his clergy. The danger of this age lies within this issue. The primary aim of most people is to live in sin with as little trouble in the present and as little fear of the future as they can achieve. There are only two ways to attempt such a mindset.

One way is by eradicating all notions of good and evil, all sense of future rewards and punishments, or of God's governance in the world. In all ages, some people have attempted this: "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God';" and as a result, "they are corrupt and do terrible deeds" (Psalms 14:1). No age could provide more examples of this chosen atheism than the one in which we live. No one deceives themselves into it except with the intention of living in sin without self-control, the last restraint they can free themselves from. Some even take pleasure in achieving the state described in Psalms 10:4 : "The wicked, in their arrogance, will not seek God: God is not in all their thoughts." However, God has embedded the minds of people with such a persistent and undeniable witness to the contrary that it is challenging for anyone to find satisfactory peace in this way. This is because "what may be known about God is evident within themselves" (Romans 1:19), whether they like it or not, and they cannot escape the prevailing belief that "God's judgment is that those who commit sin are deserving of death" (verse 32). Therefore, there are not many examples of people who claim to be unaffected by these things on principle or who find no discomfort in sin. For most of them, this is just a pretence. Their outward boasting is a poor cover for their internal fears and anxieties, and the alleged security of such impious individuals cannot withstand even the smallest of life's surprises, calamities, and dangers to which human nature is vulnerable, let alone death itself. The desired outcome cannot be achieved through this method.

Another way must be found to achieve the same goal, and this must be through religion. Only religion can turn people away from sin, and only religion can secure them in it. The apostle Paul highlights this point: "In the last days, perilous times will come. For people will be lovers of themselves, greedy, boastful, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness but denying its power" (2 Timothy 3:1-5). If they had the power of religion within them, they could not surrender to the pursuit of such animalistic desires; and if they did not have some form of religion, they could not be secure in their behaviour.

Sin and conscience have a stubborn conflict when directly opposed, with conscience arguing that there should be no sin and sin contending that there should be no conscience. However, as human nature is corrupted, both will agree to a compromise. A method to satisfy sin and deceive conscience will be readily accepted, and this is the aim, in part or whole, of every false path in religion that people turn to when they abandon the purity and simplicity of the gospel. See 2 Peter 2:18-19. One way or another, the aim is to remove the need for regeneration and the renewal of human nature in God's image. This is the obstacle that deters all sorts of lazy people from taking religion seriously. While Jesus Christ has placed the need for regeneration at the very entrance to the kingdom of God, every false religious path first seeks to destroy its nature or remove its necessity. Some claim that it is only baptism with its conferred grace through the act itself, while others substitute a moral reformation of life in its place, which they believe is sufficiently strict. The inner light makes all thoughts of it unnecessary.

If this point is not well secured, all subsequent attempts to provide people with a religion will be in vain. The requirement for internal sanctification, the mortification of all sinful urges within the flesh, and the universal obedience required for a godly life must also be accounted for while satisfying conscience. If people living in sin and determined to continue doing so can believe that they may be eternally secure in the religious path you offer them — that their shortcomings will be compensated for by absolutions, masses, and various supplies from the church's treasury, with the last resort being purgatory — there is little fear that you will not find them easily influenced and compliant with your desires. Additionally, the methods by which one may benefit from these effective means of eternal salvation — namely, confession, penance, and almsgiving — are possible and even easy for those who never intend to abandon their sins. Most of those who visibly defect to the Roman church every day are of this sort. It would be desirable if the wickedness of people did not provide grounds for fearing additions to their number. If there is no assurance of people's constancy in professing the truth unless their souls and lives are transformed in its image (which there isn't), then those paths where people are passionately pursuing their desires must indeed be perilous and may, without the special help of divine grace, lead to a disastrous defection.

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06. CHAPTER 5.

CHAPTER 5.

DARKNESS AND IGNORANCE ANOTHER CAUSE OF APOSTASY.

II. The second source of defection from the gospel is the spiritual darkness and ignorance that remains in the minds of people even while professing the truth. The gospel can be considered in two ways: first, in terms of the content, the revelations and propositions it contains, which form the material objects of our faith; second, in terms of the doctrinal way these are declared. With respect to the first, there is a spiritual darkness in the minds of all people by nature, which prevents them from perceiving these truths in their inherent form and beauty. Regarding the latter, people are said to be ignorant when they do not properly understand and comprehend the doctrines of the gospel, and so perish for lack of knowledge. These two aspects have different influences on this harmful outcome and should be considered separately, with the first being addressed first. The existence of such spiritual darkness in the minds of people by nature, and the primary manifestation of their corruption by sin, is fully testified in the Scripture, as I have extensively demonstrated elsewhere. Consequently, everyone agrees, as far as I know, that spiritual illumination is necessary to enable us to perceive spiritual matters appropriately, although there is disagreement about the nature and causes of this illumination. To deny this necessity is to deny the gospel and render the promises of God ineffectual. When illumination is needed, darkness must be removed, as the purpose of introducing light is to dispel darkness. Therefore, we must acknowledge this depravity of the human mind in spiritual darkness, or we must reject the gift and grace of God in illumination. Those who do so, through their own blindness, provide new evidence for the truth they oppose. There is no more certain demonstration of the power of darkness in anyone than for them to claim that they do not require light to be communicated to them through the effectual operation of the Spirit of God. As for the nature of this illumination, I will not debate it here, but will assume that it is an act of His power, who in ancient times "commanded light to shine out of darkness, shining in our hearts, to give us the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ," 2 Corinthians 4:6.

There is a glory and beauty in the spiritual matters that form the subject of the gospel's truths. They contain God's wisdom, "the wisdom of God in a mystery," 1 Corinthians 2:6-7, even "the manifold wisdom of God," Ephesians 3:10; the Lord's glory, which is shown to believers through the gospel, 2 Corinthians 3:18, or "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," 2 Corinthians 4:6. These are things that are beyond discovery by any means that are merely natural, 1 Corinthians 2:9-10. Even the ancient philosophers argued that there was a beauty in all truth, which would attract people's minds and affections if they could perceive it. If they acknowledged this in natural and moral matters, which are earthly and accessible to human reason, how much more should it be granted for the truth of heavenly, spiritual, and divine things! See John 3:12. In short, whatever divine glory or excellence exists in the divine nature itself, in any or all of its holy properties, in the person and grace of Christ, in the renewal of our nature into the image of God, and in the divine

life of faith and obedience, is presented to us in the gospel's truths.

Regardless of how these things may be presented to people's minds through doctrines, the things themselves cannot be understood or spiritually discerned without the illumination of the Holy Spirit previously mentioned. As a result, people may be taught the doctrines of truth, but if they continue under the power of natural darkness, they will not perceive these matters in their own spiritual nature and glory, nor experience their power and efficacy. All the prayers of holy people in the Scripture for spiritual light and instruction, all of God's promises to enlighten people's minds in a saving way, and the descriptions of the work of his grace through which he accomplishes it, undeniably prove this. One consideration will suffice for our purpose. Whoever has a spiritual view and knowledge of these things will have their mind certainly changed and transformed into their image. The apostle states this explicitly in 2 Corinthians 3:18, "We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image." They become like the doctrine to which they are committed, Romans 6:17. The mind is united with the things it discerns, and their image is so expressed in it that there is a perfect conformity between them. However, we see through clear and obvious experience that, despite the knowledge many people have of spiritual matters, their minds remain carnal and fleshly, filled with corrupt and depraved affections, and are in no way changed into the image or likeness of the things themselves. There is no better proof that people have never had a spiritual view of or insight into the glory of gospel truths, no matter their doctrinal knowledge of them, than the fact that their minds are not renewed or transformed into their likeness. When people are in this state, they have no stable grounds to remain in the profession of truth against temptation, opposition, or seduction. Their steadfastness must be a result of such assurance in their minds of the truth of the things they believe, as will be effective against all force and deception with which they may be attacked, and such that their own minds will not be indifferent, careless, or negligent about them. But where should this assurance come from? We are not capable of assurance from outward natural sense in spiritual matters, nor are they evidenced to our minds by rational demonstration. All the full persuasion or assurance we can have of them, which will be effective against temptations and oppositions, arises from a spiritual view of them that gives an experience of their reality, power, and efficacy on our minds. This relates to the renovation of the mind itself in light and faith, the adherence of the will to the things known and believed, with a holy, heavenly, unconquerable love, and the constant approval of the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God in all things. This assurance, although it is neither that of sense nor that of reason, is compared with them and preferred above them in Scripture, as it gives the mind a more certain satisfaction than they can provide, even though it is of another kind. Without this assurance, it is impossible for people to attain such evidence or full persuasion of the evangelical truth they may profess, as to secure their profession in such a combination of circumstances and situations they may encounter.

Here, therefore, I place another means and cause of apostasy from the truth of the gospel after it has been received and professed. Multitudes in all ages have been instructed in the truth, some have been learned and knowledgeable in its doctrines. However, due to their darkness, being without spiritual illumination, they did not discern the things themselves which they agreed to, in their supernatural, heavenly nature and glory. Therefore, they had no experience of their proper power and efficacy on their own minds, affections, and lives. They could not have any such evidence of their truth as would, upon trials, confirm their adherence to them or secure them from

apostasy.

If people's minds had been transformed in their renovation to "prove what is the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God," – if they, by beholding spiritual things, "had been changed into the same image from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord," – they would not have abandoned the most important doctrines of the gospel, as we know them to have done, nor have embraced foolish imaginations in their place, on every plausible invitation and appeal to their fancies. How did people under the papal apostasy gradually desert the principal truths of the gospel and all the spiritual glory of its worship? Not discerning the internal glory and beauty of things evangelical and purely divine, and not having an experience of their power in and upon their own minds, they chose to comply with and admit such things whose outward painted beauty they could discern, and whose effects on their natural and carnal affections they had experience of.

We have seen, in all ages, people learned and skilled in the doctrines of truth, to the point where they might have been considered pillars of it, yet to have been as eager as any to fall into apostasy from it when they have been tested. Indeed, such people have often led others into apostasy. In the past, many of this sort fell into Arianism and Pelagianism, as some have done into Socinianism, and many into Catholicism in our days. When such people fall away, they usually overthrow the faith of some and shake the confidence of others.

However, the apostle provides a double relief against this temptation: firstly, the stability of God's purpose in the preservation of the elect; and secondly, the means of preservation in the holiness of those who believe, as described in 2 Timothy 2:19. We can be sure that all these people never had the insight or understanding of spiritual things which alone could secure their stability. They never saw so much or that in these things for which they should be preferred above all other things. No one who forsakes the truth has ever seen its glory or experienced its power. "They went out from us, but they were not of us," says the apostle about such individuals; "for if they had been of us" (whose fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ), "they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us," 1 John 2:19.

Thus, when the apostle had described the woeful apostasy of some among the Hebrews, he adds concerning those whose preservation he believed, "But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation," Hebrews 6:9. Whatever knowledge people may have of the doctrines of the gospel, and whatever profession they may make, unless they also have those things which are inseparable from salvation, such as the saving illumination of the Holy Spirit, by which the darkness of our minds is removed, there can be no assurance that they will always "stand firm" and "stand fast in the faith." This consideration further highlights the danger of a defection from the truth that is present in the days in which we live.

Firstly, it is due to this issue that we have such a large number of sceptics in religion among us - a group of people who claim not to reject or abandon the truth, only they will discuss and debate it with the greatest indifference as to what is true or false. The Scripture, the Holy Trinity, the person of Christ, his roles, the nature of justification and grace, whether it be or not be, this or that church, all or any in the world, with regard to their profession and worship, are weighed in the tainted, unstable scales of bold, disrespectful conversations. For reasons known only to themselves, this sort of people will acknowledge the public profession of religion, perhaps even be teachers in it.

But on all occasions, they clearly show that they are entirely ignorant of the fundamental difference between truth and error, and so give no firm commitment to what they profess; this difference lies in their glory and beauty in themselves, and in their power and effectiveness towards us. Spiritual, heavenly truth, through its connection to the being, infinite wisdom, goodness, love, and grace of God, by the characteristics of all these things imprinted on it and represented by it, is glorious, lovely, and desirable; - all error, as a consequence of darkness, and through its relation to Satan as the head of the apostasy which led our minds away from the original essential Truth, is twisted, deformed, and brings the mind into confusion. Truth is powerful and effective in conforming the soul to God, and in imbuing it with a love of and power for obedience; - error leads the mind astray into twisted and hidden paths of folly or superstition, or pride and self-promotion. If people were practically acquainted with this difference between truth and error, it would remove the indifference in their minds towards them that this sceptical attitude reveals. Truth, when known in its nature and efficacy, will generate that reverence, that love, that sacred esteem for itself, in the souls of people, that they shall not dare to subject it to be tossed about with every foolish idea. And from this group of people, who are often the boldest and most eager in undertaking the guidance of others, by a pretended generous contempt of their narrow principles, baseless doubts, and cowardly fears, nothing can be expected but a wise and safe compliance with any ways or means of apostasy from the truth which may be advantageously presented to them.

Through the means of this darkness, it is easy to understand how uncertain and unstable the minds of the majority of people, who may also be somewhat ignorant (which we shall discuss later), must be in their acceptance of the truth and the profession of it. They are in no way capable of discovering it in such a way or manner as to provide them with an assurance that will be infallibly victorious against temptations and oppositions; nor can they have that holy love for it which will protect their minds and affections from being enticed and captivated by it. However, all the difference between truth and error that they can discern lies in bare different notions and perceptions, where they are also dark and unskilled, it is no wonder if at any time they make an easy transition from one to the other. The majority of people lost the truth gradually under the papal decline without any significant complaint, even with much satisfaction and contentment; and it is to be feared that many are ready to follow the same path if the opportunity presents itself to them. From this consideration, we may correct the apparent inconsistency that exists in the profession of religion or among its followers. Truth, in every form, is the only guide for the mind in all its actions; when it does not act according to it, it is always off course. Divine truth is the sole guide for the mind in all its actions towards God; it is the only source, immediate cause, and rule of all our obedience. However, while in other matters, people generally follow the light of the bits of truth they have received, we see that many who accept and profess divine truth in its greatest purity and highest discovery are often no less wicked and corrupt in their lives, no less hostile to holiness, no less barren and unproductive in the good and useful works it guides and directs, than those who, having the greatest aversion to it, are under the guidance of other principles, erroneous and superstitious. Thus, the lives of the average Protestants are no better than those of the Catholics, nor can theirs be compared to those of some Muslims; in fact, due to the power of false and superstitious beliefs imposed on their minds and consciences, some are driven to greater and more frequent acts of generosity and charity, of self-discipline, denial of sensual desires and satisfactions, than can be found among most who claim to be under the guidance and rule of truth. Hence, no profession of religion, no matter how corrupt or foolish, is promoted among us without

immediately (at least for a while, and while it is new) claiming an advantage in terms of life and behaviour against the truth, measured by the lives of its common followers; indeed, this is made the main motivation and argument to convince honest and well-intentioned people to comply with the profession of their path because of the effects which (as it is claimed) it produces in their lives and behaviour above those who profess the truth. And the effectiveness of this claim among us is well known to all.

Therefore, I say, we cannot accept that the lives of ordinary followers should be considered a fair and accurate representation of the doctrine they profess. It is true that when this is not the case, people will not benefit from their profession, nor will they remain steadfast in it when faced with a challenge. When the mind is internally and genuinely conformed to the truth, the actions of life may fairly represent, though not perfectly, the truths that are believed. A person is not a firm Christian in any sense, and is not brought into any spiritual order, if their mind does not receive the transformative influence of the gospel truth through the Spirit of Christ, and if they do not exert its power in a holy way of life, so that they are not unwilling to have their beliefs judged impartially by their lifestyle, in terms of sincerity, though not in terms of perfection. However, if we were to accept the lives of people in general as a rule by which judgment could be safely made in these matters, it cannot be denied that sometimes, and in some ages and places, error would, at least temporarily, take glory and reputation from the truth, indeed, natural light from grace, tradition from Scripture, and the Quran from the Gospel. But we have sufficient grounds to object to this interpretation and explanation of the doctrine of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that without the slightest excuse for the ungodly lives of its followers. Among these objections, the one currently being discussed is of the first rank and importance. Many of those who profess the truth have never seen its spiritual glory due to the darkness of their minds, and therefore have no experience of its power and effectiveness, nor are their hearts and lives influenced or guided by it. The gospel will not have its effects on people's minds unless it first communicates to them the internal spiritual principles necessary for all the actions it requires. Put this new wine into old bottles and everything is lost, both bottles and wine as well. The gospel doctrine, when only understood notionally by the old, unrenewed, and corrupt minds of people, is completely lost in terms of all its proper purposes. And wherever there is a reformation of life, along with diligent attention to moral or religious duties, brought about in individuals by the light and dispensation of the gospel, these are the immediate effects of the doctrines it shares with the light of nature and the law in its power, rather than those that are unique to the gospel itself. And this seems to be well understood by those who, having discovered, either through their own experience or from observing others, how ineffective the truth of gospel mysteries is for the minds of worldly people, have essentially abandoned preaching it, and have instead focused on those principles that align with the light of nature and the convictions of the law. The holiness that the gospel requires involves transforming our entire souls into the image and likeness of God, with the actions of our renewed nature universally approving of his "good, acceptable, and perfect will" (Romans 12:2). However, this transformation cannot happen unless we can "behold the glory of the Lord" in it, by which we may be "changed into the same image from glory to glory" (2 Corinthians 3:18). Furthermore, we cannot behold that glory unless the one "who commanded the light to shine out of darkness shines in our hearts to give us the knowledge of it" (2 Corinthians 4:6). As a result, the doctrine of the gospel remains ineffective in the hearts and lives of many who openly profess its truth. The situation is different with every false religion. The motivations and tools they use to influence people's hearts, to reform their lives, and

to engage them in the works and duties they require are all suited either to their natural light or to their superstitions, fears, desires, pride, and other corrupt emotions. Those that align with natural light are common to some degree in every religion, regardless of whether it is true or false in other respects. Every religion, at least, claims to improve upon natural light, as did the philosophers among the heathen of old. It also urges the law as far as it is revealed to them, although some reduce its force and effectiveness through their own presumptions and prejudices, nullifying the commandments of God through their traditions. Any change brought about in people's minds and lives due to these principles and motivations does not belong exclusively to any one religious path, nor should it be considered to the glory or advantage of any of them. In these matters, Islam and all false forms of Christianity have an equal share and interest, except where people's own corrupt beliefs corrupt the light of nature and the rule of the law itself.

Some people claim to find more justice, temperance, honesty, and fairness in dealings, as well as common usefulness to mankind, among Turks and Banians than among the average Christians, leading them to foolishly believe that their religion is better than Christianity. However, this scandal will undoubtedly be held against those who cause it through their disgraceful lives, and it is just as foolishly and wickedly accepted by others. The truths and laws that produce these effects in them are common to all religions and are equally suited to the light and reason of all humanity. They have more evidence and effectiveness communicated through the gospel than any other kind of religion. The same is true for those among us who would claim an advantage for their faith due to its effects on their lives in terms of moral behaviour when they can only claim genuine motives for what is good and useful, and not mere pretence and hypocrisy, which are acknowledged and emphasized in the gospel that we adhere to. The differences, therefore, lie not in the doctrines people profess but in the individuals who embrace them, along with their various desires, inclinations, and temptations.

It is clear, then, that any moral good, duty, or usefulness found in people following a false religion all stem from principles and motives that are acknowledged and developed in the true faith. It can be easily proven that these principles are cultivated and refined, receiving more evidence, vitality, light, and power through the truths of the gospel than through any other means or path. When they don't have an equal effect on those who profess the truth as they do on some who have abandoned it, it is due to the power of their own cursed desires and worldly complacency. The difference on the part of religion itself lies in what is added to these general principles by any notion of it. In every false religion, these additions are suited to people's natural tendencies, such as innate pride, vanity, curiosity, superstition, and irregular hopes and fears. Among Roman Catholics, for example, these include the doctrines of merit, outward disciplines, satisfaction for sin, confession, penances, purgatory, and the like. They were all devised to impose a sense of awe on people's minds and to influence their lives, especially for those who had lost all understanding of gospel principles and motives, although some consideration was given to the benefit and advantage of the inventors themselves. After all, why should people work hard and strain their minds solely for the benefit of others, without some income and revenue of advantage for themselves? It is no surprise that these doctrines have led many to display acts of devotion, numerous outward acts of generosity and charity, and in some cases, genuine austerity in life and renunciation of worldly pleasures. I don't doubt that the hedonistic, immoral paradise of Mohammed effectively influences the minds of many of his followers to lead the kind of virtuous

and devout life they believe may grant them access to its enjoyment. The question, then, is why the truths of the gospel do not produce, in all those who profess them, effects far more excellent than those mentioned, considering truth is more excellent than error, heavenly light more valuable than superstition, faith more significant than fearful imaginations of imagined torments, and true peace and tranquility of mind more meaningful than outward reputation and glory. The main reason for this is that those individuals who lack knowledge in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ do not perceive these truths in their spiritual nature, and therefore cannot grasp their power and effectiveness on their souls.

There is a holiness, obedience, and fruitfulness in good works, created, preserved, and maintained by the truth of the gospel, in those who are genuinely regenerated and sanctified by it, and who receive its proper influence on their minds and souls. This differs entirely in nature from anything that the principles and motives previously mentioned, which derive their effectiveness from their suitability to people's corrupted affections, can produce. Only this holiness is acceptable to God. However, it must be acknowledged that when people are ignorant of the gospel's power and unfamiliar with its internal influence, their lives under the profession of the truth can be as bad, and it is astonishing they are not worse than those of Catholics, the most misguided individuals, or even Muslims themselves. This is because they have many superstitious beliefs and false principles that can put some outward restraint on their desires and encourage them to perform praiseworthy actions. However, those who are not influenced by such ideas and are not under the gospel truth's power may indeed surpass them in all manner of wicked behaviour. It is not merely the outward profession of the truth but the inward power of it that is beneficial to the world and people's souls. And hence it is that the preaching of any person which primarily focuses on and argues from the things that natural light can reach on its own, and the convictions that come from the law, is better received and appears more useful to a large number of common believers than the revelation of the gospel's mysteries. This is because such things align with people's natural understanding and the workings of their own reason, which gives them a sense of their effectiveness. However, being in the dark about the gospel's mysteries, they neither see their excellence nor experience their power. Nevertheless, those mysteries alone are the true source, cause, and guide of all acceptable obedience, even "the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes." From this, it becomes clear how susceptible such people are to apostasy from the truth when they lack spiritual light to discern its glory or allow its power to influence their souls.

If we want to be established in the truth, stand firm in our faith, and be protected from the danger of defection from the gospel, which the world is prone, predisposed, and inclined to, our main effort should be to have a spiritual understanding of the things themselves that are declared in the doctrine of truth which we profess, and to have an experience of their effectiveness on our own souls. Mere notions of truth, or the knowledge of its doctrines, enabling us to talk about them or argue for them, will not preserve us. And although this spiritual light is God's grace, promise, and gift, it is also something we must strive for as part of our duty. The following guidance may contribute somewhat towards the proper fulfilment of our duty in this regard: —

Pray earnestly for the Spirit of truth to lead us into all truth. Our Saviour promised the Spirit of truth to his disciples for this purpose, and there are no teachings like those of the Spirit. If we learn and receive the truths of the gospel merely with the power and ability of our natural faculties, as we do other things, we shall not remain constant to them in spiritual trials. What we learn by ourselves in

spiritual matters, we receive only in their outward form; what we are taught by the Spirit of God, we receive in its power. The apostle admits that "the spirit of man," his mind, reason, and understanding, can grasp "the things of a man," things merely natural, civil, or moral, which are related to human nature; but he says, "The things of God," the mystery of his wisdom, love, and grace in Christ Jesus, "no one knows, but the Spirit of God," and through him, they are revealed to those who believe, 1 Corinthians 2:9-12. Without his special aid, people may, through their natural intelligence and diligence, attain knowledge of the doctrines of truth, handling them with incredible subtlety and curiosity; but they may still be far from establishing knowledge of spiritual matters. The horrible neglect among Christians of this single duty of earnest prayer for the teaching of the Spirit of Christ, the scorn some cast upon it, and the self-confidence that prevails in opposition to it among most, clearly demonstrate the nature of their knowledge of the truth and what is likely to become of it when a trial befalls them. The smallest spark of saving knowledge embedded in the minds of the humblest believers, by the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, will be more effective for their own sanctification and more resistant to opposition than the loftiest notions or most intricate reasoning that people have achieved by relying on their own understanding. Therefore, the Scripture abounds in examples, instances, and directions for prayer to obtain the assistance of the Holy Spirit in learning the truth of the mysteries of the gospel, without which we cannot do so in a proper manner: Ephesians 1:16-20, "Making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power towards us who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places." Chapter 3:14-19, "For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge, that you might be filled with all the fullness of God." Colossians 2:1-3, "I wish you knew what great conflict I have for you, and for those at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Do not settle for any understanding of truth, unless you find that you have learned it as it is in Jesus. What it means to learn the truth as it is in Jesus, the apostle fully explains in Ephesians 4:20-25, "But you have not learned Christ in this way; if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off the former way of life of the old self, which is corrupt according to deceitful desires; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that you put on the new self, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." This is what it means to learn the truth as it is in Jesus, - namely, together with the knowledge of it, to have an experience of its power and effectiveness in the mortification of sin, in the renewal of our nature, and transforming the whole soul into the image of God in righteousness and the holiness of truth. When people learn merely for the sake of knowing, and are satisfied with what they know without attempting to experience the life and power of what

they know in their own hearts, their knowledge is of little use, and their acceptance of the truth will lack stability. The immediate goal (with respect to us) of the whole revelation of the mind and will of God in the Scripture is that it may exert a spiritual, practical power in our souls, and that we may do the things that are revealed to us. When this is neglected, when people are content with a mere speculation of spiritual truths, they do what they can to frustrate the goal, and "reject the counsel of God" in them. Therefore, if we want to know any evangelical truths in a proper manner, if we want to have that evidence and assurance of them in our minds that may secure our profession against temptations and oppositions, let us not be satisfied with any understanding of truth whose effectiveness we have no experience of in our hearts, nor think that we know any more of the mysteries of the gospel than we find actively working in the renewal of our minds, and the transformation of our souls into the image of the glory of God in Christ.

Learn to value a small amount of knowledge that shows itself to be sanctifying and saving in its effects, more than the highest achievements in notions and speculations, even if they are adorned with the reputation of skill, subtlety, eloquence, wit, and learning, which do not demonstrate similar effects. We live in times where people of all types, sects, and parties are competing for the reputation of skill, ability, knowledge, subtlety, and cunning in disputes about religion. There are few who, due to an apparent lack of learning, are not hoping to catch up in one way or another, so as to think highly of their own knowledge and abilities as they do of others'. The person who has learned to be meek, humble, lowly, patient, self-denying, holy, zealous, and peaceable, who purifies their heart and is useful in their life, is indeed the one who is best acquainted with evangelical truth. Therefore, let this knowledge be valued, both in ourselves and others, above all that proud, presumptuous, notional, and self-important knowledge that seeks great reputation in the world, and we shall experience a blessed success in our pursuit of it. Do not be satisfied without discovering such goodness, excellence, and beauty in spiritual matters that your hearts are drawn to them, causing you to cling to them with unshakeable love and delight. This is the essential characteristic, property, fruit, or effect of faith, without which it is not fundamentally different from the faith of devils. The knowledge, perception, and understanding of the truth, which does not present the known, believed, and perceived things as lovely, excellent, and desirable to the will and affections, is a "cloud without water," which every wind of temptation will scatter and blow away. Therefore, do not assume that you have learned anything about God in Christ, the mystery of His grace, or His acceptable and perfect will, unless you see in it such evidence of infinite wisdom, goodness, holiness, and love, in all things so suited to the eternal glory of God and the benefit of your own souls, in the utmost rest, peace, and satisfaction they are capable of, that you may admire, adore, delight in, and cling to them with holy, powerful, and unbreakable love. When you do so, then you will be established in the truth and be able to defy the schemes of Satan and the enticements of people who would try to withdraw or separate you from it. But I will not digress further in these discussions.

Ignorance is another factor that contributes to apostasy from the truth, which was mentioned in relation to the corruption of people's minds. By ignorance, we mean the lack of a proper perception, understanding, or knowledge of the main doctrines of the gospel, the evidence supporting them, and their purpose in the Scriptures. A general knowledge of some doctrines, without being familiar with their foundations and reasons, their function and effects in the spiritual life, holds no value in this context. When people do not know in religion what they should know, as

they should know it, or what their duty is to know, and without which knowledge they cannot perform any other religious duty correctly, they are considered culpably ignorant and exposed to all other evils that may befall them. This may be due to a lack of proper instruction from others or a lack of diligence on their part to learn; either way, the outcome is equally harmful. In the first case, the Holy Spirit assures us that "where there is no vision, the people perish," Proverbs 29:18. People will suffer if those responsible for instructing them are not able to do so; as the saying goes, "if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into the ditch." In general, it is asserted that "people are destroyed for lack of knowledge," Hosea 4:6. The ignorance of people concerning their duty to know has such devastating consequences, and no single factor is more effective in leading to their destruction than the predisposition to defect from the truth they have professed when faced with trials or temptations.

Many people, even entire nations, are often led to an outward general acceptance of the truth of religion, particularly when faced with opposition to any other beliefs. The influence and example of some who hold power and esteem among them, combined with a time of encouraging circumstances, can bring about this effect, even when people have little knowledge of what they profess and even less understanding of its power and efficacy. For example, the majority of people in the past turned to the true religion during the reformation led by Josiah; however, as the prophet Jeremiah observed, "they did not do it with their whole hearts, but insincerely," Jeremiah 3:10. They did not embrace the truth out of love or genuine respect for God's ways but in a hypocritical compliance with their ruler. The conversion of the northern nations after they had taken over the western parts of the Roman Empire foreshadowed what their future religious profession might look like. The first conversion of the world involved the hard work of apostles, evangelists, and others, who preached with miraculous operations, demonstrated holiness of life, and showed patience under all types of persecutions. As a result, only those who were personally convinced of the truth, educated in its mysteries, conformed their lives to its precepts, and committed to professing it in the face of persecution were welcomed into the Christian religion.

However, in later conversions, some kings, rulers, or powerful individuals, influenced by popes or other rulers, and perhaps also motivated by secular considerations, accepted Christianity in opposition to Paganism. Consequently, their allies, relatives, and subjects typically followed suit, with little more of Christianity than the administration of some external rites and the exchange of their old idols for the new saints proposed to them. As a result, their initial profession of Christianity was rooted in a deep ignorance of the principles and most essential doctrines and duties of the gospel. This made it easy for those regarded as their guides to lead them into foolish opinions, idolatrous practices, superstitious devotions, and blind subjection to themselves, ultimately resulting in the tragic apostasy. Knowing only a little of what they should have known and taking no pleasure in obeying what they did know, they willingly embraced, and God judicially handed them over to, the strong delusions that completely turned them away from the gospel. In general, this nation has embraced and professed the Protestant religion in opposition to Catholicism, and undoubtedly, many did so through a sincere and effective conviction of its truth during the initial Reformation. However, it has happened that, due to their own negligence and carelessness about all things invisible and eternal, and the laziness, ignorance, and indifference of some of those who should instruct them, many people have become shamefully ignorant of the basic principles of the religion they claim to follow. This has been the case in almost all ages and places where the

profession of faith has become a national matter. Many people will not make use of the means of instruction available to them, and even more lack effective means of instruction. It may be that there has never been an example of sufficient care taken, or at least sufficient provision made, for the instruction of the population as a whole; nor is the ordinary course of ministry found in the world adequate for this purpose. Can anyone familiar with the gospel or the nature of humans with respect to spiritual matters possibly think that reading prayers to a congregation, or reciting a sermon without zeal, life, power, or evidence of compassion for people's souls, accompanied by a frivolous, vain, worldly lifestyle (as it is for many), would meet the apostolic standard of laying the foundation and then continually instructing people towards perfection? As a result (and for other reasons clear to all impartial observers), "darkness covers the earth, and gross darkness the people," with ignorance prevailing among all kinds of people. Some refuse to learn, some have no one to teach them, some are consumed by the pursuit of sensual pleasures and vanities, and some are engulfed in the love of and concerns about worldly matters. In any age, few people have been conscientiously diligent in matters of eternal significance. This ignorance made it easier for the papal apostasy to emerge and progress. Those who wanted to be considered Christians, and whom the supposed leaders in religion wanted to be viewed as such, were profoundly ignorant. They first adapted religious practices to their carnal, superstitious minds and then gradually led them into all kinds of errors and fables. They were blind and did not know where they were going. Thus, the crucial truths of the gospel were abandoned for monastic fantasies, legends of absurd, false miracles, and other pagan superstitions. It was primarily through ignorance that people surrendered themselves to the power of deceivers, which enabled the architects of the Roman apostasy to lead them into opinions, ways, and practices that suited their worldly interests. The Catholic leaders were so aware of the advantage they gained from this that some of them even praised ignorance as the most useful quality in the people's religious beliefs!

We can therefore identify this as another cause, or at least an occasion, of apostasy. When people are ignorant of the religion they profess, in terms of its doctrines and the primary foundations of those doctrines; when they are like the Samaritans, who did not understand their own religious worship they had received through tradition, but "worshipped they knew not what" (John 4:22) - they are in no way able to defend themselves against the slightest influence of seducers. They may continue in the old path of some formal external duties, but if anyone confronts them, it is easy for that person to divert them from their course. The Apostle, highlighting the danger that believers faced due to apostate seducers, attributed the means of their preservation to "the anointing they had received, by which they knew all things" (1 John 2:19-20; 1 John 2:27). Had they not been taught and instructed in the truth, they could not have persevered in their profession of faith during such a time. Indeed, such individuals are very likely to think that there is something worthy of their consideration in what is proposed to them by even the most corrupt seducers, whereas they have not genuinely found anything in what they have long professed; for no one can find any real benefit, profit, or advantage in that which they are ignorant of. Thus, it is said that some "by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple" (Romans 16:18). Everything they say has a plausible pretence and appearance to those under that character, making them prone to be captivated and pleased by it. Consequently, the Apostle advises those who aim for establishment in faith and order: "Brethren, be not children in understanding; howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men" (1 Corinthians 14:20). Be complete, perfect, well instructed in your minds, fully initiated into the doctrines of the gospel. The Apostle

refers to such people as "perfect men" (1 Corinthians 2:6; Hebrews 5:14). In contrast, those who are "children" - that is, weak and ignorant - will also be uncertain and unstable. They will be like children, "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive" (Ephesians 4:14). For let some cunning papal agents come among this sort of people, and let them confidently tell them that they have not, nor ever will have, any benefit from the religion they profess, and that they have no evidence or assurance of its truth; they tell them nothing more than what they will know to be true if they once take it into consideration. While they have seemed to be "always learning" by attending church and engaging in similar outward expressions of religion, they "never came to the knowledge of the truth". Therefore, when they are somehow put to a stand and forced to consider themselves, they are astonished to find how little they believe in the religion they profess or know about the basis of what they would like others to think they believe.

Let such people add (as they are likely to do) that with the Roman Church comes full assurance, that no one has ever gone astray who accompanied those who practice the old religion, which their ancestors professed for many ages before the recent changes emerged, causing confusion, disorder, sects, and divisions, while before everyone shared the same belief (which was the most persuasive argument of Paganism against Christianity). Every difficult personal circumstance in their current situation makes them inclined to believe that it may be as they say. Let them also tell them about the power given to the priesthood of their church to forgive all types of sins; the effective intercession of saints and angels, among whom they can select particular patrons and guardians for themselves; the mercy, grace, goodness, power, and influence in heaven of the Blessed Virgin, all continually exercised on behalf of Catholics; the daily miracles performed among them; and the incredible sanctity and devotion some have achieved - they start to think there is something in these things that they can feel or see, while in their own religion they can understand very little or nothing at all. The "great things" of the gospel are "strange things" to them; they neither do nor can comprehend them, no matter how much effort they think is appropriate in this case. However, the things now proposed to them have the nature of stories, which the human mind is accustomed to and adept at both receiving and retaining. It is hard to imagine how easy a transition would be from a religion of which people know little or nothing at all, to one that instantly presents their imaginations and senses with everything they need to believe or do in order to achieve eternal happiness.

Suppose someone else comes among such people and immediately asks them to abandon the profession of the religion they claim to follow, confidently urging them to focus entirely on an inner light that will guide and direct them to God. They find through natural experience that there is some such light within them, similar to what the individual proposes; for there is such light in all people, as the apostle states, even the light of conscience, accusing or excusing with regards to sin or duty, Romans 2:14-15. Due to their ignorance, and having no experience of any power or effectiveness in the religion they profess, they begin to think there is some truth in what is proposed to them, and so are easily deceived. There is no guarantee of consistency for someone who lacks enough light or knowledge of the truth to give them some internal experience of the effectiveness of what they profess when a trial or temptation arises.

However, it is not necessary to dwell on this any longer, as it is so evident in both the facts and the reasons for it. Apostasy from a traditional profession of truths that people do not truly understand

is easy and, in a time of temptation, inevitable. In all ages, many have perished due to a lack of knowledge; such people lack defence against any external cause or means of defection. They have nothing in their minds to oppose force, nothing to resist seductions or deception, nothing to counter the examples of influential leaders, and nothing to combat their own superstitions; they will therefore comply with any seemingly reasonable excuse for a revolt when the circumstances align with such a design. In this lies a significant part of the danger of the public profession of the Protestant religion among us. It is incredible how ignorant many people are, and it's hard to say whose fault it is. Some individuals can't distinguish between religions as long as the same names of God and Christ are used and the same places are frequented for worship. Yet, this group of people show great zeal and passion against Catholicism and other heresies. They're more than eager to mock, scorn, and fight against them, as ready as Muslims are to persecute Christians or Catholics to persecute true believers, and for the same reasons. However, if they are ever forced to examine their own religion, to understand what they believe and why, their confidence fails them. At that point, they're most likely to abandon their professed religion for another, one in which they're promised to have more understanding and from which they can gain some benefit, as it is claimed, since their own religion has provided them with none.

Whatever causes ignorance among people, it exposes them to a dangerous departure from the truth. If those responsible for teaching them the truths and mysteries of the gospel are unskilled or negligent in their duties, they effectively deliver people into the hands of their spiritual adversaries. Those who obstruct the efforts of others willing to teach the truth will also be held accountable. Considering the current state of affairs and people's attitudes, one might think it would be in the best interest of those who genuinely love the Protestant religion to prevent its followers from apostasy or any inclination towards it. The idea that this can be achieved without continually instructing people in the truths to be professed, their foundations, reasons, and effects, is naive and merits no consideration. It is unrealistic to assume that people will remain loyal to their religion due to external laws, adherence to external forms, or the secular advantage of some individuals, in which they have no stake. This loyalty will not hold when they face a trial. The only effective and rational means to achieve this goal is for those concerned to personally instruct people in the truth and encourage obedience through their own example, persuading others with the same goal to assist them. However, to cry out about the great danger of the Protestant religion in the face of growing Catholicism, while not only neglecting the crucial duty of imparting real, effective knowledge of it to people but also placing unnecessary obstacles in the way of others who sincerely want to do so, is an inexplicable inconsistency in religion. Either we are not sincere in our professed zeal for the truth and our fears of Catholicism's growing influence, or we don't believe that instruction in the truth is the only means to preserve people in their useful profession of it, which would mean renouncing the gospel and all rational considerations, or we are influenced by other things we value more than evangelical truth and the purity of religion. The Reformation of the church primarily involved freeing people from darkness and ignorance; and if, through our negligence, they are brought back into the same state, they would be easy prey for the Catholic Church to capture. The advice of the apostle, regarding the duty of all gospel ministers and officers in a time like ours, is the only thing that will protect us, as stated in 2 Timothy 4:1-5.

However, some might argue that the level of effort and diligence in teaching and instructing people, as some suggest, is entirely unnecessary. It should be enough if they are taught general

principles of religion and follow the practices of the church they belong to. Furthermore, if this responsibility lies with the ministry, those called to it would have no respite from continuous, diligent "labour in word and doctrine", and would be required to exemplify what they teach throughout their lives. If this is the case, who would ever take on this role if they could find success in the world another way? It would indeed be burdensome if our religion could not be preserved in people's minds without this constant, never-ending work. In the Catholic Church, we see how easy it is to maintain people's adherence to its beliefs while the clergy enjoy the pleasures and honours of this world, not burdened with the seemingly endless toil we demand. In fact, experience shows that ignorance in people is the most effective way to keep them submissive to the priests, and thus ensure the security of the church. I fear that such thoughts may influence some people to be open to change if it could be achieved without risk.

If we, as ministers of the gospel and leaders of the church, require more effort, diligence, and hard work than the Holy Spirit has clearly, positively, and repeatedly commanded in Scripture, let our demands be rejected and scorned. The best of us, among the living, fall short in many ways of the rules and examples set before us in Scripture. I am uncertain on what basis or by what measures most of us intend to give our accounts on Judgment Day. Moreover, there is no opinion more impious or contradictory to the gospel than the belief that it's sufficient for people to be instructed only in general principles of religion, without further growth or development in knowledge. Those who are referred to as "the people" are, I assume, considered Christians – disciples of Jesus Christ and members of his mystical body. If so, their growth in understanding, their increase in knowledge, their progress towards perfection, and their familiarity with the entire counsel of God and the mysteries of his love and grace in Christ Jesus are as necessary for them as the "salvation of their souls" can make them.

If we want to be ministers of the gospel, it would be wise for us to accept the terms set by the Holy Spirit, or avoid the role entirely. We must understand that the closer our beliefs align with the gospel, the less they are mixed with anything human, the more difficult it becomes to thoroughly instruct people in its knowledge. The human mind is far more capable of comprehending and retaining fables, errors, and superstitions than evangelical truths. The former are natural to it, while the latter are disliked and resisted until grace removes these barriers. As a result, some people may show more apparent progress in a false religion in a few days than others will in learning the truth and mysteries of the gospel in several years. We might see well-versed Catholics in a month's time, experts in the mysteries of their devotion, and another belief system that takes only a few days to master. But most people's progress in learning the gospel truth is slow. If particular diligence and constant dedication are not used in their instruction, they will become vulnerable to the next opportunity for departure from the truth

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07. CHAPTER 6.

CHAPTER 6.

PRIDE AND VANITY OF MIND, SLOTH AND NEGLIGENCE, LOVE OF THE WORLD, CAUSES OF APOSTASY — THE WORK OF SATAN, AND JUDGMENTS OF GOD IN THIS MATTER.

III. The innate pride and vanity of people's minds is another factor that predisposes them to apostasy from the profession of evangelical truth. In this regard, the purpose and work of the gospel is to "demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God," taught within, "taking captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ," 2 Corinthians 10:4-5. The human mind is naturally filled with high thoughts of itself and its abilities. The prevailing belief is that it is sufficient for all the purposes of its existence and all the duties of its situation without any special help or assistance from above. People not only naturally say, "With our tongue we will prevail; our lips are our own: who is lord over us?" Psalms 12:4 - claiming sovereignty over all their outward actions; but also, that nothing is or can or should be required of us that we don't have the power within ourselves to comprehend, comply with, and perform. This belief has been contested in various forms and under different pretences throughout the history of the church. The real crux of all controversies surrounding the powers of nature and grace is this: on one hand, it is argued that the minds and wills of people are self-sufficient in terms of internal abilities for all duties of obedience necessary for eternal happiness; on the other hand, it is argued that we have no sufficiency of ourselves, but that all our sufficiency comes from God. See 2 Corinthians 3:5; 2 Corinthians 9:8. This principle, which arose directly from the pride that, in aiming to expand our self-sufficiency, ultimately led to the loss of what we had, has never been fully uprooted from the minds of the majority of professed Christians. In all things, the human mind seeks to be its own measure, guide, and rule, continually giving rise to these two problems:

It elevates its own ideas, which it loves, applauds, obsesses over, and clings to. This is the origin of heresy and has led to the birth, growth, and progress of error. "God created humans upright, but they have sought out many schemes," Ecclesiastes 7:29. Seeking out and exalting our own ideas in spiritual and religious matters is the most harmful consequence of our fall from the state of uprightness in which God created us.

It considers itself the sole and absolute judge of what is divinely proposed to it, determining whether it is true or false, good or evil, to be accepted or rejected, without any desire or expectation of supernatural guidance or assistance. Whatever does not conform to its own preconceived notions, it is prepared to ridicule and disdain.

What we now need to demonstrate is that where this pride and principle are dominant, where pride is not humbled by grace nor the principle eradicated by spiritual light, people can never receive the truths of the gospel in a proper manner and are ready to abandon them when they have, for a time, been led to profess them. This is because: The gospel, meaning the doctrines and truths it contains, is presented to us in the name and on the authority of God, bearing His image and

inscription. It has impressions of divine wisdom, goodness, grace, holiness, and power upon it, revealing it as the "glorious gospel of the blessed God," 1 Timothy 1:11. Therefore, it should be received with holy reverence and a due sense of God's glory, as His voice speaking to us from heaven. The apostle cautions us not to "refuse" or "turn away from him who speaks from heaven," Hebrews 12:25. Without this, the gospel will never be properly received, truly understood, or steadfastly believed. It is not to be accepted as "the word of humans, but as it is in truth, the word of God," 1 Thessalonians 2:13. It must be embraced with the mindset, submission, and subjection of the soul and conscience appropriate for mere mortals when dealing with the great and holy God, as expressed in Genesis 18:27. Jesus tells us that "unless we change and become like little children, we cannot enter the kingdom of God." Unless we deny ourselves and our own ideas, and become humble and teachable, we can never truly understand its mysteries. He showed the learned Pharisees that due to their pride, vanity, and hypocrisy, they could not perceive or comprehend the doctrine he taught.

God promises that He will teach the humble in judgement: "He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them His way," Psalms 25:9. "The Lord confides in those who fear Him; He makes His covenant known to them," verse 14. "Whom shall He teach knowledge? Whom shall He make understand doctrine? Those weaned from milk and taken from the breast," Isaiah 28:9. Unless people become like weaned children, as David claimed of himself in Psalms 131:2 when "his heart was not proud nor his eyes haughty," verse 1, God will not teach them. Therefore, nothing obstructs divine teachings more effectively than human pride, which is utterly incompatible with them. Hence, people approach the study of the gospel and its contents with carnal confidence in themselves, their intellectual abilities and the acuity of their own minds, without any particular awe or reverence for God, the source of the gospel. As a result, they assume themselves to be capable judges of the Holy Spirit's intent in all divine revelations. Can anyone who has read the Scripture believe that this is the way to learn heavenly truth or benefit from God's teachings? When we consider how most people learn the truth, it's no surprise to see how easily they forget and abandon it. If truth ever finds its way into a soul whose mind is not humbled and whose desires are not subdued, it is an unwelcome guest and will be cast aside at the first opportunity. It's true that we should use our utmost rational abilities to investigate sacred truth; however, if we follow the guidance of our own minds in this endeavour, perhaps delving into subtleties and nuances while abandoning humble reliance on God's teachings, we may mistakenly assume we possess unique wisdom, leading ourselves into disastrous folly. This was the error that corrupted the efforts of the schoolmen, leaving them to become vain in their imaginations in the height of their inquiries. They rejected the approach of handling spiritual matters in a spiritual way, using the words taught by the Holy Spirit, and instead opted for curious, subtle reasoning and inventions of carnal, unsanctified minds. As a result, they corrupted, degraded, and distorted the Scripture's teachings. Most of their disputes would never have arisen if Aristotle had not invented obscure terms and distinctions, far removed from the common understanding and reason of wiser men than himself. These scholars never considered inquiring into divine revelation with a holy, humble heart, waiting and praying for divine teaching and illumination of the mind, so that they might gain wisdom in the knowledge of the gospel's mysteries and instruct others in the knowledge and fear of God. Instead, they were filled with a conceit of their own intellectual abilities, philosophical prowess, and disputing skills, and they tackled Christian religion with boldness, reshaping it according to their own imaginations. In doing so, they dressed it up in foolish terms of art, and under the guise of extraordinary subtlety,

they completely corrupted it and led people away from the simplicity of the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. This proud, self-confident generation of men left no article of religion unaltered, making it impossible for anyone to understand it without first becoming a better student of Aristotle than of Christ. To believe and teach Scripture's doctrine with sound reason and judgement, and to influence people's minds and consciences in the way Scripture does, without their philosophical notions, subtleties, and distinctions, was, for them, to be considered a heretic or a fool. Through the pride, confidence, and supposed subtlety of these men, religion was completely corrupted, and the source of sanctuary waters was poisoned. Even the truth that remained among them was so debased, stripped of its native heavenly glory, beauty, and majesty, and rendered so deformed and unsuited to the spiritual light in which it can only be usefully discerned, that it became entirely useless and ineffective for its intended purposes. We are never in greater danger of withdrawing ourselves from God's teachings than when we rely on our own understanding in our inquiries into spiritual matters, forgetting the humble, lowly mindset that is essential for proper learning and teaching. This is one way in which, through the innate pride of their minds, people are hindered from accepting and inclined to abandon the truths of the gospel.

Again, it's agreed that there is nothing proposed in the gospel that contradicts reason, as reason is the appropriate understanding and measure of things as they are in their own nature. This is because the gospel itself is the principal external effect of God's wisdom, which has given all things their natures, properties, and measures. However, there are aspects revealed in the gospel that are beyond the comprehension of human reason. This isn't due to the accidental corruption of our nature but the essential limitations of our understanding. There are, indeed, divine mysteries in the gospel that we can understand in terms of their revelation, but we cannot fully comprehend the nature of these mysteries themselves. Reason itself must acknowledge this limitation, as it knows it is finite and restricted. How can we fully comprehend the infinite or all the effects of infinite wisdom?

"Can we discover the depths of God by searching? Can we find the limits of the Almighty? It is as high as the heavens; what can we do? Deeper than hell; what can we know? Its measure is longer than the earth and wider than the sea," Job 11:7-9. These mysteries surpass the natural and appropriate objects of our understanding, and we cannot fully grasp them. In this context, human reason has no choice but to humbly accept the revelations that are made.

Additionally, there are aspects of the gospel that are unsuited or even contradictory to reason as it is corrupted. Reason is now not only limited and finite, but also impaired, depraved, and corrupted. To deny this is to deny the fundamental principle and assumption that the gospel is based on – that Jesus Christ came into the world to restore and repair our nature. In this state, our reason is not only incapable of discerning and judging spiritual matters properly but is also prone to creating vain imaginations and being preoccupied with countless prejudices contrary to the teachings and requirements of the gospel. Whatever our minds perceive or create in this manner, we tend to consider as valid acts and effects of reason as any other exercise or capability.

Regarding both the weakness of reason as it is finite and limited, and the depravation of reason as it is corrupted, the aim of the gospel is to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of faith. To this end: As for the former, the gospel requires people to believe in things beyond their reason, solely based on the authority of divine revelation. They must believe in things that "no eye

has seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the human heart to conceive;" they are only "revealed to us by the Spirit," 1 Corinthians 2:9-10. The gospel doesn't allow for questioning how certain things can be, which were spoken by the Lord. We may inquire into the meaning of the revelation but cannot fully comprehend the things revealed. "We don't need curiosity after Jesus Christ, nor investigation after the gospel; when we believe, we desire nothing more than to believe, for this is what we first believe, that there is nothing more we should believe," Tertullian. When the wise, the scribes, and the debaters of this world refused to submit to this principle, guided by their reason, they descended into the most irrational unreasonableness, judging God's wisdom to be foolish and his power to be weak, 1 Corinthians 1:18-25. It is an unprecedented act of atheism that some in our days (who still want to be considered Christians) have undertaken, attempting to elevate philosophy or human reason to a position of authority over all divine revelations. Nothing should be assumed to be contained in them unless it is measurable by reason's principles and rules. Anything claiming to be beyond reason, they argue, should be rejected, essentially claiming that human reason is infinite, or that God's wisdom and understanding are finite and limited. Therefore, concerning the things revealed in the gospel, because many of them are absolutely beyond the comprehension of our minds or reason, reason is not the judge of them but serves faith only in bearing witness to them; for "the things of a man are known by the spirit of man within him; but the things of God, no one knows except the Spirit of God," 1 Corinthians 2:11. In short, asserting that we can be obliged to believe only what we can comprehend, or nothing other than what we can fully understand in itself, or that we may reject what is genuinely above reason under the assumption that it is contrary to reason, is to renounce the gospel and, along with it, all divine revelations. This is spoken not of reason as it is corrupted but merely as it is human reason, finite and limited. As the gospel proposes to people things that are beyond their comprehension in terms of infinite, spiritual, and heavenly matters, assuming their reason to be pure and uncorrupted, only allowing it to be finite and limited; it also prescribes things contrary to our natural conceptions or reason as it is depraved within us concerning the obedience of faith that it requires. The natural conceptions of our minds about religious duties and the way of living for God are all in line with the covenant of works, as they are the effects of the remnants of that light which directed us to walk with God in that manner. However, the arrangement of things in the covenant of grace is diametrically opposed to this, and their accounts will never mix, Romans 11:6. Indeed, the carnal mind – that is, reason as it is corrupted – acts in contradiction to the will of God as revealed in the gospel with enmity and hatred, Romans 8:7. As for the duties that are in line with the light of nature, the gospel alters them with respect to the mediation of Christ and the efficiency of the Holy Spirit, to the extent that corrupted reason rejects them, considering them foreign to its conceptions. Corrupted reason can approve of the duties themselves but not of their relation to Jesus Christ, to which they are directed by the gospel. This is why those who claimed an absolute sovereignty of their own reason in the past, accepting nothing as truth but what complied with its dictates, were the slowest to receive and the quickest to oppose the mysteries of the gospel. Because some aspects were beyond their reason and more were contrary to it as it is corrupted, they regarded them as foolish and thus despised them. The apostle discusses and documents this in 1 Corinthians 1:2. This was particularly true among those who, in addition to the general "darkening of their foolish hearts" due to vain imaginations, had adopted a specific philosophical sect that was highly regarded among the wise people of the world. They believed and upheld all the maxims of their sect as the absolute dictates of right reason, even though most of them were

foolish fantasies, either inherited through tradition or sophistically imposed on their understandings. Consequently, they considered anything contrary to or inconsistent with these principles to be against reason and therefore dismissed it. Many Christians today exhibit similar behaviour, using the traditional principles of their sect or group as the rule for examining everything proposed to them in religion. Although the majority of philosophers and wise people in Athens rejected the apostle's doctrine, none were as quick and fierce in their opposition to him or as contemptuously proud in their criticism as the Epicureans and Stoics, Acts 17:18. The reason for this was that the doctrine he taught was directly opposed to the maxims of their particular sects. The Epicureans denied the providence of God in the governance of the world, the existence of human souls after death, and all eternal rewards or punishments, making it impossible for them to accept any part of the apostle's doctrine without renouncing all their impious beliefs and thus destroying their sect. The Stoics, on the other hand, believed that people should seek all happiness and blessedness within themselves and from things within their power, considering themselves entirely self-sufficient for that purpose. Everything the apostle taught about the mediation of Christ and the grace of God through him was also directly opposed to this principle. As a result, these two sects opposed him in a unique way, not only due to the pride and darkness inherent in human minds and the elevation of corrupted reason above its proper place and dignity but also due to the prejudiced opinions to which they clung on the basis of their sects' reputations as being the assured dictates of right reason in general. When some such individuals later adopted a profession of the gospel based on a general conviction of its truth, they were the ones who corrupted its main mysteries with their futile philosophy, as the apostle suggests in Colossians 2:8. Tertullian similarly observed, "Heresies are fostered by philosophy. From it come the Æons, forms, and other notions, as well as the human trinity of Valentinus, who had been a Platonist. From it came Marcion's better God of tranquillity, derived from the Stoics; and the idea that the soul perishes, observed among the Epicureans; and the denial of the restoration of the flesh, taken from the school of all philosophers."

We can apply these concepts to our present purpose. The aim of the gospel, in all its specific truths and mysteries, is to bring every thought into submission to the obedience of faith. This is why we have the direction which human instinct will never adhere to: "If any of you think you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise," 1 Corinthians 3:18. Unless people renounce their worldly wisdom, in all its principles, effects, and actions, they will never gain the wisdom that comes from above; and anyone who doesn't know what it means to become a fool in this sense has never been wise towards God. As a result, when individuals adopt the outward profession of the gospel, they start to discover, upon inquiry, that the mysteries and principles of its teachings don't fit with the natural pride of their minds and conflict with the absolute sovereignty they want to give to their own reason. In response, various alternatives are sought to throw off the burden of faith and re-establish reason in its place; not that people abandon faith with this explicit intention, but it is the hidden motivation driving them. Consequently, most of those who abandon the truth on this basis are those who, trusting too readily in their own rational abilities and lacking the will, humility, or diligence to properly examine the foundations and reasons for the truth, end up following the guidance and teachings of others who have devised opinions better suited to the inherent pride of their minds and worldly reasoning. Some, through an overzealous pursuit of their own rational faculties in spiritual matters, having removed their minds from the humble state in which they are capable of divine teaching, also fall into the same mistake. All

ancient heresies sprang from this root; even those that were most absurd and foolish, and most directly opposed to sound reason, arose from a claim to it. When people insist that reason must have absolute supremacy in religion, it is unavoidable that they will assume their own reason is the one intended, and it is easy to imagine how some might be led by this belief into very foolish notions, unless we suppose all people to be equally wise and sensible.

I will briefly illustrate these concepts with one example, focusing on a prevalent deviation from the truth that is currently gaining ground in the world; this is the case of Socinianism. I provide this example because its influence is particularly potent when it encounters the mindset previously described and is more widespread than many realise. Although the name is generally condemned and some opinions under its umbrella are incompatible with the interests of the majority, all the deviations from the truth that we see among us, under various labels, stem from this corrupt source. In fact, the entirety of Socinianism is a system of ideas craftily tailored to the initial notions and perceptions of corrupted reason and the inherent pride of people's minds who, in any capacity, acknowledge divine revelation. Upon first hearing these ideas, those who are not prepared and fortified against them through a spiritual experience of the excellence, power, and efficacy of the gospel's mysteries readily embrace them, as they cater to all the corrupt desires and worldly reasoning of their minds. As previously noted, there are two types of concepts in the doctrines of the gospel: 1) Those that are beyond the comprehension and scope of reason in its best state, as it is in us limited and confined; 2) Those that are contrary to it when corrupted and depraved. This type of apostasy can be categorised under these two headings.

Those who follow this path absolutely reject what is above reason and incomprehensible to it. Examples include the doctrines of the Trinity and the incarnation of the Son of God. Because the ideas taught in these doctrines are not comprehensible to their reason, they conclude that they are opposed to sound reason. Other people also refuse these doctrines as they do not align with the inner light within them; they cannot accept the existence of the divine nature in three distinct persons or the union of the divine and human natures in one person. These ideas, so thoroughly, so plainly, and so frequently revealed and asserted in the Scriptures, and so attested by the early universal church, are rejected for no other reason than that they are against reason. The only basis for this claim is that they are beyond reason. When these individuals have confounded themselves with Nicodemus' question, "How can these things be?" they categorically deny their existence simply because they cannot grasp the manner of it.

Regarding those things that are contrary to reason when corrupted, these individuals distort and manipulate them to comply with their own beliefs. They deal this way with the doctrines of the attributes of God, His eternal decrees, the role and mediation of Christ, justification by His righteousness, the power and efficacy of the Holy Spirit's grace in the conversion of sinners, and the resurrection of the dead. Because they cannot bring their corrupted and depraved reason to agree with these truths, they will force, twist, and contort the truths themselves to make them subservient to their own reasoning or their worldly understanding of spiritual matters. They accept the words, terms, and propositions in which these truths are expressed but impose absurd interpretations on them, which are destructive to faith and contrary to the overall purpose and intent of the Scriptures. In this way, they attempt to subjugate every divine revelation to the bondage of their own distorted reasoning and imagination.

It is therefore evident that this type of apostasy stems from nothing other than the pride of people's minds, which refuse to accept the evangelical truths based solely on the authority of divine revelation when they are beyond reason as it is limited or contrary to it when corrupted. On these terms, the gospel cannot maintain its position, nor will it relinquish its prerogative by subjecting itself to be tested by these uncertain standards or weighed in these uneven, unstable balances. Only the humble, the meek, and the teachable – those who are willing to surrender their understanding to the obedience of faith – are the ones with whom the gospel will remain and endure.

However, it may be argued that this is just one private heresy with no significant influence or acceptance in the world, and thus there is no risk of it contributing to a more widespread defection. This might be how it appears to many, but I must admit that I have a different perspective, for two reasons:

One reason is the daily progress it makes by adding new, bold, and arrogant ideas to those it has already successfully promoted. In pursuit of the same principles as those held by people of this persuasion, many are beginning to submit the Scripture and everything it contains to the judgment and verdict of their own reason. This is the true form and spirit of Socinianism, visibly asserting itself with more than ordinary confidence. They accept what aligns with their reason, and what doesn't, even if it is affirmed a hundred times in the Scripture, they reject as easily and confidently as if they were mere human imaginings. Both books written for this purpose and common discussions among many fully attest to this increase in human pride. Anyone who doesn't see that the next step is outright atheism is not paying attention. This is the pit into which such glaring displays of pride ultimately fall. Many defend themselves with the false and foolish pretence that all those they disagree with are fanatical enemies of reason when, in fact, they give reason all the credit it deserves from anyone who believes in divine revelation and does not completely deny the corruption of human nature by the fall. The poison of these principles is widespread in the world. It is for this reason that all those gospel doctrines containing any spiritual mystery or constituent principles of the covenant of grace, which are not entirely reconcilable to corrupt and carnal reason, are so burdened with contempt and ridicule by many that merely expressing support for them exposes one to accusations of being "ignorant, irrational, and foolish." Such doctrines include eternal predestination, total corruption of human nature concerning spiritual matters due to the fall, the power and efficacy of God's grace in the conversion of sinners, the nature and necessity of regeneration, union with Christ, justification by the imputation of His righteousness, the nature of internal, inherent righteousness or evangelical holiness, the need for continuous spiritual support for all acts of obedience, the power of the Holy Spirit in demonstrating the divine authority of the Scriptures, and several others. Many cannot see the reason for accepting these things or cannot understand the rationale behind them. Therefore, although they are clearly and plainly declared in the Scriptures, they are mocked and rejected by a significant number of people to the point where the very names of these doctrines have become contemptible. But why all this scorn and severity? People would do well to consider that not long ago, all the bishops of England acknowledged these doctrines as articles of faith, which are now so ridiculed. While they are not obligated by any divine command to share the same beliefs simply because they were once held by these bishops, they might be bound by the laws of the land not to renounce the ancient doctrines of the church and are certainly bound by the laws of Christian modesty and sobriety not

to vilify and scorn the doctrines they once held and all who profess them. But some people find it sufficient reason to detest any religious principles if they seem incompatible with their reason, even if that reason is clearly corrupted by prejudice and weakened by ignorance. They refuse to accept that there can be consistency between the unchangeability of God's decrees and the freedom of our wills; that justification by the blood of Christ does not make our own obedience unnecessary; that the efficacy of God's grace and the necessity of our duty can be reconciled. In doing so, they appear to rely on two principles as their security, without which they have no foundation to build upon:

(1.) The belief that their individual reasoning is the same as right reason in general and that whatever respect is due to one is also due to the other. It would be helpful if prejudices, corrupt affections, and significant ignorance did not frequently reveal themselves among this group of people. Not only that, but some of them display a lifestyle that no one who believes in the Scriptures would consider consistent with divine teachings. However, it has come to pass that the humility, meekness, self-doubt, and conscientious fear of sinning and practice of holiness, which the word of God deems so necessary for those who want to learn the truth as it is in Jesus, are completely disregarded by many who are puffed up with the belief in their own ability to know everything.

(2.) The belief that there is no time or instance in which our seemingly most rational thoughts should be submitted to the obedience of faith; yet without this, there can be no true knowledge of God's mind in the gospel. It would be easy to guess where such principles would lead people in their religious beliefs if experience didn't make guessing unnecessary in this case.

Therefore, this pride of people's minds, refusing to bow or subject themselves to the authority of divine revelation and aiming to exalt themselves in their intellectual and moral abilities, has always been a significant principle of opposition to and apostasy from evangelical truth. It has never been more widespread than in the days we live in. Besides openly spawning a whole range of errors that some entire sects embrace, it spreads its effects among all types of people professing Christianity. A humble submission of mind and conscience to the authority of God in His word, which alone will be found to answer the experience of believers, is the only protection against this problem. We can and should pray for this, not only for ourselves but also for those who hardly believe that God gives anything spiritual and supernatural to people's souls in a way that the effect depends on the efficiency of grace and not on their own wills.

Along with this pride, we can include the vanity and curiosity that exist in people's minds. The Apostle Paul identifies these under the outward sign and effect of "itching ears" (2 Timothy 4:3), which indicates an inclination and craving for new, vain, and curious things. Under the power of these affections, people "cannot endure sound doctrine" and will not remain in the simplicity of the gospel. They don't know how to be wise with moderation and keep their speculations about spiritual things within the limits of modesty. Instead, they constantly intrude into things they haven't seen, being vainly puffed up by their own fleshly minds (Colossians 2:18). This curiosity has produced many needless, vain opinions, subtle, complex, philosophical debates and distinctions, which some have filled religion with. The unrestrained vanity of mind also leads to the levity and inconstancy seen in many people, making them "tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine" that blows upon them, from the "cunning tricks of men who lie in wait to deceive." To all of these, we

can add carnal pride and ambition (when the external affairs of the church or the profession of religion are associated with such worldly benefits of wealth, honour, and authority, as to provoke envy and rivalry among people with earthly mindsets). These factors have not only caused many scandalous actions in religion, but have also been the origin and cause of numerous heresies.

IV. Careless security and baseless confidence can lead people into apostasies from the gospel when unexpected trials befall them. To provide evidence for this, we may consider the following points: The Holy Spirit has sufficiently warned us that defections and backslidings from the truth would occur among its followers. This has been clearly demonstrated in the specific instances of such warnings and predictions previously mentioned. In the word, there is a strong application of all these warnings to us and our responsibilities. Hence, there are numerous exhortations and instructions to "watch," "stand firm in the faith," and "be strong and act like men" in this matter. Only diligent attention to all gospel duties and vigorous practice of all gospel graces will preserve us if we are to believe the Scripture. As for those who despise these things, it does not matter at all what religion they follow.

We are foretold and warned about the significant danger that will confront the followers of the gospel when such a season of apostasy comes upon them. The means of this danger will be so powerful that many will be deceived, and if it were possible, even the elect themselves (Matthew 24:11; Matthew 24:24). Such a season is an "hour of temptation that comes on the whole world, to test those who live on the earth" (Revelation 3:10); and the dreadful outcome for those who fall under its power, in their utter and eternal destruction, is presented to us in many instances.

It is also clearly suggested that such a period of widespread defection from the truth will be a time of great security among the majority of professed Christians. Churches will be asleep, and people will cry, "Peace, peace," when that day comes as a snare.

We are not, therefore, left without sufficient warning in this case, both about the certainty of our trial, the importance of our involvement, and the danger of complacency. Despite all these means of encouraging a vigorous attention to our situation, danger, and duty, it is evident to every discerning eye how dangerously complacent the majority of gospel followers are regarding this issue and its consequences. Nothing can awaken them to consider their own state, even though their neighbours' houses are set ablaze from hell. Love of the world, with prosperity and ease on one hand, or the cares and businesses of it on the other, so occupy the minds of people that they do not feel any involvement in these matters. We may briefly consider the various ways this complacency manifests its effectiveness in predisposing people to apostasy when they encounter its causes:

(1.) It does so by possessing and overpowering them with a proud, careless, and supine negligence. People hear of this issue and the danger of it, but like Gallio, they "care for none of these things." They are unaware of any involvement they have in them or any need to prepare against them. To some others, perhaps, these things may apply, but not to them at all. Those who would impress these matters on their minds and consciences are viewed as individuals pointlessly insistent, or troubled with baseless suspicions and fears. If there is any danger concerning religion, they have no doubt that sooner or later, provision will be made against it by law. However, as for any special duty incumbent on themselves concerning their own souls, they know nothing of it and will not consider it. Had the world not been asleep in this complacency, had people not been

entirely indifferent to their interest in the truth, it would not have been possible for religion to become so utterly corrupted as it was in the Papacy, and yet so few take any notice of it. In certain periods, God raised among them witnesses for the truth, who not only declared and professed it but also sealed their confession with their blood. However, the majority of Christians were so far from being prompted by this to consider their own involvement and duty, that they opposed and persecuted them to destruction as disturbers of public tranquillity. The situation is no different today. Many complain of, and even more fear, a defection from the gospel. It is also evident how much the doctrine of it is already corrupted by some who previously professed it. Instances of as significant apostasies as the name of Christianity can tolerate are multiplying among us, and yet how few are there that pay any attention to these matters or even consider what their duty or danger is during such a time!

(2.) Complacency works and is effective through a wicked indifference concerning all things in religion. People under the power of this complacency do not see, nor want to understand, nor can be made aware of the difference between truth and error, piety and superstition, so as to value one more than the other. "It is all religion, and it is no more than that. If individuals switch from one path to another, so long as they do not completely renounce Jesus Christ, they may be saved in the way they choose." The profession of such individuals adapts to all circumstances, and an apostasy from the mysteries of the gospel will be seen as a useful compromise with opportunity.

We do not judge people or groups of people regarding their eternal state and condition based on their outward religious profession, unless they are openly idolatrous or flagrantly immoral in their lives. Only God knows the relationship between them and their souls. The creation of churches (as the Church of Rome) according to people's thoughts, whims, opinions, or interests, and then confining salvation to them, is a result of pride and folly, as contradictory to the gospel as anything that can be imagined. However, there is a significant difference to be made between apostates and others. "It would be better if people had never known the way of righteousness than to turn away from the holy command after knowing it." Those who have been educated in the truth of the gospel and have professed it are mostly driven by such corrupt principles, influenced by such corrupt desires, and demonstrate such ingratitude against the Lord Jesus Christ in their defection, "denying the Lord that bought them," that they put a unique character and mark upon themselves. Although we will not judge anyone, it is our duty to remind people of the danger that comes with such apostasies. The apostle Paul explicitly tells the Galatians that, upon their acceptance of legal ceremonies and falling from the grace of the gospel in the one point of justification, "Christ should profit them nothing," or they would have no benefit from what they still retained in the profession of the gospel (Galatians 5:2-6). Regarding those carried away by the "strong delusion" of the grand apostasy foretold in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12, he plainly says that "they shall be damned" (verse 12). Peter also affirms that those who introduce "damnable heresies" bring upon themselves and those who follow their destructive ways "swift destruction" (2 Peter 2:1-2). The Scripture provides little support for this effect of cursed complacency.

(3.) It also operates through false confidence. Most people think, like Peter and with no better basis than he had (or even not as good, as they are not aware of as much sincerity as he had), that even if all others abandon the truth and purity of religion, they will not do so. However, they do not understand at all what it means to be preserved during a time of temptation, nor what is required for it. They disdain the idea of falling away and yet they scorn all the means by which they

could be protected from doing so. Tell them that they need the power of God for their preservation, the intercession of Christ, the constant support of the Spirit, an experience of the goodness and efficacy of the truth, and the benefits their own souls have received from it; and that to achieve this, they must watch, pray, and live in constant attendance to all evangelical duties; and they either despise them all due to their pride, or neglect them due to their spiritual laziness that they have succumbed to. People like these, if they encounter anything that challenges their confidence, fall at once under the power of the next temptation they face.

Therefore, as the majority of professed Christians are influenced, in one way or another, by this dreadful complacency, it is no wonder if they are caught off guard and swept away from their profession by deceivers, or if they will be easily carried down the current when they encounter a general inclination towards defection.

V. Love for this present world and its fleeting satisfactions betrays countless souls into frequent apostasies from the gospel. The apostle Paul assures us of this in the example of Demas: 2 Timothy 4:10, "Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world." And as he abandoned the apostle, he also abandoned the work of the ministry, and possibly Christianity altogether. I will not dwell on the love of the world that operates through greed in the course of people's lives, although this too is a means of predisposing them to apostasy; for our Saviour asserts that the "seed that falls among thorns is choked," – the word that is received by people whose hearts are filled with the cares of this present world never comes to the perfection of fruit-bearing. I will only mention two situations in which the predominance of this love in people's hearts leads to a multiplication of apostates from the truth. The first is that of persecution, in which the followers compared by our Saviour to the rocky ground quickly fall away. "Such people," he says, "have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, they are offended," Matthew 13:20-21. The first thing that persecution attacks in people's minds is their worldly interests; their wealth, houses, land, and possessions are put at risk by it. These individuals might be willing to follow Christ for a while, like the young man in the gospel; but when they hear that everything they have will be at risk and perhaps must be given up, they leave with sorrow. They might be sad for a while to abandon the word or doctrine they previously received with joy, as in Matthew 13:20, but the love of the world overcomes all other considerations, and they depart. Such seasons have driven countless people from the truth, and no nation has had greater experience of this than our own during the days of Queen Mary. I pray that we never face another trial like that and hope it is unlikely to happen again! The other situation when love of the world leads people to this fatal error is when and where superstition and error reign supreme. We can observe some foreign nations where the gospel once held significant influence, especially among the nobility who were obedient to the faith. However, the supreme power of those nations remained in the hands of those who adhered to the Roman Catholic faith, and with it the allocation of authority, wealth, and honour, those vain illusions of the world and idols of corrupted minds. It is evident what impact this has had on religious beliefs, as most descendants of those great and truly noble individuals who once professed the Protestant faith have in many places reverted to the old apostasy. Their minds, filled with love for this world and driven by ambition in pursuit of their desires, found the path to worldly honour and wealth closed to those who would steadfastly adhere to the truth. As a result, they have generally sacrificed their convictions, consciences, and souls to this dominant lust. A situation like this is more to be feared

than persecution itself. Many possess a courageous determination not to be forcefully driven from their beliefs and professions, but when these cursed temptations are laid before people, with various pretexts to suppress their consciences and advantages to maintain their reputation, there is no stopping the torrent of their love for this world. The warmth of the sun caused a man to cast away his garment, which the blustering wind only wrapped tighter around him. The rays of power, in the form of honours and favours, have led more people to abandon their religion in neighbouring nations than persecution ever could. Therefore, as long as the world rules people's minds, as long as it is made their idol, and as long as hopes of advancement and fears of loss are the primary emotions steering their lives, the profession of the truth stands on very uncertain and unstable ground. Thus, while we see that the minds of many are under the influence of this lust, the only assurance we can have of their continued profession of the truth is their not being led into either of the temptations mentioned.

I won't focus on other corrupted affections of people's minds. The truth is, there is no one prevalent desire, no single dominant sin, no spiritual or moral disorder indulged in, but it disposes the soul first to undervalue and then to relinquish the truth when opportunities arise.

VI. Satan's hand is in this matter. He was the head of the first apostasy from God. Having himself fallen away from the position and order in the obedient part of creation where he was made, his first task (and he did it effectively) was to draw humanity into the guilt of the same crime and rebellion. Ever since the revelation of the means of recovery for humankind (from which he was justly excluded), he has pursued the same design towards all to whom that way of recovery is proposed. In this way, he quickly led the whole ancient world, for the most part, into idolatry. Since God has been pleased to make known the way of life and salvation through Jesus Christ, Satan's two main objectives and works in the world have been to prevent people from accepting the gospel and to lead them astray once they have accepted it. He managed the first in two ways: firstly, by stirring up violent, bloody persecutions against those who professed it, to deter others from engaging in the same path; and secondly, by blinding people's eyes and filling them with prejudices against the truth, as the Apostle explains in 2 Corinthians 4:4. The specific ways and means by which he carried out this first design, in both its aspects, are not relevant to our current inquiry. Failing in this, his main objective in the world has been and continues to be corrupting people's minds about the truth and drawing them away from it, either partially or completely. So the Apostle hints in 2 Corinthians 11:3, "I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent deceived Eve through his cunning, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." It was the serpent who deceived Eve, but who is it that the Apostle is concerned that the Corinthians might have their minds corrupted by, from the simplicity that is in Christ, meaning by false doctrine, or, as it were, "another gospel," as he says in verse 4? It was the same serpent, both directly and through his agents, as he makes clear in verses 14 and 15. And he compares his attempt to lead followers away from the gospel to his attempt on Eve, by which he began the apostasy from God in the state of nature. The terms of the covenant were proposed to our first parents in the prohibition of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the warning attached to it; and he deceived Eve by corrupting the warning with his false interpretation of it, thereby corrupting her mind. The terms of the covenant of grace are proposed to us mainly in the promises of the gospel, which are at the heart of the entire doctrine. These, then, he strives by all means to distort, in opposition to the wisdom and grace of God in them. In this way, he hopes to lead people away

from the simplicity that is in Christ, or the plain declaration of God's will in the gospel, to false and foolish imaginings of his own suggestion. And what a role he was to play in the great apostasy the Apostle foretells in 2 Thessalonians 2:9-11. There was to be the working of Satan in it, and powerful or effective delusions leading to belief in lies, all of which come from him, who is the father of lies. So people departed from the faith by "paying attention to deceitful spirits," 1 Timothy 4:1, — that is, to the devil and his agents. It would be too long a digression to delve into a particular inquiry of how, by what ways and means, Satan prevails with people to turn them away from the truth and towards fables. How he blinds their minds, how he inflames their desires, how he presents opportunities, how he suggests temptations with false and corrupt reasonings; what disguises and excuses he puts on his designs when he transforms himself into an angel of light; with what power, signs, and lying wonders he gives credibility to his delusions; how he works on the minds of seducers, how on the minds of those who are to be seduced; how he stirs up persecution against the truth and its profession — all of this would require a discourse longer than the entirety of what this is intended to be. It may suffice to know that he is neither weary nor lacking in any of the numerous opportunities that are afforded to him. He is at work in all places today; in some, wreaking havoc on the churches; in others, through various tricks and schemes, filling people's minds with prejudices against the truth and leading them away from it.

Lastly, God does not observe all these things as an unconcerned spectator. Indeed, he is "not tempted with evil"; he tempts no one, he seduces no one; but he governs them all and overrules all events for his own glory. He will not allow people to first undervalue and despise, and then reject and abandon, the greatest of his mercies, such as his word and truth, without responding with some acts of his severity. Therefore, when people, due to the corrupt principles mentioned, seduced by the desires of their own hearts, and entangled by the deceit of Satan, abandon the truth, God, in his holy, righteous judgment, gives them up to further delusions, so that they shall complete their apostasy and grow stubborn in it until their destruction. When a people, a nation, a church, or private individuals have received the gospel and the profession of it, not living accordingly, God may abandon them and withdraw from them the means of their edification and preservation. The rule of his continued presence with any people or church, concerning the external dispensation of his providence and the means of grace, is that expressed in 2 Chronicles 15:2, "The LORD is with you while you are with him; and if you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will forsake you." He judicially forsakes those who wilfully forsake him.

God may be forsaken by people in one way, and he may righteously forsake them in another. For example; under the profession of the truth, people may give themselves up to all ungodliness and unrighteousness, to a shameful course of life in all abominations, thus holding the truth captive in unrighteousness. In this case, God often, as a form of punishment, gives people up to apostasy from the truth they have professed, to show that he will not always have it exploited for the desires of people. So the apostle speaks expressly in 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12. Although they received the truth in the profession of it, they did not love it; they did not yield obedience to it but took pleasure in sin: therefore, God arranged things so that they would also reject the truth itself and believe lies, leading to their own destruction. At present, there lies the danger of a total and disastrous apostasy. Numerous people, the majority of all sorts, the body of the people, still agree with and profess the truth; but, alas! what are the lives and behaviours of many under that profession? How do all kinds of sins abound among us! The profession of the truth by quite a few

is the greatest dishonour and discredit that can be cast upon it. The best service many can do it is by forsaking it and declaring that belief in it is inconsistent with their wretched wicked lives. And may we not justly fear that such people may soon be given up, by one means or another, to "strong delusion, to believe a lie," leading to their just damnation? And on the other hand, God sometimes gives people up to sins and wickedness in practice, because of the rejection of the truth they have received. So he dealt with those who did not appreciate those notions of truth they had concerning him, his being and his providence, from the light of nature, Romans 1:28. And so he usually deals with all apostates. If they choose to forsake the truth, they shall forsake righteousness and holiness, which are the proper fruits of it, and be given up to all abominable lusts and practices.

We may therefore inquire into the ways and means by which God punishes and avenges the beginnings of wilful apostasy from the gospel, so that people complete them and become stubborn in them, leading to their eternal destruction. God does this through the following means:

First, by removing his candlestick from among them. The Lord Jesus threatens his backsliding church with this in Revelation 2:5. God will, one way or another, deprive them of the light and means of knowledge of the truth, so that ignorance and darkness cover them and irresistibly increase upon them. Some of the instruments of light may be taken away by death, and some may be subject to prejudices; the gifts of the Spirit may be restrained or withheld from others, so they experience darkness in their vision, and "the sword of the LORD shall be upon their right eye, that it shall be completely dried up." In this situation, the minds of apostates, already inclined to backslide, are increasingly filled with prejudices against the truth due to their ignorance and darkness and become more alienated from it. As they lose the knowledge and faith of any part of the truth, their minds are possessed by what is opposite to it.

Secondly, in this condition, God "sends them strong delusion, so they may believe a lie," as mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2:11. God is, as it were, now resolved on the end of these individuals – what they have righteously deserved; and therefore, he makes use of any means, as it is merely penal, to bring them to that point. As by the former act of his displeasure, he took the knowledge of his truth from them, so by this he gives them up irrecoverably to adhere to lies. They will not only profess it but believe it, which is the cruellest slavery the mind of a person is capable of. Now, God's sending "strong delusion, so they may believe a lie," consists of the following aspects:

Handing them over to the power of Satan. He is the grand deceiver, the one who misleads the souls of people, the original source of lies, whose main goal is to gain the faith and agreement of individuals. Satan is always ready to carry out this work, but God chooses to limit, control, and restrain him concerning those who are still under his special care. However, when it comes to these apostates, God removes all barriers around them and, through his effective permission, allows Satan to act to the fullest extent in deceiving them. This was the situation during the papal apostasy, when Satan had deceived people, seemingly to the satisfaction of his extreme malice. To demonstrate his absolute success, he seemed to make a mockery of the deluded souls of individuals. There was nothing so foolish and absurd that he didn't impose on their gullibility. Numerous volumes cannot contain the tales of ridiculous follies that he imposed on the minds of the unfortunate deceived individuals, appearing to amuse himself in the misery of blinded

humanity. May God prevent him from ever receiving permission to act in the same way among us, as our sins seem to demand it, and people live as if they longed to be given up to the power of the devil again! By allowing deceivers and false teachers to come among a community with such advantageous outward circumstances that promote their success. These deceivers prepare themselves for their work through their inclinations and Satan's suggestions, but God, in executing his just displeasure, will, through his providence, provide them with the means to prevail over the minds of people. The chief deceivers in the world today, namely, the Pope and those acting with or under him, have occupied positions and gained such reputation among people that often leads to their uncontrollable success in their work. If people were on an equal footing with those professing the truth, and someone were to come to them persuading them to accept the errors, superstitions, and idolatry of the Papacy, they would undoubtedly reject their proposal. However, these individuals have managed to acquire the title of "The Temple of God" and present themselves to the public as God's representatives, enabling them to draw and deceive many. The superstition or profession of the masses is maintained solely due to the power over their consciences that names, titles, and the positions they appear to hold in the church give them. Therefore, God gives up people to delusions when, in his providence, he provides such advantages to those who are to deceive them. Those who occupy places of outward respect can lead a backsliding crowd wherever they please.

Lastly, God judicially strikes such individuals with mental blindness and hardness of heart, so they cannot see, perceive, or understand, even when the means of light and truth are presented to them. This effect of God's severity is declared in Isaiah 6:9-10, and its application is made to the Jews under the ministry of Jesus himself in John 12:39-41 and that of the apostles in Acts 28:25-27, and is explained in Romans 11:7-8. When things reach this point; when God withdraws the means of grace from people, either wholly or partially, or in terms of their effectiveness; when he allows Satan to deceive them with strong delusions; and, moreover, when he himself strikes them with hardness of heart and blindness of mind, then the state of such apostates becomes miserable and irrecoverable. We should not, therefore, find it strange that the light of the gospel does not spread more widely in the world, or that such a significant halt is put to its progress. God has put an end to his gracious dealings with some types of apostates, and they are reserved for another dispensation of his providence.

These are some of the general principles of the defection that exists in the world from the mystery and truth of the gospel, along with the reasons and causes for them; to which more, I have no doubt, of a similar nature can be added. But there is also a particular consideration to be given to those specific truths that some turn away from, and the ideas they fall into. The special grounds and reasons for these, in addition to those we have considered, which equally relate to every kind of defection from the gospel, also need to be examined. This will be done in one instance among ourselves.

* * *

08. CHAPTER 7.

CHAPTER 7.

INSTANCE OF A PECULIAR DEFECTION FROM THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL; WITH THE REASONS OF IT. In addition to the reasons discussed, which have a general influence on all apostasies from the doctrine or mystery of the gospel, each specific defection has reasons and causes particularly suited to its origin and development. There are, indeed, quite a few people who abandon the truth they have professed merely due to the impact of external circumstances, following the encouraging examples of others who have gone down the same path and from whom they expect some advantage. In every age, we see that when either worldly interests or weariness of the truth, driven by the love of the present world and hatred of holiness or strict adherence to the gospel, cause people to lean towards a decline from any gospel doctrines, the allure of those with status and external benefits is enough to attract compliance from individuals driven by ambition or a strong desire for material things. As a result, many people follow suit and try to get as close as possible to the leaders in the apostasy.

It is not uncommon for these people, when encountering new temptations, to go even further than they initially intended, surpassing both their leaders and their own expectations. This is why so many people nowadays end up deviating from the truth, led by those false guides or misleading influences, and find themselves unintentionally trapped in the swamps of Popery on one hand, or Socinianism on the other. However, I will not delve further into this matter at the moment. Indeed, those whose minds are visibly biased towards earthly and carnal matters in the profession of spiritual and heavenly things are not worthy of further consideration.

There is another group of people from whom we can take an example of the specific reasons for a particular defection from the gospel. It is evident that some among us have turned away from the entire mystery of the gospel, with respect to the person and grace of Christ, the satisfaction for sin made by his death, the atonement by the blood of his sacrifice, justification by his righteousness, and sanctification by his Spirit. If anyone feels they are being unfairly accused in this regard, please know that only those who are truly guilty are being referred to here. Whoever acknowledges the mentioned aspects, even if they use their own unique words for expressing them – words that are neither scriptural nor appropriate, nor what believers in past ages have been accustomed to – as long as the concepts themselves are believed and accepted, we currently hold nothing against them. However, unless we deliberately close our eyes and ears to maintain a baseless, unproductive, and irrational charity, we cannot ignore the evidence that many have completely rejected these things. Moreover, they do this to their own detriment and to the dishonour of the truth in the worst possible way; for they claim to have tried Christ and the gospel in these matters, only to find there is nothing in them that warrants their continued faith or confidence.

I hope none of them have gone so far as to place themselves under the dreadful condemnation mentioned in the apostolic passage; but it cannot be denied that their situation is dangerous. To

prevent ourselves and others from falling into a similar state, we would do well to consider the true, immediate causes and reasons for such individuals' apostasy from the mystery of the gospel, in addition to the general reasons for all apostasies of this kind mentioned earlier. Indeed, apart from those general reasons and causes that have an impact on all apostasies and must always be taken into account, there are also specific reasons for each particular instance of backsliding.

First, ignorance of the necessity of Jesus Christ and the benefits of his mediation for life and salvation has led them first into indifference about these matters, and then into a defection from them. They lack a true and deep conviction of their personal need for these things. Such apostates come from superficial, theoretical believers who never had any solid convictions of the need for Christ, like those mentioned in Acts 2:37 or Acts 16:30. Although they lived for a long time in the outward profession that such a conviction of the value and purpose of Christ and his grace was necessary for those who wanted to be saved, they don't dare to admit that they ever had such a conviction themselves. If they had, why do they now abandon him for those purposes for which they were convinced he was so desirable? That faith alone will never forsake Christ, which springs from or is built on a conviction of the need for him. Those who are well and healthy will not always value the physician. To have this conviction of the need for Christ, two things are required in everyone, according to the level of light they have received: The knowledge of the nature, guilt, filth, and consequences of sin: for Christ came to save us from our sins, and no one will seek him for deliverance from something they don't understand, or look to the brazen serpent without being stung. Few have any knowledge of this except what they cannot avoid, and even fewer are genuinely aware of these things. Satan's primary goal in the world today is to downplay sin in people's opinions and thereby encourage it in practice. Indeed, this has always been the case, but it is particularly evident and blatant at present, although the conspiracy is so strong that a public resistance to it is barely sustainable. Satan's aim is, and always has been, to undermine the necessity and usefulness of Christ and his grace, against which his malice is primarily directed. Once he can remove the relief, he will be more than ready to intensify the problem. This is why opinions that diminish the guilt and power of original sin and the corruption of our nature are so eagerly promoted and embraced by people of all kinds. Whatever some individuals may intend, Satan's goal in all of this is to prevent people from realizing their need for Christ. Likewise, sins in practice are trivialized; spiritual sins against the gospel are dismissed or even laughed at, and immoral acts against the law are treated lightly and easily overlooked. The purpose of these and similar corrupt opinions is to remove the present sense of needing Christ and pave the way for future apostasy. As a result, the world is witnessing an unprecedented lack of regard for Christ's person and offices, his grace, and the benefits of his mediation among those who call themselves Christians. Unless God graciously intervenes, the world is likely to lose Christ from the gospel, in terms of the true glory of his person and the purpose of his mediation. This has been the case for the majority of those we are discussing. They never had a thorough practical conviction of the need for Christ; if they had, they would not have abandoned him so shamefully. The general notions they held serve only to label them as defectors. I know that many people despise these matters and view the need for Christ and receiving him or having a relationship with him as contemptible things. However, that doesn't matter. We must not abandon the gospel, our own experience, and jeopardize our souls just to avoid their mockery. Sin will still be sin, and Christ will still be Christ, and salvation through him will remain unchanged, no matter what they do.

Additionally, a knowledge and awareness of the weakness of even our best efforts and their complete insufficiency to withstand scrutiny in the sight of God is required. Without the former, we cannot have, and without the latter, we can never maintain, a sense of the need for Christ. A proper consideration of the instability of our minds, the often weak actions of grace, the weariness of the flesh that accompanies them, hidden influences from self, and inner oppositions from sin that follow them, along with the greatness and holiness of God with whom we are involved in these matters, is absolutely essential to keep Christ and his grace always desirable to us. A lack of this understanding leads some to dream of perfection in themselves and others to seek justification through their own obedience; the first leading to contempt, the latter to neglect, of Christ and his grace. This is the beginning of transgression for many apostates. They never had an adequate sense of the need for Christ, either for deliverance from the guilt of sin or for acquiring a righteousness that would allow them to appear in the presence of God. This is what they should investigate if they want to attempt their recovery. Arguing with them about their own imaginations is, for the most part, endless and fruitless. Instead, let it be asked whether they ever had any conviction of the need for Christ for the forgiveness of sin or for obtaining life and salvation. If they admit they did, it can be asked why they do not make use of him for the purposes for which they were convinced of the need for him; and if they do so, we have no dispute with them in this matter. If they confess that they never had any such conviction, we must insist that such a conviction of the need for Christ is essential for the salvation of all who are adults; and in this, we have the testimony, in essence, of the entire Scripture, both the law and the gospel, to support the truth we argue for. A lack of this understanding was one of the reasons for this defection. For those who have recognized the necessity of Christ or an interest in him for the aforementioned reasons and later declare that there is nothing good or true in what they have found and discovered that would warrant them continuing to do so, they are essentially saying they have considered this matter, known it, and rejected it, which is the essence of apostasy. They attract all those disciples who follow them by hiding from them or drawing them away from any sense of a need for Christ or his mediation. The foundation of our profession, in opposition to this, upon which we place the weight of all our eternal concerns, is that without Christ, before we accept him as set forth by God to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, we are in a lost, ruined, and cursed condition. Our commitment to him, our belief in him, is based on a conviction of our need for him for life, righteousness, and acceptance with God, both before and after believing. It is futile for even Satan to attempt to shake the faith of God's chosen in this matter. A combination of clear revelation and evident experience is invincible. However, anyone who has never known or been deeply aware of the need for an interest in Christ will not persevere in the pursuit of it, nor remain in what they have attained when faced with a strong temptation.

Secondly, a lack of a spiritual understanding of the excellence of Christ, both in his person and roles, is another source and cause of this decline from the faith of the gospel. This understanding of him in symbols, shadows, and promises was the lifeblood of the faith of the saints under the Old Testament. In this way, "Abraham saw his day and rejoiced," John 8:56. So in Song of Solomon 2:8; Song of Solomon 2:17. And it is mentioned as their greatest privilege in Isaiah 33:17. They diligently investigated these things, as in 1 Peter 1:11, and longed for them, desiring, if possible, to see them, as in Matthew 13:17; for the glory and life of all religion, of all interaction with God, lay in them since the giving of the first promise. Christ was "all and in all" to them, just as much as to us. Remove the reference to him and his roles from the old administrations, and they become things

of no value or significance. It was better for those who were diligently searching for Christ under obscure symbols and shadows than it will be for those among us who close their eyes to the brilliant light of the gospel. The reason why he was rejected by the Jews at his coming (for "he came to his own, and his own did not receive him," John 1:11) was because they could "see neither form, nor attractiveness, nor beauty in him, why he should be desired," Isaiah 53:2. No one can or will remain steadfast in his teachings who is not able to spiritually discern the glory of his person and roles. Hence, the apostles lay it down as the foundation of their faith that "they beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth," John 1:14; and what they had within themselves, they sought to share with others, so that they too might believe through their word and have fellowship with him, 1 John 1:3. So, Christ himself makes this the foundation of his church, the rock upon which he will build it; for on Peter's confession that he was "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (which expresses the glory of both his person as the Son of the living God and his roles as the Christ), he says, "On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it," Matthew 16:16-18. Whoever does not build on this foundation builds on sand and will be overcome. So, our apostle declares that those who do not hold him as the Head will be deceived, and vainly puffed up by their fleshly minds, falling into foolish errors and pointless curiosities, Colossians 2:18-19. And he rests the entire foundation of all gospel faith on this glory of his person and roles, as in Hebrews 1:2-3 and Colossians 1:15-19. It is only this knowledge of him that will make us undervalue and disdain all other things in comparison to him, Php 3:8-10.

Therefore, a spiritual understanding of Christ, familiarity with him as "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the exact representation of his being," as the one in whom all the perfections of the divine nature, such as wisdom, goodness, and grace, come together for their manifestation, even in the union of his natures, the glory of his roles, and the suitability of his person and grace to all the needs and desires of people's souls, is essential for our protection against apostasy. I could easily demonstrate through specific examples that a failure in this regard has had a significant and influential role in all the apostasies that have occurred in the Christian world, both in terms of faith and worship. It is a new but extremely wicked attempt by Satan, using some people to fight against our entire religion; while accepting his person to be what it is (which they dare not deny for secular reasons), they strive to make him of little or no use in our profession. This is to "fight neither against small nor great, but against the King of Israel." If such underhanded attempts are not stopped, the public profession of religion among us will result in atheism, or something closely related to it.

It seems that this is the case with some of the people we are discussing. They had, like other theoretical believers, a historical knowledge of Christ and made a profession of it, but they were never spiritually acquainted with the glorious excellencies of his person and roles; for if they had, they would not have abandoned the "great mystery of godliness, God manifested in the flesh," for other strange notions of their own. Who can believe it possible that anyone who has known the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, the Son of God incarnate, receiving our nature into a unique union with himself and a blessed existence in his own person, as proposed to us in the gospel, as clearly crucified before our eyes, as the apostle and high priest of our profession, as our advocate with the Father, as making peace for us and reconciliation through the blood of his cross, as made by God unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; — who has ever

experienced or benefited from his love, care, tenderness, compassion, readiness, and ability to help those who come to God through him during their temptations and trials, — can renounce all these things to adopt in their place vain notions of a light and perfection of their own? I hope few do so in practice, but the expressions of many have a dangerous inclination in that direction; and it is certain that nothing is more essential for all who are called Christians than to have clear, distinct ideas of the person of Christ and openly declare how they place their entire faith, hope, and trust in him. And for those who genuinely do so, even if they are unable to express themselves properly or are wrongly captivated by some novel ideas and expressions, may the good Lord pardon them, and let mercy and peace be upon them and the whole Israel of God! Therefore, since some who have professed these things now abandon them, I pray that they be careful not to "crucify the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." A verbal acknowledgment, in admitting the Christ who suffered in Jerusalem, will not free anyone from this charge and guilt. Unless the Lord Christ, that Christ who is both God and man in one person, is acknowledged, accepted, believed in, loved, trusted, and obeyed in all things as he is presented to us in the Scripture, and with respect to all the purposes of righteousness, holiness, life, and salvation for which he is so presented, he is renounced and forsaken. Who can adequately express the cunning tricks of Satan? Who can truly lament enough the foolishness of people's hearts, that after they have, at least in terms of doctrine, known and professed these things, they could be diverted from the glory, truth, and holiness of them? Christians should be aware and cautious, because if they notice any decline in faith, love, joy, and trust in the person and mediation of Christ, they are on a path that leads to some sort of devastating apostasy. But when the divine nature of Christ is denied, or any familiarity with him is disregarded; when the sharing of grace from him to believers is mocked; when there is no allowance for using his love, care, compassion, and power through faith, as our high priest and advocate with the Father, in our duties, sins, temptations, and sufferings — we don't need to point out the danger of falling into apostasy; such people are already deep within it. I say this with more urgency because, of all the evils I have seen in the course of my journey (now nearing its end), there has been nothing more troubling than the public contempt I have witnessed being cast on the person of Christ, in terms of its relevance to our faith and the benefits we receive from him. But God takes care of these things.

Thirdly, the lack of experience of the power and effectiveness of the Spirit and grace of Christ, of his life and death, for the mortification of sin, has been another source of this apostasy. I have extensively discussed elsewhere how it is achieved by these means and can be accomplished in no other way, and I must not revisit the same argument here. However, two things can be observed about this work and duty:

It is something in which or to which the greatest wisdom and exercise of faith are necessary. It is purely an evangelical matter to derive strength and ability from Christ for the mortification of sin, by virtue of his death, through believing. Unenlightened reason can neither see nor understand anything about this matter; indeed, it is foolishness to it, as are all other mysteries of the gospel. It will more readily embrace any other way for the same end.

It is a task and duty that meets with great resistance from the flesh, from our corrupted nature. There is nothing it would rather be freed from, whether we consider the inner nature of it or the constant persistence in it that is required of us. Yet, it is such that without it, we can never achieve life and salvation; for "if we, by the Spirit, mortify the deeds of the flesh, we shall live," and not

otherwise. Therefore, when people begin to be aware of the powerful inner workings of sin, they will choose one of these two paths, and they cannot do otherwise: either they will surrender themselves as "servants to sin," and make "provision for the flesh to fulfil its desires," according to their ability and as far as it is consistent with their worldly interests, as most do; or they will resort to some means or other for its restraint and mortification, either partially or entirely. At this point, many things will present themselves to such individuals, some, perhaps, of their own invention, and some appointed by God, but for other purposes than what they apply them to. As a result, many people lose heart in this task and eventually abandon it completely. They start with the Spirit and end with the flesh; for, not striving lawfully nor in the right way, sin gains ground and strength against them, and they yield themselves to its service. This is why we have so many who, having battled their lusts under their convictions in their youth, give in to them in their old age. However, in this situation, those who, through their lack of faith, cannot rise or attain an experience of the power and effectiveness of Christ's grace for the mortification of sin will turn to something else for relief; and this is primarily what has given rise to the inner light among some, which must do all this work for them, and even more. If anyone chooses to rely on this inner light, they will find that remedy against sin and that perfection of holiness in a few days, which they had been seeking from Christ for a long time without success. At least, that is what those who, perhaps, have never experienced what it means to draw spiritual strength from Christ or to wait on him for it would have us believe; they have only been worn out by the fruitlessness of their convictions and the burden of lifeless duties. Indeed, nothing is more troubling than the outward form of spiritual duties where there is no experience of inner power and sweetness. Consequently, people's corrupt minds will be ready to abandon them for anything that claims to offer better relief.

What was the reason that so many in the Papacy turned to penances, severe disciplines, and self-inflicted suffering for relief of their consciences with respect to the mortification of sin? It all stemmed from this root: ignorance of the power and efficacy of the Spirit and grace of Christ for that purpose. Something had to be done for this purpose, and not knowing the right way and the gospel method for it, they resorted to whatever they could invent or what was imposed on them by the superstition of others, claiming to provide relief. Some among us seemed for a while to display an outward seriousness and apparent austerity of life; but they had no real inclination towards these practices, as they did not align with other interests they sought to pursue. However, the inner light shall do all of this for them; as a result, at least in comparison and for this purpose, they reject the Lord Christ and do everything they can to "put him to an open shame." For what do they do less than declare that what could not be achieved by the faith they professed in him for so long is now done for them in a few days by another means? But the cause of the whole issue lies solely in their own ignorance and lack of experience of the things they themselves professed.

Fourthly, ignorance of the righteousness of God has been another source of this apostasy. The Apostle Paul explicitly states that this is the reason why people try to establish their own righteousness: Romans 10:3, "Being ignorant of God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own righteousness, they have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God." And he speaks of the Jews, and that the best of them, who "pursued the law of righteousness, but sought it as if it were by the works of the law," Romans 9:31-32. Of all people, they thought themselves most knowledgeable of the "righteousness of God"; for they "boasted of God, and knew" (as they thought and professed) "his will, and approved the things that are more excellent,

being instructed out of the law, and were confident that they themselves were guides of the blind, and the light of those who are in darkness, instructors of the foolish, and teachers of infants, having the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law," Romans 2:17-20. Yet these individuals did not submit to the righteousness of God but instead tried to establish their own righteousness because they were ignorant of the righteousness of God. And wherever this ignorance exists, people will do the same.

Take the "righteousness of God" in any sense in which it is mentioned in the Scripture, and this outcome will follow upon ignorance of it; for it must be either the righteousness that is in him, the righteousness he requires of us in the law, or the righteousness he has provided for us in the gospel. Consider it in any of these ways, and ignorance of it encourages people to rely on their own righteousness, even unavoidably leading them to do so; for: A proper understanding of the infinite purity, the glorious essential holiness of God's nature, his absolute eternal righteousness as the Lord and judge of all, will teach people what views they should have of anything done in them or by them. "Our God is a consuming fire," Hebrews 12:29; "a God of purer eyes than to behold evil," Habakkuk 1:13; "who will by no means clear the guilty," Exodus 34:7; "whose judgment it is, that those who commit sin are worthy of death," Romans 1:32; "a holy God, a jealous God, who will not forgive transgressions and sins," Joshua 24:19. While the dread and terror of the excellence of his holiness and righteousness is before people, they will not easily rely on their own righteousness. There are two types of people that the Scripture describes as having an apprehension of God's righteousness. The first are convinced, guilty sinners; and the other, humble, holy believers. And what thoughts each type has on this matter is revealed in Scripture. For the first group, we have examples in Adam (Genesis 3:10) and others (Isaiah 33:14, Micah 6:6-7). The sum is, they can only think of fleeing from him, hiding themselves, inventing impossible ways of atonement, or being swallowed up in horror and despair. Send them in this condition to their own righteousness, and they will easily understand that you are just mocking their misery. As for the other group, humble, holy believers, we can also see how they express themselves in this matter (Job 4:17-19; Job 9:2; Psalms 130:3; Psalms 143:2). They all acknowledge that, given the glorious holiness and righteousness of God, and the imperfection of our righteousness and impurity of our works, there is no standing before him on their account. It is the lack of proper reflection on this matter that has produced many presumptuous opinions in the world concerning the justification of sinners. The Scripture, speaking of justification, directs us to consider it "in God's sight" (Psalms 143:2) or "before him" (Romans 3:20), teaching us that in this matter we should see ourselves as in the presence and under the eye of this holy God, and then consider on what ground we may stand before him. But when people are "ignorant of the righteousness of God," when they secretly think that he is "altogether such an one as themselves" (as the psalmist speaks), meaning one who is either not as holy in himself as is claimed, or one who does not require a likeness in us to his holiness and is not greatly concerned with our duties or our sins, is it any wonder if people think they can of themselves do something satisfactory to him, and so "go about to establish their own righteousness?" And this way, even in teaching, some have resorted to. They try to convince their followers that there is no such severity in God against sin as some claim, no such holiness in his nature as necessarily to result in indignation against every sin; that they are but vain fears and needless disquietments which either their own consciences or the preaching of some people impose on them. And if they can succeed in being believed in this regard, there is no doubt that those whom they persuade will be pleased with their own

righteousness. But whether God, in this matter of justification, will be pleased with it or not is not so easy to determine. And hence it is that all opinions of self-righteousness, or justification by works, have always resulted in licentiousness of life, although those who advocate for it loudly claim the opposite. For example, when a righteousness of works was absolutely established in the Papacy, before the Reformation, the lives of the majority of people were shockingly wicked, and most of the good works that were performed among them were just exchanges with God and conscience for horrible vices and impieties. Similarly, as the same opinion has grown in its various degrees among us, so has the spread of all sorts of impiety and licentiousness of life. And if the proponents of these opinions would just open their eyes, they would see that while they assert their justification by works under the pretense of a necessity to do so for the maintenance of holiness and righteousness among people, unholiness, unrighteousness, intemperance of life, and all abominations are growing, such as were not heard of in former days among those who professed religion. And the reason for this is because the very same notions of God that allow people to suppose that they can be justified in His sight by their own duties also accommodate their desires with various perceptions that He will not be so harsh against their sins as is assumed. In any case, it is evident in the matter of fact that the opinion of self-righteousness and looseness of conversation in the practice of sin have generally gone together, from the days of the Pharisees to this present time. And as this proud belief gains daily advancement in several degrees, under various pretenses, it is to be feared the world will be increasingly filled with the bitter fruits thereof. It is grace, and the doctrine of it, as well as its power, that must put a stop to sin. Whoever drives people into self-righteousness at one door opens another to their sins. And all we have gained so far by fierce debates about justification, as it were by works, is only that the faith of some has been weakened, the peace of many disturbed, differences increased, without the slightest evidence of holiness improved or the vices of people reformed by them. And it will not be granted that the strictest followers in these days (whether they have adopted these opinions or not) do, in real holiness and fruitfulness of life, surpass those of the previous age, who firmly, and without hesitation, trusted in the Lord Christ alone for life, righteousness, and salvation.

Suppose the righteousness God requires of us in the law is intended; the ignorance of it is also a significant reason why people rely on their own righteousness and try to establish it. If they were indeed familiar with the purity, spirituality, severity, and unyielding nature of the law, they would never be convinced that the perfection they dream of in themselves would withstand its trial. But when people assume that the law only concerns outward duties and those of the greatest notoriety, regarding sin and obedience, and can find relief in various matters through Pharisaical distinctions and interpretations of it; when they don't consider or understand its extent – requiring the complete image of God in us, where we were created, and regulating all the frames, creations, and first motions of the heart, and applying the curse to the smallest deviation from it – they may please or somehow satisfy themselves by establishing their own righteousness, as it were, through the works of the law. But the "righteousness of God" in this context is taken primarily for the righteousness that He has provided for us in the gospel; and the apostle explains what this is in the next verse: "For," he says, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes," Romans 10:4. And he calls this "the righteousness that comes from faith," Romans 9:30. Therefore, the "righteousness of God" is Christ as fulfilling the law and achieving its purpose, received by faith. This is the righteousness of God, which whoever is ignorant of and does not submit to, they will try to establish their own righteousness and trust in it. And this has openly and

visibly happened with those we are discussing. They will not deny that, under their convictions, they were concerned about finding a righteousness with which God would be pleased; – and if they were to deny it, they would not be believed because it is impossible for anyone in that condition not to feel the need for righteousness; for conviction is mainly a sense of the lack of righteousness. In this state, the gospel they had, and perhaps heard preached, presented to them "Christ as the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes," as it is fully explained in Romans 3:21-26 and chapter 5:18,19. Some of them, for a while, claimed to accept and be satisfied with this. But when things were put to the test, it generally became apparent that they had all along been ignorant of this righteousness of God; for they have abandoned it for their own righteousness, which, had they genuinely known it, they could not have done. Anyone who has ever genuinely made Christ the end of the law for righteousness for themselves, by believing, will not show contempt and scorn for His imputed righteousness, as some do. But in doing so, the Son of God is, to some extent, "crucified again and exposed to public disgrace." When people claim that they sought righteousness through Him and would have received Him as the end of the law for righteousness, but not finding what they expected, they have turned to a righteousness entirely within them and thus completely their own, they will hardly devise a way to reflect more dishonour upon Him. Regardless of any pretences to the contrary, whatever labyrinth of words anyone may lead people into and tire them with, whatever reviling and reproaching of others they may surround them with, they cannot help but know in their own consciences that this is the case with them. Despite any profession they ever made, they never did come to, nor ever could achieve, a real knowledge of and familiarity with this righteousness of God, so as to receive it by faith and obtain rest for their souls through it. And as a result, they have at least professedly turned to an effort to establish their own righteousness; which, if it produces and maintains a genuinely holy conversation and righteousness in them for any significant period, they are the first in whom it has ever had that effect in this world and will be the last in whom it will find success.

Fifthly, a lack of submission to the sovereignty of God has contributed to the advancement of this problem. The sovereignty of God, acting through infinite wisdom and grace, is the sole foundation of the covenant of grace and runs through the entire mystery of the gospel. From this arises the incarnation of the Son of God and His being filled with all grace to be a Saviour, John 3:16; Colossians 1:19; John 1:16. No other explanation can be given. From this comes His substitution as the guarantee of the covenant on our behalf, to undergo the punishment due to our sins, Isaiah 53:6; Isaiah 53:10; 2 Corinthians 5:21. Eternal election flows from this and is regulated by it, Romans 9:11; Romans 9:18; as does effective calling, Matthew 11:25-26, and justification by faith, Romans 3:30. The same can be said for all other mysteries of the gospel. Love, grace, and goodness, dispensed in a way of sovereign, unaccountable pleasure, are proposed in them all as objects of our faith. The carnal mind is not pleased with any of this but rises up in opposition to every instance of it. It cannot bear that the will, wisdom, and pleasure of God should be submitted to and adored in paths it cannot trace. Hence, the incarnation and crucifixion of the Son of God are foolishness to it, 1 Corinthians 1:23-25; the decrees of God concerning election and rejection are unjust and unequal, overthrowing all religion, Romans 9:17-21; and justification through the imputation of Christ's righteousness is seen as something that undermines the law and makes our own righteousness unnecessary. So, in the entire mystery, in all the doctrines, precepts, or promises of the gospel that spring from or are resolved into the sovereignty of God, the carnal mind rises up in opposition to them all.

Faith's formal nature lies in giving glory to God by believing things that are above our reason and against it as it is carnal, Romans 4:18-21, setting up enmity in all things. It is always in turmoil against the mysteries of the gospel; and if it becomes the judge of them, taking aid from sensual affections and the vain imaginations of the mind, it will destroy all the articles of faith. It seems that those we are discussing have rejected the sovereignty of God because they were never genuinely submitted to it through faith. Therefore, in opposition to it, they have set up their inner light as the rule, measure, and judge of the truths and doctrines of the gospel. Instead of becoming fools by surrendering their reason and wisdom to the sovereignty of God, so that they might ultimately be truly wise, they have become wise in their own conceit and have become futile in their foolish imaginations. Indeed, there is no broader path to apostasy from the gospel than the rejection of God's sovereignty in all things concerning the revelation of Himself and our obedience, and a refusal to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to faith"; which first gave rise to Pelagianism, and later to Socinianism, as has been demonstrated, from which the entirety of the current apostasy originates.

Sixthly, we may add to this, as another source of this partial apostasy, a lack of evidence within themselves of the divine authority of the Scriptures. It is not enough, to establish someone in the profession of the gospel, to generally acknowledge that the Scripture is the word of God or a divine revelation of His will. Those who do not have personal experience of divine authority in the Scripture affecting their soul and conscience will not be steadfast when their trial comes. God looks favourably upon those who tremble at His word, as acknowledging His present authority in it. When this does not remain within them, "unlearned and unstable men," as the apostle says, will be bold to "distort the Scriptures, to their destruction," or to prefer other things before them, or at least to place them on an equal footing. It is not enough that we assent to the truth of the word of God unless we also feel its power and the claim it makes in the name of God for the absolute subjection of our whole souls and consciences to it. Now, these people either never had this evidence within themselves of this present divine authority, or they have lost it unconsciously or openly rejected God's yoke. As a result, every imagination of their own elevates itself into an equal right and authority with the Scripture. The outcome of these things is that God gives people up to "strong delusion, to believe a lie," because they "did not receive," or did not retain, "the truth in love," 2 Thessalonians 2:10-11. When it comes to this, it is Satan's work (which he easily accomplishes) to both suggest endless delusions to them and make them so stubborn in their delusions that they will despise everything offered for their conviction. This is the FIRST way in which people fall away from the gospel – namely, from the mystery and doctrine of it as the object of our faith; in doing so, they do what they can to "crucify the Son of God afresh and put Him to open shame."

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09. CHAPTER 8.

CHAPTER 8.

APOSTASY FROM THE HOLINESS OF THE GOSPEL; THE OCCASION AND CAUSE OF IT — OF THAT WHICH IS GRADUAL, ON THE PRETENSE OF SOMEWHAT ELSE IN ITS ROOM.

Secondly, there is a departure from the gospel with respect to the holiness of its precepts, which are to be the substance, as they are the rule, of our obedience. This type of apostasy is equally dangerous as the first, and similarly exposes the Son of God to open shame. In fact, a departure from the holiness of the gospel can be more dreadful and risky than a partial departure from its truth. As it is more pervasive and less noticed, it is typically harder to reverse, with most people under it being significantly hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Moreover, its commonness has diminished the sense of its evil and danger. If a false doctrine against the gospel is propagated, it is likely that someone will notice it, refute it, and warn everyone about the associated danger. However, if the majority of the world indulges in sinful behaviours and pleasures, if people's lifestyles and actions are as opposed to the gospel's rules as darkness is to light, as long as they maintain order in their outward religious practices and identify as good Catholics, good Protestants, or similar, anyone who criticises these behaviours risks being labelled as irritable, overly strict, self-righteous, or even hypocritical.

Nevertheless, despite this bias in judgement or practice concerning these issues, it is generally agreed that it is possible for people to please God and be accepted by Him, even if they have many misconceptions or errors about spiritual matters. However, no one argues that someone who lives and dies unrepentantly in any sin, against the gospel's rule of holiness, can attain salvation. To claim that people can live in, and habitually commit any known sin, without resisting it, striving for repentance, and attempting its mortification, is essentially the same as openly trying to overthrow Christianity. For these and various other reasons, this latter kind of apostasy, from the holiness of the gospel, is at least as dangerous, and as much to be resisted and opposed, as the first kind, which is from the mystery and doctrine of the gospel. It's also something that people in general should be more strongly warned about, as they're more prone to this kind of apostasy than to the other. We link these two types of apostasy not only because they both lead to the same result, namely the ruin of people's souls and the dishonour of Christ, but also because we've been forewarned that they will both appear in the world during the "last days." Regardless of how the "last days" mentioned in the Bible are interpreted - whether they refer to the end times of the world and religion in general, or of specific churches that people may belong to - it's clear that they have arrived for us. Therefore, the danger and duty outlined in these pre-warnings are very relevant to us. The apostle Paul speaks of the first type of apostasy in 1 Timothy 4:1, saying, "The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons." I have no doubt that this prophecy was remarkably fulfilled in the Papacy, and I'm convinced that the Holy Spirit was specifically referring to those principles and practices that a learned person from our country has revealed, under the title of "The Apostasy of the Latter

Times." However, we're also finding, through painful and almost daily experience, that this prophecy is relevant to us and the times we're living in. The appearance and onset of the kind of apostasy we're now discussing is similarly predicted in 2 Timothy 3:1-5. The essence of what the apostle there tells us is that in these "last days," people, while outwardly professing the gospel, will surrender themselves to the pursuit of the basest desires and commit the most abhorrent sins. We fear that this prediction is also being fulfilled.

Even though these trends are harmful and dangerous, both in their own nature and in their implications, especially as they occur together and jointly assault the honour of Christ and the salvation of those professing the gospel, the prophecy of them and the early warning about them can be beneficial to those who are sincere and upright, if they take it to heart. Because:

If this dual catastrophic apostasy is pressing upon us, in our era, which can be considered the "end times," we should certainly be on our guard, so that we're not caught off guard or overwhelmed by it. How then should we "live out our time as foreigners here in reverent fear!" This was the advice of someone whose overconfidence almost led to his downfall. It's certainly not a time for anyone who intends, or even just hopes, to be saved from this deadly evil, to be carefree and complacent. Nonetheless, none of us can claim that we weren't warned of our peril, or called upon to exercise the caution and vigilance, the care and diligence, and the earnestness for divine help and assistance, that our situation demands and which will lead to deliverance and safety. And, -

If we're committed to our own duties, we don't need to be overly concerned or "disturbed" when we see these things happening. The current state of religion in the world might terrify some or at least fill them with awe. If things continue this way, they might worry that Christianity could eventually lose all its beauty and glory. However, all these events have been precisely predicted, which diminishes the shock factor when they actually occur. In fact, given that our faith is rooted in the Scripture and based on the infallibility of its prophecies, seeing these predictions come true can strengthen our faith. If we didn't see these prophecies fulfilled, especially when it's clear from other signs that we're living in the "last days," it would be more disturbing. You can see this in Matthew 24:9-13; Matthew 24:25; Acts 20:29-30; 2 Thessalonians 2:3; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Timothy 3:1-5. In fact, it's highly dangerous to believe that churches – this church, that church, or any church – aren't susceptible to these declines, deteriorations, and apostasies, or that anyone within them can be safeguarded from these without utmost care and diligence in using the means intended for their preservation. When the Jews had such misguided confidence regarding their temple and worship, God often reminded them to look at what had happened to Shiloh, assuring them that what happened once could happen again. We know what happened to the first Christian churches and how quickly they declined (as stated in Revelation 2:4-5; Revelation 3:1-3; Revelation 3:14-17). We can learn from them how futile all the claims of external privileges and exemptions are. For indeed, "unless we repent, we will all likewise perish." The topic we will now explore is the nature, causes, and circumstances of that apostasy or departure from the holiness of the gospel, in churches and by individuals, which has been predicted to occur in the "last days" and has indeed transpired as such. We will consider both the general apostasy of this kind that occurred in earlier eras, primarily under the influence of the Roman Catholic Church, and the current widespread apostasy happening through various ways and means. Before we delve into this, there are a few points to bear in mind: The gospel doctrine is a doctrine of holiness. It

teaches, requires, and commands holiness; its mysteries and grace guide us towards it; its commandments call for it, and the supreme example of its author, as presented to us, mandates it. It does not present holiness as something merely suitable or somehow necessary for us, but as something without which we can't have any share in its promises. No unholy person can expect any benefit from the gospel, either now or in the future. When all things come to their ultimate end and are subject to eternal judgement according to the gospel, all other pleas and excuses will completely and permanently fail those who are "workers of iniquity," as Matthew 7:22-23 states. The holiness that the gospel calls for is of a different nature and kind than what any other doctrine or method of instruction demands. The law of nature continues to propose to us many important duties towards God, ourselves, and others; the written law is an exact representation of all those moral duties required of us in the state in which we were created. However, the gospel demands a holiness that, although it encompasses these things within the scope of its law and order, is of a different kind (for various reasons) than what is required by those laws, in the way they require it. Gospel holiness arises from different principles, operates on another formal reason and motives, and has different essential properties, acts, duties, and ends than the obedience required by those laws. This was thoroughly demonstrated in our discussion of the nature and necessity of gospel holiness, so it doesn't need to be revisited here.

Alongside the light and doctrine of the gospel, or its preaching, there's an administration of the Spirit, to convince people of sin, righteousness, and judgment. God has promised this (Isaiah 59:21), and Christ accomplishes this wherever the word is properly dispensed according to His will (John 16:7-11). By this, people are driven to profess this holiness and express it in outward duties. All the religion in the world that holds any truth and reality is an effect of the word and Spirit of Christ. Many people throughout history have been made truly holy by this, and many remain so. We believe that these people will never completely fall away from it, but will be preserved by the power of God through faith for salvation. However, even they can decline in their degree of holiness and its fruitfulness; and in every such decline, there's a partial apostasy and much dishonour to Jesus Christ. In that condition, no one can be certain that it won't ultimately be total and destructive to their soul. This was the case with those churches and people whom Jesus charged with having lost their initial faith and love, and whom He advised to remember how far they've fallen and to repent. Primarily for their sake, so that Christ and the gospel aren't dishonoured by them, nor their eternal interests jeopardised, and those who are making progress towards the same condition through the use of means, the following cautions and warnings are prepared. Others have only arrived at a profession of this holiness through inward convictions and outward duties. Although they have not yet reached a full embrace of its power and conformity to its rule, they're on the path to achieving it. People like this can, for various reasons, first decline in their profession and duties, and later completely fall away from them into the overt service of sin and the world.

***** This is also true for churches. At their inception, they were established in a pure and holy state regarding the doctrine, professed holiness, and worship of the gospel. They were all founded as noble vines, completely of a right seed, even if they later deviate and become "the degenerate plant of a strange vine." They can lose this order and beauty, part ways with truth, decline in holiness, and the faithful city can thereby become corrupt. How this has happened; how Christianity has lost its glory, power, and effectiveness in the world; how the blessing it brought to

nations has been lost and forfeited, and by what means - these will be declared in some key examples. When this holiness is professed, and its power is demonstrated in its fruits, then and only then is Christ glorified and honoured in the world. True, there are other things that contribute to the glory that our Lord and King demands from us - such as the profession of the truth and observance of the gospel worship - but if these things are divorced and separated (as they can be) from holy obedience, they do not in any way enhance the glory of Christ. However, when churches and individuals professing the gospel are transformed and renewed into the image of God; when their hearts are purified internally, and their lives made fruitful externally; when they are universally guided by a spirit of peace, love, meekness, kindness, self-denial, heavenly-mindedness, and are fruitful in good deeds - in which things and others of a similar nature this holiness is embodied - then they make an accurate representation of the gospel and its Author in the world; then they demonstrate the power, purity, and effectiveness of his doctrine and grace, thereby glorifying him. In this, he "sees the labour of his soul and is satisfied"; this is "his portion and his inheritance" in this world. But when the opposite occurs, when people and churches, who are called by his name and profess his authority while expecting mercy and eternal happiness from him, fall short of this holiness and walk in ways contrary to it, there is the holy Son of God being "crucified afresh, and put to an open shame." With these things stated, we can now consider what was previously proposed. Today, there is a clear and shameful departure from the holiness of the gospel among the majority of people who are called Christians. It is worth investigating the reasons behind this apostasy and finding ways to prevent it or at least preserve certain individuals from its guilt and the resulting consequences. If anyone believes that there is no such apostasy in the world, and that the current state of affairs in Europe and among ourselves accurately represents the gospel, and that the things we continually witness among the majority of Christians are the true effects of our religious doctrine and principles, I won't argue with them, as long as they step aside and don't impede our progress.

Now, the apostasy from gospel holiness, or obedient following of the teachings, comes in two forms. Some deviate from it formally, while others deviate in terms of its substance. The first group promotes a different kind of obedience, engaging in a different set of duties, or the same duties with different underlying principles and motives than what the gospel requires. Many people in the world are like this. They claim to be strict in certain duties and multiply others, or at least give the appearance of doing so. However, it is difficult to see how their actions relate to evangelical holiness if its nature depends on evangelical principles and objectives. Others openly and visibly fall into a sinful, worldly, and wicked lifestyle. This is the apostasy that the Christian world currently suffers from, and it is likely to invite God's judgments upon it. The mere profession of piety is greatly diminished, and in fact, mocked by many. Duties of holiness, maintaining a righteous lifestyle, and engaging in edifying communication are not only neglected but ridiculed as well. In many places, it is a fruitless endeavor to seek true Christianity among Christians, and the decline appears to be worsening every day. It is primarily this latter form of apostasy that I am concerned with, as it has universal significance. However, I will not entirely ignore the former either, as it is equally harmful to many individuals, despite its deceptive justifications. Therefore, I will first provide some examples of people's departure from the holy path of gospel obedience into self-devised paths of supposed duties, and then address the reasons behind their dislike of the traditional and virtuous way. The first and most prominent example of this kind is provided by the Roman Catholics. They boast excessively about holiness, associating it with their church and

considering its sanctity as evidence of its truth. However, due to the openly evident wicked and immoral lives led by many of their people, including several of their leaders and guides, they resort to defending their claim by relying solely on their devotees or those who dedicate themselves through vows to more rigorous religious practices than what others achieve or are obligated to follow. Within the Roman Catholic context, these individuals alone have acquired the title and reputation of being "Religious." The specific details of their way of life, their devotional practices, the diverse duties they bind themselves to, and the manner in which they carry them out are widely known, and I shall assume this knowledge and pass over them. Many have already exposed the emptiness, superstition, and hypocrisy inherent in their entire external lifestyle, even though they should not judge the hearts, minds, and overall condition of individuals unless they are revealed through their actions. I will only demonstrate that what they claim to possess at best (despite boasting that it not only fulfills but exceeds God's requirements) is not the holiness or obedience prescribed in the gospel, but rather something substituted in its place and consequently in opposition to it. And

It lacks the clear evidence of spiritual freedom and liberty that accompanies gospel holiness in all its duties. The initial impact of truth on our minds is to "set us free" (John 8:32). It serves as the foundation of all holiness, enlarging the mind and spirit towards it, which is why it is referred to as "the holiness of truth" (Ephesians 4:24). It is said, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Corinthians 3:17). By nature, people are "slaves to sin," willingly surrendering themselves to fulfill its desires and commands, while being "free from righteousness." However, when the Holy Spirit works with the truth, individuals are "set free from sin and become servants of God, resulting in holiness" (Romans 6:20; Romans 6:22). It is also stated that all believers "have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but the Spirit of adoption, by whom they cry out, 'Abba, Father'" (Romans 8:15), and not "the spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:7). These testimonies convey that through God's grace, believers' hearts are enlarged, freed, and made willing to embrace all gospel obedience, walking in it and performing its duties willingly, cheerfully, and freely, without the fear and dread resulting from the power of the law. They are not held in scrupulous bondage to outward duties and their manner of performance but engage in all things with joy and freedom. By the Spirit of adoption, they possess both a reverential fear as children and a gracious inclination towards obedience.

However, in the Roman Catholic practice of devotion and their multitude of external religious duties, which they boast of as their special sanctity, there are clear indications of a servile bondage or slavish disposition. They are compelled to bind themselves and be bound to these duties by specific vows. In observing these vows, they no longer act as their own masters or as those who are "sui juris," but are subject to the coercive discipline of others and face external punishment in case of failure. Those who serve men in religious duties are not God's freemen, nor do they have Christ as their Lord if they serve another. The foundation of all these duties, which obligates them to perform them, are vows that are not required by God or our Lord Jesus Christ in the gospel. The primary consideration in their strict adherence to these vows is obedience to those who oversee them. It is evident how inconsistent this approach is with the spiritual freedom and liberty of mind that invariably accompanies true gospel holiness. Furthermore, the belief in merit, which not only accompanies their practices but also motivates them, renders them servile in all they do. They are aware that everything done in the pursuit of merit must not only be tested for

sincerity but meticulously scrutinized to determine its worth. This completely undermines the liberty in obedience that the gospel demands. Similarly, the tormenting conviction they experience—namely, that they have no grounds for confidence or assurance of being accepted by God in the present or attaining blessed communion with Him in the future—forces them to act out of a "spirit of fear" rather than "power and a sound mind" in all their duties. Their duties and obedience are governed not by the gospel but by a system of self-constructed laws and regulations that they have devised. Some follow the rule of Benedict, others of Francis, Dominic, Ignatius, and so on. This completely removes their endeavors from any connection to gospel holiness. The essential nature of gospel holiness lies in its conformity to the rule of the gospel itself and compliance with God's revealed will. However, they multiply unrequired duties, and their devotion and sanctity largely revolve around practices that they have invented themselves, without any scriptural command or precept. The very foundation of their actions is based on vows that fall into this category. In a similar situation, Jesus reproached the Pharisees for their additional duties that went beyond the commandments of the Word. He showed them how they rendered the commandment of God void through their traditions and how their worship was in vain as they taught doctrines that were merely human commandments (Matthew 15:6; Matthew 15:9). When they took offense at Jesus' rejection of one of their newly imposed duties, he responded by stating that "every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up" (Matthew 15:13), thereby completely rejecting all the religious duties they had devised through their own rules. The devotion of Roman Catholics is no better in this regard. They are plants that have been cultivated by human hands and will be uprooted and thrown into the fire accordingly. No matter how numerous the false invented religious duties may be or how meticulous or severe their performance may appear, they serve no other purpose than to divert people's minds from the obedience that the gospel requires.

Everything prescribed by the leaders of this devotion and practiced by its followers can be done and observed without having faith in Christ or experiencing His love for our souls. The obedience required by the gospel is rooted in faith alone; it will not grow on any other foundation. The primary motivation for this obedience is the love of Christ, which compels us to act. However, is there anything in their instructions that necessitates these things? Can't people rise at midnight to recite numerous prayers, go barefoot, wear sackcloth, abstain from meat during specific times or always, submit to self-imposed or externally imposed disciplines, or endure extreme and, frankly, absurd hardships like standing on a pillar continuously or carrying heavy logs of wood on their shoulders throughout the day, as the Egyptian monks are told or rumored to have done, all without possessing the slightest trace of saving faith or love? False religions throughout history have always had individuals who sought to impress others with these self-inflicted sufferings and mortifications. In fact, the devotions practiced by the Banians far surpass whatever the Roman Catholics claim to engage in. Their entire conduct is tainted and corrupted by the arrogant belief in merit and supererogation, which makes it completely detached from the gospel. It is not my current objective to argue against these beliefs. It has already been extensively demonstrated (and can be done so again if necessary) that they undermine the essence of the covenant of grace, are detrimental to the significance of Christ's blood and mediation, and fundamentally contradict the principles of the gospel. Therefore, as these proud notions fuel their entire practice, it is not within the scope of the gospel.

Additionally, we must consider the blatant superstition, and even idolatry, that permeates most of their devotions. This is not the least of their transgressions in these matters and is sufficient to invalidate all their other actions.

Hence, despite their claims of sanctity and a more stringent commitment to obedient duties than others, it is evident that even the most exemplary among them have deviated from the holiness prescribed by the gospel, replacing it with their own self-conceived obedience.

II. Furthermore, there are others who limit their entire obedience to morality and ridicule anything that is advocated as going beyond it or surpassing it, dismissing it as "enthusiastic foolishness." The truth is, if those individuals who argue for the necessity of both gospel grace and holiness, which goes beyond mere morality, truly understand one another, and if they do not intend slightly different aspects under varied expressions and diverse approaches, then they do not share the same religious beliefs. However, if they simply misunderstand each other's meanings and differ only in the manner of conveying the same truth, then I believe those who follow and adhere to the way in which these matters are taught in Scripture navigate the safest path and avoid causing unnecessary offense, rather than those who tailor their discourse to align with the language of pagan philosophers. Nevertheless, it appears that there is indeed a genuine difference, and the principles upon which individuals proceed in these matters contradict one another. Some plainly assert that the entirety of gospel obedience consists solely in the practice of moral virtue, which they define in a manner that excludes evangelical grace. Others view this as a clear deviation from and avoidance of gospel holiness. It is unquestionably true that the performance of all moral duties in an evangelical manner—that is, with the power of Christ's grace, unto the glory of God through Him—is an essential part of gospel obedience. And those who, under the guise of grace or anything else, neglect the cultivation of moral virtues or the fulfillment of moral duties, are disobedient to the gospel and its teachings. Some individuals fail to realize how they diminish their own credibility when they accuse others of opposing morality or moral virtue, while setting up an imagined form of holiness in its place. The individuals they defame not only have their consciences as immediate witnesses, absolving them from any guilt in this regard, but anyone with a sense of fairness, based on their understanding of their doctrine and observation of their conduct, can testify to their innocence.

"But is it not the case, then, that people condemn morality, considering it untrustworthy and deceiving those who rely on it?" I reply, they do so when it is presented (as done by some) as the entirety of religion, and when it is imposed as a substitute for evangelical grace and holiness by others. They understand moral virtue, as it has always been understood until recently, to refer to natural integrity or a way of life that conforms to the principles of human nature and is considered beneficial and commendable among people. However, it is possible for individuals to do what is morally good without doing anything that is acceptable to God. They may perform such actions not out of love for God above all else, but out of self-interest. Hence, they criticize morality for being inadequate in achieving the purpose of religion or saving souls.

They object to morality when it is limited to what aligns with the light of nature. The light of nature guides individuals in every duty that is properly moral, and what it does not direct towards, what is not universally obligatory to all human beings by the law of our creation, cannot be considered moral. However, confining all of religion, particularly its prescriptive and obedient aspect, to the

light of nature would undermine half of the gospel.

They also object to morality when it is practiced merely as a result of conviction and is performed solely through the innate abilities of our rational faculties, without the specific supernatural assistance of the Spirit and grace of God. Anything that is not brought about within us by the grace of God, alongside our own participation in fulfilling our duties, is not genuine evangelical obedience. Those who reject the sufficiency of morality for acceptance by God and eternal salvation refer specifically to performances accomplished through the external stimulation and direction of our natural faculties, without any supernatural influence or operation of special grace. Indeed, placing confidence in such duties is essentially embracing Pelagianism.

Unless it arises from the spiritual and supernatural renewal of our souls. The rule and approach of the gospel is that the tree must first be made good, and then the fruit will also be good. Unless a person is first regenerated and experiences a renewal of their nature into the image and likeness of God, unless they are endowed with a new principle of spiritual life from above that empowers them to live for God, they cannot do anything, regardless of its nature, that is truly acceptable to God. It is particularly in light of this consideration that some reject morality as insufficient for encompassing gospel obedience. They even view it as a potential distraction from it and as something that can deceive those who rely on it. Their argument is that morality does not proceed from the principle of grace in a renewed soul. Although something may originally have a moral nature, it becomes gracious and evangelical in its performance when it stems from the principle of grace. Therefore, we should not hesitate to exclude the best works of unregenerate individuals from being considered as part of gospel holiness or obedience.

Unless those who possess or claim it are genuinely lacking in the internal illumination of saving grace, which enables them to perceive spiritual matters in a spiritual manner and to comprehend the mysteries of the kingdom of God. The existence of such saving light, which the Holy Spirit works in the minds of believers, has been thoroughly demonstrated elsewhere. This light is necessary for individuals to discern spiritual things, to have a favorable and approving attitude towards them. However, this aspect does not pertain to the morality being discussed. It not only stands independently from it but is actually presented in competition with and opposition to it. There is no need to hesitate in judging and criticizing that morality, regarding its connection to gospel obedience and its sufficiency for the salvation of souls. Such morality may be attainable, practiced, and adhered to where God's light does not shine in people's hearts to provide them with the knowledge of His glory revealed in the face of Jesus Christ. It is where no work of spiritual enlightenment has taken place in their minds, enabling them to discern and comprehend the mind of God, a knowledge that is originally known only by the Spirit of God, who makes it known to us (1 Corinthians 2:11-12). Yet some individuals seem to settle for and rely on this, rejecting evangelical obedience in the process.

Lastly, the same criticism applies to morality wherever it is detached from the fundamental gospel graces that are purely supernatural in their nature, actions, and objects. These graces have no principle, rule, or measure other than the truth supernaturally revealed. This includes our entire regard for the mediation of Christ, as well as the dispensation of the Spirit promised to abide with the church as its comforter, along with all the duties of obedience that are dependent on them. Anyone who is ignorant of the gospel fails to recognize that these things constitute the

fundamental principles of its teachings and commands. The exercise of these graces in the performance of duties directly related to them forms the essential aspects of the life of God or the obedience to Him through Jesus Christ that is indispensably required of all who will be saved. Therefore, as these aspects cannot be regarded merely as moral virtues and are distinct from the morality deemed insufficient for life and salvation, it is evident that they are not subjected to undue severity or harsh criticism. If anyone solely focuses on morality as their entire duty, it falls under the category of a partial departure from the gospel, which we are examining.

III. There are individuals who, in their own estimation, claim to have already achieved perfection in this world. They believe they have attained such a high degree of holiness that the gospel itself serves merely as an introduction to it. However, this proud notion is destructive to the covenant of grace and undermines the significance of Christ's mediation and blood. It contradicts numerous testimonies of Scripture and goes against the experience of all who truly believe. Moreover, the consciences of those who make such claims themselves reproach them for their pretentiousness. However, we need not delve further into examining this false notion. For our present purpose, it suffices to provide these examples of how individuals, while pretending to conscientiously fulfill many duties of obedience, can still deviate and depart from what the gospel requires. We shall briefly explore the occasions and reasons behind this deviation (taking into account the more general considerations we discussed earlier regarding the truth of the gospel, which all of these instances align with and influence their rejection of its holiness). We will not limit ourselves to the given examples but will also consider every departure from gospel holiness that occurs among those who, despite having been convinced of its necessity, refuse to embrace its universal practice. To this end, let us observe:

It is necessary to recognize that the holiness demanded by the gospel cannot be maintained in the hearts and lives of individuals without continual conflict, struggle, and contention. This requires utmost care, diligence, watchfulness, and perseverance. Our journey of obedience is a spiritual warfare, and the Scriptures abound in revealing the adversaries we must contend with, describing their power and subtlety, and providing guidance and encouragement for resistance. To assume that gospel obedience will flourish within us without the ongoing vigorous engagement against its enemies is to deny the teachings of Scripture and the experiences of all who sincerely believe and obey God. Satan, sin, and the world perpetually assail our pursuit of holiness, seeking to undermine its influence in our lives. Resisting the devil, as we are commanded to do (1 Peter 5:8-9), requires a fierce struggle and conflict, for which we are instructed to "take up the whole armor of God" (Ephesians 6:12-13). Our fleshly desires continually wage war against our souls (1 Peter 2:11), and unless we engage in a lifelong battle against them, they will lead to our downfall. Overcoming the power of the world is only possible through victory over it (1 John 5:4), which necessitates contending against its influence. It should be evident to anyone who understands what it means to serve and obey God in the midst of temptations that a life of faith and pursuit of holiness cannot be sustained without vigorous striving, laboring, contending, and warring, accompanied by diligence, watchfulness, and perseverance. I assume that this principle, at least in theory, is widely accepted among Christians. If we are unwilling to embrace holiness on these terms, we must let it go, for it can never be attained otherwise. If we grow weary in this race, if we give up or deem the pursuit of holiness not worth obtaining or preserving through such intense and lifelong contention, we must be prepared to live without it. Nothing promotes the interests of hell

and destruction in the world more than the presumption that a lazy, negligent performance of certain duties and abstaining from certain sins is acceptable as our obedience to God. We are called to crucify sin, mortify our unruly affections, contend against the desires of the flesh, Satan, and the world, both inwardly through acts of grace and outwardly through various duties. This struggle is required of us as long as we live in this world. This is where the first cause of apostasy arises for many individuals in the world, particularly those who choose to adopt and find satisfaction in a different approach to their religious duties than what the gospel requires. It is possible that these individuals, through their understanding and convictions, have come close enough to perceive the incessant spiritual striving and effort that is necessary to attain and maintain gospel holiness.

They can be likened to the Israelites journeying through the wilderness towards the land of Canaan. As they neared the borders and entrance of the promised land, they sent spies to explore and gather information about the nature and condition of the land they were about to enter. These spies brought back to the people a branch carrying a single cluster of large and ripe grapes. It was so impressive that they had to carry it on a staff between two people. They also brought pomegranates and figs, demonstrating the fertility of the land (Numbers 13:23). However, they also warned of the formidable challenges they would face: the strength of the inhabitants, their fortified cities, and the presence of the Anakim (a race of giants) among them (verse 28). This report deeply discouraged the faithless people, despite the glimpse they had of the land "flowing with milk and honey." As a result, they turned back and retreated into the wilderness, where they eventually perished. The same pattern applies to these individuals. Despite their nearness to the kingdom of God through their understanding and convictions (as our Savior indicated to the young man who was in a similar position, Mark 12:34), and the glimpse they have of the beauty of holiness, they turn away and perish in their spiritual wilderness. When they confront the difficulties and challenges inherent in the spiritual conflict mentioned earlier, they encounter several disadvantages that ultimately divert them from pursuing holiness. These include:

Weariness of the flesh, which prevents them from enduring the constant cycle of duties that are required for spiritual growth. They make various excuses to exempt themselves from these responsibilities, particularly in the more troublesome aspects. The carnal mind readily provides justifications to support the weariness of the flesh. As a result, one duty after another is first neglected and then completely abandoned. Many apostasies of this kind begin with a lack of vigorous discipline in subduing and subjecting the body, as the apostle Paul commended in his own example (1 Corinthians 9:27). It is not uncommon for various duties to be omitted due to the weariness and aversion of the flesh, encouraged by the carnal mind. However, this becomes the test of faith and character for believers. Genuine believers, sooner or later (usually promptly), will be humbled for such omissions and regain their former diligence, as expressed in the prayer of the psalmist (Psalms 119:176). Conversely, when the flesh gains ground and individuals become content with the loss of any duty, it is an indication of a hypocritical and backsliding heart.

Furthermore, when individuals reach the pinnacle of their convictions and make no further progress, indwelling sin, along with its lusts and corrupt desires (which have been temporarily restrained by light), will gradually gain the upper hand. It will subtly and persistently tempt the mind, seeking to regain its former dominion. Since the source of indwelling sin has not been eradicated and its bitter root remains unremoved and unshrivelled, it will not cease its relentless

assault until it breaks down all boundaries that were set against it, overpowering convictions with force and violence.

Another crucial factor is ignorance regarding the true method of applying to the Lord Christ for grace and the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit, both to attain and maintain a state of gospel holiness. Without this understanding, to entertain the notion of being holy according to God's will is to renounce the very essence of the gospel. There is no need to search further for the cause of people's apostasy if they are content with a holiness and obedience that is not derived from the grace of Christ, not wrought within us by the Spirit of Christ, and not preserved in us by the power of Christ. These individuals are always ignorant of and eventually openly disdainful toward the way of making continual applications to Christ, who is the source of all grace, for the spiritual strength necessary to pursue holiness. Just as one cannot see without the sun or light, breathe without air, or live without natural vitality, one cannot engage in or persevere in the practice of gospel holiness without continually seeking strength from Christ. These individuals are unaware of and unfamiliar with the means and methods of accessing this grace, causing the holiness demanded by the gospel to appear strange and burdensome to them, prompting them to abandon and reject it. Therefore, if it is indeed true that without Christ we can do nothing, that our life unto God is his life living within us, and that nourishment flows from him as the head to every living member of the body, if our life is sustained by faith in the Son of God, and if the sole way to receive these things and all supplies of spiritual strength from him is through the exercise of faith in him, then it logically follows that all those who are unacquainted with this way, who do not know how to apply to him for this purpose, can never persist in the pursuit of gospel holiness. This is exactly what has occurred with those we are discussing. Just as ignorance of the righteousness of God, or the fact that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes, leads people to establish their own righteousness and reject the righteousness of God, so too does ignorance of the grace that must be continually received from Christ through faith in order to be holy with gospel holiness cause many to turn away and seek a different form of holiness of their own devising, which is ultimately no holiness at all. In fact, many not only fail to strive for or abide in gospel holiness based on the foundation of receiving continual grace from Jesus Christ, but they openly despise any holiness and obedience that springs from that source or grows from that root. In such cases, God will be the judge. In the meantime, it is evident that one significant reason why people turn away from gospel holiness in the face of difficulties and opposition is their unbelief and ignorance regarding the means of applying to Christ by faith for the necessary supplies of spiritual strength and grace.

Another contributing factor is a lack of understanding regarding the true nature of evangelical repentance. This grace is essential for believers, carrying their souls comfortingly through their failings, weaknesses, and sins. They cannot live a day to God without constantly exercising repentance. It is as necessary for the continuation of spiritual life as faith itself. It involves continual humble self-abasement, stemming from a recognition of God's majesty and holiness, along with the inadequacy of even our best deeds compared to His will. Believers live and walk in this state of humility continually, and those who do not experience its gracious sweetness and usefulness do not truly know what it means to walk with God. Through repentance, God provides various encouragements for us to persist in obedience, despite the discouragements and despondencies we may encounter. In short, if repentance is removed, faith, hope, and all other graces will

crumble. Therefore, those who are unfamiliar with the nature and significance of this grace and duty, who find no spiritual refreshment amidst their sorrows, and who only know of its legal troubles, anguish, fear, and distress, will not entertain the thought of living in the practice of repentance all their days, even though it is as crucial to gospel holiness as faith itself. When individuals find themselves in this condition, grappling with these difficulties and facing these disadvantages, they are quick to embrace anything that offers itself as a substitute for this costly holiness. Hence, some turn to a pretense of morality, which, for many, is merely a facade used to excuse their neglect of the complete obedience openly required by the gospel. Others, under different guises, retreat to the mere duties dictated by their own limited understanding, only adhering to them and finding relief in what is convenient for their flesh. For example, constancy in the duty of prayer, both privately and in families, and in all circumstances, especially when approached in a spiritual manner as the gospel requires, is something the flesh despises and opposes. However, prayer is a duty demanded by natural light. To alleviate the burden it places on the flesh, a relief is sought by claiming that one need not pray at any time unless their own spirit or understanding prompts them to do so—a distortion that turns God's grace into an excuse for sinning. Consequently, some have devised a form of holiness in which prayer seems indifferent and unnecessary to them most of the time. Similar examples can be provided for other situations. In their pursuit to escape this uncomfortable state, so contrary to the desires of the flesh and the carnal mind, some individuals have embraced an alternative where they have no conflict against sin or need to seek the Lord Christ for spiritual strength—a state that does not align with the holiness required by the gospel and accepted by God.

It can be argued that in some of the examples previously mentioned, particularly in the case of the Papacy, there appears to be a greater conflict and more hardships imposed on the flesh compared to other forms of obedience that are advocated. There is indeed such an appearance, but it is only superficial. The opposition they face in relation to their austerities comes from external sources or from the weakness of human nature, not from its carnal inclinations. It is possible that their actions may not be directly associated with sin in terms of its power or dominion. However, to the extent that their practices are influenced by superstition, sin manifests itself no less than in others who are driven by fleshly desires. Nevertheless, it is the internal, spiritual, and immediate opposition against sin in its very essence and manifestations that provokes such vehement resistance, wearing down those who lack the living principle of faith to which victory over sin uniquely belongs.

Evangelical holiness does not allow for or coexist with the continual and habitual neglect of any duty or the satisfaction of any sinful desire, whether of the mind or the flesh. We are called to "perfect holiness in the fear of God" and not make provisions for the flesh to fulfill its lusts. These uncompromising terms are what make evangelical holiness unpopular in the world. If it were willing to compromise with the desires of the flesh or grant indulgence to any particular sin, it would gain many admirers who now oppose it. People would seek exemptions for their favorite sins, those that align with their inclinations and worldly interests. But the gospel sets forth different terms: no duty is to be neglected, no sin is to be indulged, and this is seen as intolerable. Just as Naaman was not willing to worship the God of Israel without also bowing to Rimmon, which was tied to his power and position, many are not willing to give up their love for the world and cling to the gospel. The young man in the Gospel claimed to have done many things and was probably willing to continue doing them, but when confronted with the choice between his love for the world

and following Christ, he chose the former. However, this is the law of the gospel. While it provides merciful relief for the daily sins that we stumble into due to our weakness and the power of temptation, against the inclination of our minds and wills, it does not permit the nurturing or practice of any sin, whether internal or external. A habitual pattern of sin is completely incompatible with evangelical obedience, and instead, the gospel demands that our minds and wills be engaged in opposition to all sin and in constant pursuit of its absence in our lives, both in its root and its fruit. The gospel does not tolerate or accommodate any inordinate affection, ongoing sinful tendencies, or even the initial stirrings of sin in our flesh. This is the perfection required in the new covenant – sincerity, integrity, freedom from deceit, walking in the Spirit rather than the flesh, and a newness of life – as prescribed throughout the gospel. It approves of us only on the condition of universal obedience and opposition to sin. (1 John 3:7-10). This leads many to deviate from the pursuit of holiness according to the gospel's standard. When they gain an understanding through light and convictions of what is required, they find it displeasing and unbearable. As a result, they either abruptly or gradually abandon their initial pursuit. People break away from the gospel for the following reasons:

(1.) They do not share the same judgment of sin as the gospel does. They may not consider all things sinful or evil unless they are openly flagrant. This darkness and ignorance allow various sinful desires to thrive within their hearts, keeping them just as distant from true holiness as the most outwardly wicked sins would. Their refusal to align with the gospel's standard is rooted in two factors:

[1.] They willingly overlook the guilt of certain unmortified desires. They choose to remain in these sinful patterns because they have grown accustomed to them and do not perceive great evil or see compelling reasons to forsake them. This was the case with the young man who clung to the love of the world. He was sorry that he could not be obedient according to the gospel while holding onto it. However, he did not recognize the extent of the evil or feel the guilt from it, nor did he grasp the equivalence or necessity of gospel holiness that would require him to renounce one for the other. When a particular lust becomes familiar to the mind, it no longer terrifies or seems dangerous. It is a relationship between the soul and sin akin to that of the devil and a witch or one who possesses a familiar spirit. Initially, any appearance of the devil, regardless of form, would evoke fear, but over time, he becomes a familiar presence. When alone, he is no longer feared. The deceived individual believes they have power over him, being able to use or command him as they wish, when in reality, they are under the devil's power. People may be startled by sin in its initial stages or during moments of conviction or dangerous consequences. However, once it becomes familiar, they perceive it as something within their control, something they can choose to use or not, even though they themselves are enslaved by corruption and overcome by sin. Consequently, it is astonishing how little sense of guilt some people feel in regards to certain sins once they become habitual. I must clarify that this applies to certain sins, for sins that go directly against the light of nature are not easily excused by conscience. Conscience will not remain silent in such cases until it is seared and rendered insensitive. However, there are sins that may lack overwhelming evidence but carry the same guilt as those that directly contradict natural law. When the living and powerful word of the gospel arrives, piercing and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart, exposing the secret frames and inclinations of the mind, and condemning even the slightest irregularity, individuals may withdraw themselves to the rule of their own light and reason. They

find their own judgments to be more lenient and compliant in comparison.

Furthermore, a departure from the gospel due to the inwardness, spirituality, and comprehensiveness of its commands is further exacerbated by corrupt opinions. These opinions serve to diminish the seriousness of sin, as some believe that sin does not possess such provoking guilt or spiritual outrage as others claim. Consequently, many individuals feel unnecessarily troubled and perplexed by sin. They believe that a noble and enlightened mind, liberated from superstitious fears and ingrained notions, can free one from the troubles associated with sin. They assert that a heightened sense of guilt in relation to minor sins is a ploy used by preachers and those who claim to guide consciences. They argue that the metaphorical language of sin's filth and pollution is incomprehensible to most and should not concern anyone. They contend that the power of indwelling sin is a foolish notion and that disorderly frames of the heart and mind, characterized by darkness, deadness, spiritual lethargy, or other hidden irregularities, are mere fantasies and not sins that require personal trouble or confession before God. These and similar opinions represent the pharisaical corban of our age, corrupting the entire law of obedience. Their perilous and destructive nature becomes evident when considering their role in eclipsing the glory of Christ's grace on one hand and fostering apostasy from holiness in the hearts and lives of individuals on the other. It is crucial to understand that if the corrupt human heart is freed from awe and reverence for the holiness of God and his law concerning the inner workings and frames of the soul, as well as a sense of guilt when these are irregular, and the necessity for constant humility before God and a continual reliance on the Lord Christ for grace and mercy, there can be no hope of placing any limits on the progression of sin. Ignorance of these truths has led some to arrogantly imagine they have achieved perfection when, in reality, they are far from aligning their consciences and lives with the gospel's standard. Instead, they worsen their guilt by attempting to twist the inflexible rule of the gospel to accommodate their perverse and distorted minds. In this situation, carnal interests, encompassing all the circumstances of individuals, demand indulgence in one particular sin or another, which the gospel does not permit. Pride, ambition, covetousness, love for this present evil world and its transient possessions, impurity, sensuality in eating and drinking, self-exaltation, boasting, vanity, idleness — one of these must be spared. Carnal interests, whether due to the perceived insignificance, utility, generality, compatibility with one's natural disposition, or assumed necessity in life's circumstances, demand a reservation. When this resolution prevails, individuals are completely excluded from genuine participation in gospel holiness, which allows for no such reservations. Consequently, they are inevitably led into open apostasy of some kind.

Firstly, such individuals are disapproved by God in all their actions, and therefore have no grounds to expect His blessing or assistance. Allowing even the slightest sin is an indictment of sincerity that removes a person from covenant communion with God. It constitutes "offending in one point," which undermines obedience and renders one guilty of violating the entire law (James 2:10). The willing indulgence in even one sin habitually breaks the entire law as it pertains to our obedience in the covenant of grace. If individuals in this disapproved state experience outward prosperity in the world, their danger and guilt are heightened. Professing Christians must exercise utmost care in this matter, as many seem to openly indulge in habitual disorders, jeopardizing their entire covenant relationship and causing uncertainty within themselves. It is high time for such individuals to cast off every weight and the sin that easily entangles them, and to pursue the race

set before them with redoubled diligence.

"There is a kind of character that they liked and loved will make way for every other. There is a kindred and alliance between sins of all sorts, and they agree in the same end and design. Where any one is willingly entertained, others will intrude themselves beyond all our power of resistance.

(3.) Indulging in one sin will divert the soul from utilizing the means by which all other sins should be resisted, thereby leading to apostasy. God has appointed and sanctified specific means for the resistance and mortification of sin, and these means oppose sin as sin and anything associated with it. Therefore, anyone who willingly reserves one sin from the influence of the means appointed by God for its mortification is effectively reserving all sins. Consequently, as the efficacy of these means diminishes for such individuals, they will gradually neglect conscientious adherence to the ways and duties that should oppose and destroy sin.

Many of the graces that are central to this evangelical holiness are not highly esteemed in the eyes of the world. Even the most renowned moralists, whether Pharisees or philosophers, were unable to separate their love and practice of virtue from their own honor, glory, and reputation. They were driven by a desire for public recognition, as the poet expressed it in one instance,

Hence, people have always regarded virtues as most excellent when they are highly esteemed and praised by others. There is an inherent desire in human nature to seek approval for what is deemed praiseworthy and commendable by society. This desire, in itself, is not necessarily evil and can be directed towards the glory of God. However, when it becomes excessive and is fueled by the leaven of seeking to be seen and praised by others, it becomes the most poisonous influence on the mind. In whatever degree it is allowed, it alienates the mind from pursuing gospel holiness, precisely because the graces in which it primarily consists are not esteemed in the world.

These graces include meekness, gentleness, self-denial, poverty of spirit, mourning for sin, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, mercy and compassion, purity of heart, openness and simplicity of spirit, willingness to endure and forgive injuries, zeal for God, contempt for the world, fear of sin, dread of God's judgment, and similar qualities. These are the inner adornments of the heart that are highly valued by God. However, in the eyes of the world, they are often regarded as weakness, foolishness, madness, hypocritical precision, and the like. When people realize that the primary focus of gospel holiness lies within, in the heart and mind, in matters that are unseen by mortal eyes and receive little commendation even in their outward expression, they tend to turn to duties that have a better appearance and receive better acceptance. Many of these duties are important and should be diligently pursued in their proper place, as long as they do not divert the mind from attending to and cultivating those despised graces that constitute the essence of true holiness.

We need to be aware of the deceit of Satan in this matter. In the early stages of the general apostasy from the power and purity of the Christian faith, people were encouraged to neglect the principal graces of the gospel, the necessity of regeneration, and the heavenly principle of spiritual life, while being solely focused on outward acts of piety and charity, as they were considered. Even if their minds were defiled, their lusts remained unbridled, their hearts were unhumiliated, and their souls lacked spiritual and heavenly graces, these outward works were said to ensure their blessed immortality and glory. However, the veil of this deception has been torn and

destroyed in many places, including our own. Therefore, it is essential for us to exercise wisdom and great caution, so that in our pursuit of inward spiritual graces and their proper expression, we do not neglect the outward duties that are useful for the glory of God and the well-being of humanity.

These are some of the causes, and there are others of a similar nature, which have a strong influence on people's minds and lead them to abandon gospel holiness in favor of alternative paths of obedience, which they also label differently.

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10. CHAPTER 9.

CHAPTER 9.

APOSTASY INTO PROFANENESS AND SENSUALITY OF LIFE — THE CAUSES AND OCCASIONS OF IT, — DEFECTS IN PUBLIC TEACHERS AND GUIDES IN RELIGION.

What remains to be considered under this topic of deviating from the commands of the gospel and the obedience they entail is of a worse nature and has more harmful consequences. It refers to the open abandonment of profanity and indulgence in sensual lifestyles that can be visibly observed among the majority of those who identify as Christians in many parts of the world. If anyone holds a different view, believing that the conduct and behavior of churches, individual Christians, and entire nations professing Christianity align with the requirements and approval of the gospel, they either seem to be unaware of the true state of affairs or they are greatly misrepresenting the grace and truth brought by Jesus Christ. To suggest that the gospel, as taught by Him, condones or tolerates the prevailing darkness, profanity, sensuality, violent conflicts, oppression, and all the vile and destructive desires that have engulfed the Christian world today is to render it not only useless but extremely detrimental to humanity. It implies that, through Him and His teachings, support is given to such a degeneration of wickedness that even paganism would not permit, leading the world into chaos and the imminent danger of ruin. Hence, for now, I will assume (while remaining open to compelling evidence to the contrary) that within the churches to which the majority of Christians associate themselves, there is an evident departure from the piety, holiness, and righteousness that the gospel unequivocally demands from all followers of Christ, qualities which the early Christians ardently pursued and abundantly displayed. Our task now is to investigate the means and causes behind this apostasy. In particular, I will consistently refer to the example of the Roman Catholic Church, which not only exemplifies the most prominent instance of apostasy in this regard among all churches worldwide but also serves as an adequate representation of any similar occurrences happening elsewhere. The immediate internal causes, which serve as the source and origin of all sins, including those present in this apostasy, do not pertain directly to our current inquiry. By these causes, I refer to the general corruption of human nature, the power and deceitfulness of sin, the love for worldly pursuits, including its profits, honors, and pleasures, the insatiable cravings of the flesh for sensual gratification, and the aversion of the human mind from spiritual and heavenly matters due to their alienation from the life of God, resulting from the darkness and ignorance within them. These depraved affections, when stirred and manipulated by the crafty influences of Satan and fueled by temptations, incline, persuade, and drive individuals towards all sorts of wickedness with pleasure and eagerness (James 1:14-15). However, since these factors, in general, apply to all times, circumstances, and sins, and given that it is the continual duty of gospel ministers (those who understand their calling and the responsibility they bear for the souls entrusted to their care) to expose the nature, expose the deceit, and warn people of the perils associated with these underlying principles and occasions of sin within and around them, there is no need for me to delve into them specifically at this point. Instead, our focus will be on the more conspicuous external means and causes that have given rise to, facilitated,

and propelled the apostasy that is being lamented.

I. The first factor contributing to this phenomenon, observed throughout history, arises from the actions of public readers, guides, or leaders in matters of religion. By this, I refer to individuals of all kinds, regardless of their titles, designations, or affiliations, and I mention them broadly because of the diverse ways in which they are multiplied, especially within the Roman Catholic Church. It is in this church, which played a central role in the emergence and propagation of this apostasy, that various types of these leaders are most prevalent. These individuals have always exerted significant influence on the holiness or unholiness of the people. Indeed, the purity or apostasy of the church, in terms of outward means, primarily rests upon them and their faithful discharge of their roles and responsibilities. In many respects, they assume a role similar to that of the priests of old, and they often fall under the same admonition and rebuke delivered to them by the prophet Malachi (Malachi 2:1-9): "O priests, this command is for you. If you will not listen, if you will not take it to heart to give honor to my name, says the LORD of hosts, then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings. Indeed, I have already cursed them, because you do not lay it to heart. Behold, I will rebuke your offspring and spread dung on your faces, the dung of your offerings, and you shall be taken away with it. So shall you know that I have sent this command to you, that my covenant with Levi may stand, says the LORD of hosts. My covenant with him was one of life and peace, and I gave them to him. It was a covenant of fear, and he feared me. He stood in awe of my name. True instruction was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity. For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. But you have turned aside from the way. You have caused many to stumble by your instruction. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the LORD of hosts, and so I make you despised and abased before all the people, inasmuch as you do not keep my ways but show partiality in your instruction." The holy, humble, and diligent ministry that Christ originally established in the church played a crucial role in converting people to evangelical obedience and preserving them in it. Their teaching, spirit, example, way of life, prayers, preaching, and unwavering efforts were all directed towards this purpose and were blessed and fruitful by God. During that time, the lives of Christians reflected the truth of the gospel.

However, as time passed, the subsequent generations of church leaders became troubled sources, polluting and corrupting the practice of Christian religion. It is disheartening to observe, through the course of ecclesiastical records and histories, how these leaders gradually succumbed to corruption and influenced the people in negative ways. They became entangled in conflicts, divisions, ambition, and worldly pursuits. Moreover, their negligence in fulfilling their duties deprived the people of the opportunity to be transformed by the power of gospel doctrine and commands. In the Old Testament, the priests and prophets led the people into a twofold apostasy. Firstly, they led them into the sin of superstition and idolatry, which persisted until it resulted in the devastating Babylonian captivity, during which their idols were destroyed. Secondly, after their return from captivity, the same type of leaders, through negligence, ignorance, and their own sinful behavior, turned the people away from God and His law. This decline started in the days of Malachi, the last prophet, and culminated in the complete apostasy and destruction of the church and people.

Similarly, when the rejection of the Lord Christ, the Son of God, reached its climax, the leaders and teachers, through their influence and coercion, led the majority of the people into rebellion and impenitence, as clearly depicted in the gospel accounts. It is concerning to consider that a similar pattern may have occurred among Christians as well. The initial apostasy of the Christian world was marked by superstition and idolatry, primarily under the guidance of the Roman Catholic Church. This, as always, was accompanied by a life of wickedness among various individuals. While many churches and nations have been delivered from this abomination, there is a real danger that they are now slipping into a worldly, sensual, and profane way of living. The Scriptures provide ample evidence on this subject, and its very nature demands a thorough and profound examination. However, the scope of my intention does not allow for detailed elaboration on each specific aspect. My aim is to identify the primary sources and causes of this problem, and thus this portion of our discussion will be treated briefly, similar to the preceding one.

It is widely acknowledged that the well-being of the church depends on the proper execution of the ministry. The Apostle Paul clearly states this in Ephesians 4:11-15. The church will either flourish or decline in accordance with the manner in which this office is fulfilled. The nature of the ministry, its purpose, its duties, and the universal experience of all generations and places confirm this observation without any dispute. Therefore, if those who assume the responsibility of this office significantly and notoriously fail to fulfill its duties, particularly if this failure occurs commonly and over an extended period of time, it is inevitable that the people will become corrupt and deviate from the standards set by the gospel. Without diligent shepherds, the flocks will not be preserved, and without proper cultivation, fields will be overrun with weeds, thorns, and brambles. Hence, I will first enumerate some of the essential requirements for ministers and teachers of the church, which are indispensable for preserving its purity and ensuring its commitment to evangelical obedience. I will focus solely on those duties that all individuals recognize as such or that no one who professes the gospel can deny.

First and foremost, it is imperative that ministers uphold and preserve the purity of the gospel doctrine, particularly regarding the holiness it enjoins. In the past, the priests were entrusted with the task of preserving knowledge, and the people sought guidance from them in understanding the law. This remains one of the primary purposes for which the Lord Christ instituted the ministry in the church (Ephesians 4:11-15). The aim is to perfect the saints, carry out the work of the ministry, and edify the body of Christ. The goal is to attain unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God, reaching maturity and conforming to the fullness of Christ. This ensures that the members of the church are not swayed by every wind of doctrine or deceived by cunning individuals, but rather grow in truth and love, with Christ as the head. The preservation, proclamation, defense, and vindication of truth is crucial. Ministers are entrusted with this duty to prevent the members of the church, the disciples of Christ, from being led astray or unsettled through weakness, ignorance, or the deceitful tactics of seducers. It is an essential responsibility that the Apostle Paul emphasized when addressing the elders of the church in Ephesus (Acts 20:28-30). He warned them to be vigilant, as grievous wolves would enter to ravage the flock, and even from within their own ranks, individuals would arise spreading perverse teachings to draw disciples after them. This duty of safeguarding and preserving truth is also stressed in Paul's charge to his beloved Timothy. Timothy, as a minister of the church, was appointed as an example for future generations of ministers. He was entrusted with the command to keep the truth without fault or blame until the

appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was instructed to avoid profane and empty babblings, as well as the oppositions of falsely-called knowledge. Paul urged Timothy to remind others of these things, cautioning them not to engage in fruitless arguments that only lead to the ruin of the hearers.

Moreover, Paul directed Timothy to pass on this charge to faithful individuals who would be able to teach others, thereby ensuring the preservation of the gospel truth in subsequent generations. The intensity of the apostle's charge and his passionate exhortations demonstrate the significance and necessity of this duty. Without it, the church would fail to fulfill its role as the pillar and foundation of the truth.

There are three sources where sacred truths, specifically those of the gospel mystery, are preserved: the Scriptures, the minds and hearts of believers, and the ministry of the present age. The Scriptures are safeguarded by God's providence, ensuring their preservation against all opposition until the end of time. Even if the other ways of preservation were to fail, the Scriptures would remain intact, as they have been throughout history. The loss that may occur in other ways can be recovered through the Scriptures, which serve as an unfailing fountain of truth, constantly available for those who use the appointed means to draw from it.

However, the Scriptures alone are not enough to secure the public interest in truth and holiness. There must also be means of communicating the truths contained therein to the minds and consciences of people, and the Scriptures themselves appoint and require a ministry for this purpose. Additionally, there can be a temporary preservation of truth in the minds and hearts of individual believers. This was evident in the days of Elijah when, despite a lack of outward ministry, seven thousand people remained faithful to God and did not bow down to Baal. The Holy Spirit plays a crucial role in preserving truth in the minds and hearts of true believers. They are taught by God through the work of the Spirit, fulfilling the promise that "they shall be all taught of God" (John 6:45). While this preservation is not entirely without means, it does not always depend indispensably on external factors.

Furthermore, the continuation of truth in the world, both in its power and profession, even during periods of widespread apostasy, is attributed to the work of the Spirit in the hearts and minds of believers. It is reasonable to believe that during the time of the papal defection, many individuals held fast to the core truths of the gospel in their hearts and lived according to them, finding acceptance with God. However, this preservation of truth is limited to individual persons and does not encompass the realm of public profession and its benefits. For public profession and the benefits it brings, the ministry of the present age is entrusted with all sacred truth. The proper discharge of their duties and responsibilities is crucial for the preservation and dissemination of truth. The notion propagated by the Roman Catholic Church that sacred truths are kept hidden in tradition or invisible, fantastical treasures, requiring no care, wisdom, or honesty for their safekeeping but only the pretense of possessing a key to unlock them, has been a destructive force, leading to the loss of truth and holiness in the world.

Firstly, they are to diligently instruct the people in the knowledge of the entire counsel of God and the mysteries of the gospel. Their responsibility is not to hoard this knowledge for themselves, but to share it with others and provide guidance for its application. Those who do not desire or make an effort to communicate all that is profitable for their flock may lack the assurance that they have

been called to the ministry. The apostle Paul, as an example, declared to the elders of the church of Ephesus that he did not hold back anything that was beneficial to them.

It is erroneous to suggest that some preachers exclusively focus on certain topics while neglecting others. The notion that preaching about God's attributes, moral duties, and obedience to superiors should be separated from preaching about Christ, grace, and justification is unfounded. In truth, preaching should encompass the entire counsel of God, addressing the various aspects and doctrines of the faith according to the spiritual needs and circumstances of the hearers. Any preacher who fails to understand this and lacks the wisdom to discern what is useful, profitable, and timely for their congregation is ill-equipped to be a minister of Christ and his gospel. In the discharge of this crucial aspect of their office, ministers, teachers, and leaders are to focus on three things. First, they must diligently study and understand the truth themselves, ensuring that they are well-grounded in its knowledge. Second, they should carefully consider the spiritual states and specific needs of their hearers, adapting their teaching to address those circumstances. Lastly, they should employ suitable and effective methods of communication, employing various means and ways to convey the truth effectively to their audience. By fulfilling these responsibilities, ministers play a vital role in preserving and promoting gospel truth, ensuring that it is faithfully transmitted from one generation to the next. They have the privilege of being channels through which the light of divine revelation shines, guiding and enlightening the minds and hearts of believers. Their faithful instruction and proclamation of the truth empower individuals to grow in their knowledge of God and His ways, to embrace gospel holiness, and to live in accordance with His will. Through their teaching, ministers have the opportunity to shape the spiritual formation of their congregations, cultivating a deep and genuine faith that is firmly rooted in the truth of the gospel.

Furthermore, the ministry of teaching and instruction extends beyond the walls of the church. It encompasses the broader sphere of influence in society, as ministers are called to be salt and light, impacting the world around them with the transformative power of the gospel. They are to engage with intellectual and cultural trends, addressing contemporary issues and challenges through the lens of biblical truth. In doing so, they can effectively equip believers to navigate the complexities of life, guiding them to make wise and godly choices in every sphere of their existence.

They are to do it with utmost care, diligence, and diligence. How passionate is our apostle in his charge for this purpose! In 2 Timothy 4:1-2, he says, "I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with all patience and teaching." These words should continuously resound in the ears of all ministers who aim to be faithful in their duty! The weight of these words should remain in their hearts! Are they spoken only to Timothy? Or can souls be preserved, edified, and saved now with less effort and at an easier cost than before? It will be evident on the last day that others also have an eternal stake in this matter.

They must labor with all their strength, even to exhaustion and weariness. All the titles by which their office and work are described in the New Testament imply this kind of labor. As they are to "devote themselves to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4), that is, fully and completely, with their

utmost efforts and continuously committed to this work, they are also commanded to *kopiaia*, which means to labor to the utmost of their strength in it (1 Timothy 5:17; 1 Corinthians 16:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:12). It is not merely physical labor in delivering the word (which can vary depending on natural disposition and acquired gifts), but the earnestness and intensity of spirit that encompasses the laborious efforts of the whole person. The cold and formal recitation or reading (as some may do) of a well-composed speech does not truly reflect this laboring in the word and doctrine. Their entire work and all their efforts in it should be accompanied by constant prayer, that the gospel may run and be glorified through their ministry, and that the word may prosper in the hearts and lives of the people. The apostles affirmed that they would "devote themselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). Ministry of the word that is not accompanied by continual prayer for its success is unlikely to receive great blessings. Just as the apostle called God as a witness to his frequent mention of those to whom he preached the word in his prayers (Romans 1:9-10), he also desired the prayers of others so that his work and labor in the ministry might be prosperous and successful (Ephesians 6:18-19). For a minister to preach the word without constant prayer for its success is likely to nurture and strengthen hidden atheism in his own heart, and is very unlikely to produce holiness in the lives of others.

Thirdly, It is similarly required of them (to the extent that human frailty permits) that in their personal lives, conduct, and behavior, especially in the discharge of their ministerial duties, they give a true representation of both the doctrine they preach and of the One in whose name they dispense it. The Scripture declares and the nature of the matter itself makes evident the meekness, humility, and zeal for God's glory; the moderation, self-denial, and willingness to bear the cross; the mortification of corrupt affections and desires for earthly things; the contempt for the world; the kindness, condescension, and patience towards all people; and the demonstration of heavenly-mindedness that are required for this purpose. What can anyone reasonably believe, but that those who preach Christ and the gospel to them declare that their preaching has no other effect or purpose than what they themselves exhibit and represent? There is a silent language in the ministry of individuals, conveying that what they are and do is what the doctrine they preach demands, and their hearers understand and are inclined to believe it. Even the philosophers recognized that this would be the case with respect to those who publicly taught philosophy, as reflected in the words of Themistius: "If philosophers are found to be extravagant, avaricious, prone to flattery, greedy for applause, deceitful, or self-seeking, it will not be ascribed to their corrupted nature or internal vices, but to the philosophy they profess." Hence, they are commanded to "show themselves in all respects to be a model of good works" (Titus 2:7; 2 Thessalonians 3:9). Our apostle said to Timothy, "Set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12). This is the dignity, honor, and calling to which the Lord Christ summons His ministers: that they should personally embody His graces and the holiness of His doctrine to others. Those who have different intentions and affections, whose aims lie elsewhere, will find themselves under the influence of a significant error. I do not diminish the value of any external, secular, or circumstantial advantages individuals may possess in this world, but I do affirm that whatever they possess of that nature, if it does not enable them to more effectively demonstrate the meekness, humility, self-denial, and zeal of Christ, along with the holiness of the doctrine they teach or ought to teach, it will not contribute significantly to their standing in the kingdom of God.

Fourthly, It is also their responsibility to diligently adhere to the rule and holy discipline established by the Lord Christ for the edification of the church and its preservation in purity, holiness, and obedience. While many claim to be willing to comply with this, attracted by the appearance of authority and power that often accompanies it, I must emphasize that there is more to it than is commonly understood. I believe few sensible and discerning individuals would deny this.

These requirements, along with others of a similar nature, as well as all the duties that support or are in any way necessary to them, are expected of all ministers of the gospel, teachers, guides, and leaders of the church. They must be constantly attended to with zeal for the glory of God and compassion for the souls of humanity. I believe that most individuals who profess themselves to be Christians would not generally deny this.

Without these things, which constitute the life and power of the ministry and are essential for the purity and holiness of the church, it is morally impossible for the majority of the people to avoid gradually descending into ignorance, profanity, immorality, and various forms of unholiness.

There is nothing I desire more than for the current departure from evangelical holiness, which is so evident in the world, to not be attributed, either wholly or in part, to a lack of these qualities among this group of individuals. It is my hope that it may not be due to qualifications, principles, and actions that are directly contrary to what is required. If this is not the case, there is still hope for putting a stop to its progression and even for healing and recovery from it. However, I will examine what is readily observable, with the following clarifications:

I do not intend to single out the ministry of any specific place, nation, age, or time. Instead, I will speak generally about what has occurred and is happening in the Christian world.

If indeed, upon examination, no one is found to be at fault or lacking in these areas, then there is no harm in warning individuals about what to avoid.

Now, let us consider the following: Have all ministers faithfully preserved the truth, doctrine, and mysteries of the gospel entrusted to them? Are there not many among them who are woefully ignorant of the counsel of God revealed in the gospel? Moreover, are there not many who neither have the desire nor the ability to delve into the profound truths of Christ's teachings and, as a result, despise them? How can individuals fulfill their duty of preserving something they never possessed, or for which they never pursued the necessary means? The effects and consequences of this situation are evident. Multitudes perish due to their lack of knowledge, and they persist in their sinful ways because they have no one to instruct them otherwise, or at the very least, no one to teach them using principles that are truly effective for their conversion and holiness. They will die in their sins, but the responsibility for their souls will lie with others, as they have been deprived of the causes, motives, and means of attaining true gospel holiness. The widespread ignorance and lack of knowledge among many priests in the Papacy is well known. In most cases, the rulers of the church do not require anything more from them than the ability to read and perform their public religious duties. A similar situation can be observed in the Greek church and its various branches, where entire nations, despite professing Christianity, have degenerated into lives of profanity and immorality, no better than that of the heathens. It is possible that to some extent, a similar state of affairs exists in other places as well. The truth is that the ignorance of many who assume the role of ministry and their unconscionable idleness after assuming such positions are

the primary reasons for the persistence of profanity and ungodliness among the people. If preaching the gospel is the only effective and ordained means appointed by God to transform people's nature and reform their lives (denying this is tantamount to renouncing Christianity), then it is futile to expect any restoration of the beauty and glory of religion in the world unless provision is made for a competent ministry to instruct the entire populace, in all their diverse circumstances, with knowledge and understanding.

Furthermore, it is the responsibility of these individuals to preserve the truth in its pure and uncorrupted form, for without diligent and effective preservation, holiness cannot be maintained or upheld in the world. However, it is evident that many among them have failed in this regard, as has been partially illustrated in the preceding account of the apostasy from the doctrine and truth of the gospel. They have contributed to its degradation, corruption, and perversion, which continues even today. It is rare to find any doctrine that genuinely promotes evangelical obedience that has not been despised or distorted by some among them. Yet, this is not the main focus of our discussion here, as it has already been addressed. Our present inquiry pertains to the love, care, and zeal for the truth that are prominently required of them. Do they pray, labor, and advocate with God and humanity for its preservation, recognizing it as their primary concern? Or do many merely value it to the extent that their own outward advantages are secured by it? There is a fault in this matter, and it is due to the particular guilt of some that the world has become so indifferent towards the essential truths of the gospel, leading many to slip into atheism on a daily basis.

Moreover, these deficiencies cannot be compensated for by mere diligence in their work. In fact, the lack thereof is the most evident of all the evils in this regard. It is difficult to adequately express the laziness, negligence, indifference, and apathy that many exhibit in carrying out their duties, particularly in instructing others and applying the word of God to their hearts and consciences. I will refrain from citing specific examples to avoid causing offense, but the problem itself is undeniable, and its effects are apparent. While some may prefer such matters to remain hidden, those who are aware of the perilous state of countless souls may rightly voice their concerns.

How few, then, diligently and industriously devote themselves and their energies to the ministry, driven by zeal for the glory of God and compassion for the souls of humanity! How few truly take heed to themselves and their flocks, watch and pray, and earnestly impress their message upon the consciences of their hearers! Alas! Many possess only a superficial knowledge of saving truth, and even less interest in sharing it with others because they themselves do not experience its transforming power. Can souls be brought to obediently embrace faith? Can the power and influence of sin and the world be cast down and annihilated within them? Can gospel obedience be preserved in the lives of individuals through such feeble and lackluster efforts as many content themselves with? If this were the case, then conversion to God and the fruits of holiness would be considered exceedingly easy tasks, and the ministry itself would be of little consequence in the world. However, the Scriptures present a different perspective on these matters. Despite the growth of certain opinions that seek to make the entire work of Christianity so effortless and accommodating as to be compatible with a negligent ministry, the resulting outcome is undeniably detrimental. Therefore, we need not hesitate to declare that coldness, lukewarmness, sloth, and negligence, particularly when accompanied by ignorance and spiritual darkness concerning the fundamental mysteries of the gospel, as well as a lack of concern in the minds and affections regarding the significance, purpose, and aim of their work, among those who are regarded as the

public teachers of the church, in any time or place, leave a wide door open for human desires to flood in and contribute to the overwhelming deluge of apostasy from the power of godliness that currently engulfs the world. The same was true of the church in the Old Testament, as God repeatedly lamented through the prophets. Can anyone be so foolish as to believe that the mere performance of priestly rituals in the Church of Rome, such as reciting prescribed prayers at set times, hearing confessions, and granting absolution, without any genuine labor in preaching the Word and teaching doctrine, is a means to uphold the power of the Christian faith? On the contrary, it is an effective means of plunging humanity into sin and complacency. Changing the names of things does not alter their nature. Wherever there is a neglect of the true work of the ministry, whether in substance or in manner, the same consequences will follow. And nowhere will these consequences be more disastrous than where people willingly embrace such neglect and despise any contrary viewpoint, even going so far as to consider it a crime to be dissatisfied with the soul-destroying sloth and negligence of these individuals.

Furthermore, although great relief could be found in holy and exemplary conduct and behavior among those who are required by God's ordinance to lead and guide the people, it is evident in the world and widely acknowledged that many among them openly display ambition, insatiable greed, pride, sensuality, hatred for the virtuous, and associations with the worst of individuals, thus manifesting the corrupt inclinations of their minds through notable acts of vice and folly. If one were to consider the state and lives of the apostles and the early preachers of the gospel, as well as their successors in the subsequent centuries, not only in terms of their outward conditions of poverty and hardship (which some may argue were a result of the prevailing circumstances of their time), but also in terms of their humility, meekness, self-denial, contempt for worldly things, zeal for God, and purity of life, which they not only taught but exemplified themselves, and then compare it to the widespread opposition and contradiction that many in the world openly demonstrate towards them and their ways today, it becomes evident that either all those qualities were unnecessary for the public interests of Christianity, or they have been greatly undermined by the actions of some in the present time.

Therefore, it cannot be modestly denied that due to these and similar failures among the spiritual leaders of the people, the majority of Christians have either been led or allowed to gradually fall into the present state of apostasy. When God, in His mercy, grants His people pastors who are truly devoted to His heart and who nourish them with knowledge and understanding, when He revives and increases a holy, humble, zealous, self-denying, and powerful ministry through a greater outpouring of His Spirit from above, then, and only then, can we hope to witness the restoration of our religion to its original glory and beauty.

Those who still believe that matters concerning the obedience of faith among common Christian believers are as good as they have ever been, or as good as they need to be, and who have no desire or interest in seeing improvement, can continue in their complacency without troubling themselves with these concerns. However, for those who cannot help but recognize that a departure from gospel obedience has already begun in the world and has reached such a critical point that it is on the verge of descending into idolatry or atheism, it is time for them to consider under whose oversight this has occurred and to be stirred to halt its progress before it is too late. It should not be expected or imagined that the people will be restored from ungodliness and profanity, or to the holy obedience demanded by the gospel, unless there is a transformative

change in the ministry. The word must be proclaimed in a way that is effective for this purpose, and examples must be set that inspire others to follow. To believe that this breach can be healed in any other way is to demonstrate the highest contempt for the sacred office itself. Since this decline has happened under the leadership of the current ministry and that of previous generations, it is unlikely to be reversed under the same leadership. Therefore, it is necessary to acknowledge that the world of professed Christians will only be restored to holy obedience through the ministerial dispensation of the word. Any other means would render the ministry altogether useless. Thus, the cure for the spiritual lethargy that the world has fallen into lies in the renewal of a powerful evangelical ministry, in the faithful discharge of the duties by those who are called to it or hold its position, if there is to be any meaningful change in this world.

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11. CHAPTER 10.

CHAPTER 10.

OTHER CAUSES AND OCCASIONS OF THE DECAY OF HOLINESS.

II. Many people are led into and encouraged in sinful and profane ways by falsely associating justifying names and titles with their actions. They freely indulge in their lusts and corrupt desires, relying on false claims to justify their sinful behavior. This was a significant factor in the hardening of the Jews in their wickedness and immoral lives. Whenever the prophets confronted them about their sins and warned them of God's impending judgments, they would respond with a defiant cry, "We are the true descendants of Abraham, the only chosen people of God." This was their way of dismissing the prophets' message. The prophet Jeremiah, in particular, faced this contention. In Chapter 7, he conveyed the Lord's message, urging the people to amend their ways and actions in order to continue dwelling in their land. However, their defense was centered around the temple of the Lord, using it as a shield against the prophet's exhortations. In response, the prophet sternly rebuked them, asking, "Will you continue to engage in theft, murder, adultery, false oaths, and worship other gods while standing in my house, which bears my name?" In essence, he challenged them, saying, "Will you persist in your wickedness and find comfort in your identity as a people associated with the temple and its worship?" A similar situation occurred when John the Baptist called people to repentance. They proudly claimed their status as children of Abraham, assuming that this entitled them to all the privileges of the covenant, regardless of their personal conduct. These examples clearly demonstrate that when churches or individuals are on the brink of losing all their privileges and facing destruction due to their sins, they are even more inclined to boast and rely on their outward appearance as their sole source of confidence. If people could use this pretext to justify their sins against the extraordinary prophetic ministry that sought to challenge them and call them to personal holiness, how much more will they attempt to shield themselves under its cover when they are taught to do so? When individuals who have surrendered themselves to a vicious, sensual, and worldly lifestyle, either succumbing to their own desires and temptations or never being corrected from their inherent vices, discover that despite their true nature and the judgment others would pass on them, they are still considered part of the Christian church and enjoy all its outward privileges, it only serves to increase their complacency in sin and weaken the effectiveness of any attempts to reform them. Similarly, when others, who are not as deeply entangled in sin and profanity, witness that they can partake in the external signs of God's love and favor even while indulging in the same excesses and debauchery as others, it subtly diminishes their diligence in fulfilling their duties and makes them more susceptible to temptation. After all, only a few are willing to strive for a better life than they believe is necessary. Just as the church in Sardis, although spiritually dead, clung to the appearance of being alive, it became the primary factor in perpetuating its lifeless state.

Let us, therefore, reflect on how this has unfolded in the world. When these things have been indiscriminately granted to all kinds of people, even to the most wicked individuals on earth, it is

evident that the name of the church and the observance of its rituals would be employed to justify neglecting holiness and even harboring contempt and hatred towards it. When these sacred names, titles, and privileges, serving as tokens of God's love and the benefits of Christ's mediation, are forced to follow after individuals as they engage in the most sinful and offensive behaviors, what can possibly restrain their lustful desires? If the church is indeed the exclusive object of God's special love and grace in the world, and if the primary purpose of administering its ordinances is to confirm people's claim to the benefits of Christ's mediation, how can the lusts of individuals be more accommodated than by applying these things to them while they actively pursue their sinful desires? It may be assumed that Jesus Christ has established obedience to the gospel as the unshakeable standard for belonging to His church. In fact, it should not be a subject of debate among those who acknowledge the truth of the gospel's doctrine that obedience to its precepts is the sole and necessary condition for partaking in its privileges. Since everything required for our eternal salvation is encompassed within the precepts of the gospel, individuals can have no external assurance of the welfare of their souls other than what accompanies the church and its rites. Consequently, when they discover how easily they can maintain an unassailable claim to these privileges by merely conforming to outward forms or regulations, allowing them to secure their entitlement even while leading the most immoral lives to satisfy their desires, what other external means can possibly restrain them? This was the mechanism through which Satan facilitated the widespread apostasy from evangelical obedience that befell the Roman Catholic Church and its various branches, members, and followers. Once countless individuals were brought into the Christian profession, not due to a genuine conviction and personal experience of its truth, power, holiness, and necessity for the present peace and eternal well-being of their souls, but rather as a result of conforming to the rulers of the nations and their own worldly interests, they were easily settled within the church on lenient and undemanding terms. Consequently, they swiftly dismissed any notion of the necessity of the holiness required by the gospel. Assured that even if their lives were more depraved than those of the pagans—engaging in all sorts of lewd, immoral, and wicked behaviors, with a plethora of sins that can be named or should not be named flourishing among them—they alone were considered the true church of Christ, and could not be anything else. In light of this assurance, why should they bother themselves with practices such as self-discipline, self-denial, purity of heart and actions, and other unappealing duties? What reason is there to anticipate the same level of obedience from those who enter into the Christian profession on these terms, compared to those in the early days who embraced the truth out of love for it, with a resolute determination to forsake all things rather than renounce their faith or deviate from its commands?

Men were particularly entrenched in their complacency when they witnessed others being condemned to damnation, both in this world through fiery persecution and in the next through divine judgment, simply for not aligning with their supposed identity as the "church." Such spectacles only served to reinforce their own perceived happiness, as they believed they were safely exempt from present and eternal fires on account of the ease with which they had gained their status. Furthermore, to address any lingering doubts, they devised various means of relief, such as confession, penance, the exchange and redemption of sins through external acts of supposed piety or charitable deeds, and the convenient fallback of purgatory for unresolved cases. With these provisions in place, the majority of people bid farewell to the demands of gospel holiness, considering it irrelevant to their own lives and not worth the trouble.

It is within these elements that the workings of profound wickedness, the hidden mechanisms behind the extensive apostasy that occurred during the reign of the Papacy, can be found. The gospel's distinctive doctrine, encompassing its unique nature, causes, motives, and objectives, had largely been lost. This was due to a combination of widespread ignorance among some individuals and the destructive errors propagated by those entrusted with its preservation. The detrimental consequences of such a loss or corruption of the gospel's core principles on the vitality and efficacy of obedience are readily apparent. In some instances, truth diminishes first within a church, subsequently leading to a decline in holiness. Conversely, the rejection or hostility towards holiness can precipitate the loss of truth. In either case, the rejection of one inevitably leads to the decline of the other, as previously elucidated. This was the lamentable outcome of that significant apostasy, where these intertwined afflictions reinforced one another. The void created by the absence of truth was filled by indiscriminately ascribing the name, titles, privileges, and promises of the church to individuals of all kinds, even those persisting impenitently in their sins. By doing so, an implicit assurance was extended to them that they were in the state mandated by the Lord Christ, one that He accepts, approves, and to which He has attached the gospel's promises. When people are pronounced to be in such a condition, why should they expend any effort or incur any cost to effect a change or improvement? In general, they are overly enamored with their desires, transgressions, and indulgences to willingly part with them, unless they perceive a greater necessity for doing so than what their current condition allows. To further reinforce their sense of security, they were taught that the mere administration of the church's sacraments, irrespective of their inner disposition, automatically conferred all the grace symbolized by those sacraments. In particular, they were led to believe that anyone, regardless of the wickedness pervading their heart and life, could partake of the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ (at least by concomitancy), which Christ Himself has assured us grants eternal life. Through various other means too numerous to enumerate, these flagrant sinners were assured of immortality and glory based on their purported affiliation with the church and its privileges. To further enhance their satisfaction and strengthen their sense of security, they discovered that hell and destruction were exclusively reserved for those outside the church. They clung to a maxim of supposed truth, albeit falsely applied for their benefit, which asserted that salvation could only be found within the church—of which they were members. They also embraced the notion, albeit less truthful, that the church resembled Noah's ark, ensuring the salvation of all who resided within its confines while dooming those outside it to drown. These and similar affirmations served to encourage them. Moreover, they witnessed these declarations being demonstrated in reality. Whenever they encountered individuals who did not belong to their church and refused to conform, even if these individuals were clearly more righteous in their conduct and lifestyle, they saw them cursed, condemned to hell, imprisoned, and consumed by flames under the authority of the church. Consequently, they were completely satisfied that there was no fear of danger or trouble, in this world or the next, except in not being a part of the church—an offense they were determined to avoid, given how easily they could conform. It is always true that while persecutions and the sufferings endured by God's saints can serve to magnify the grace of some and bolster the faith of those who genuinely believe, they also contribute greatly to the obstinacy and unrepentance of wicked individuals in their sinful ways. No invention is more detrimental to the glory of the gospel than when professed Christians persecute, harm, and destroy others who profess the same Christian faith, especially when these others visibly excel in a holy and fruitful manner of life but happen to differ in certain beliefs. For what can

provide greater security in one's impiety than persuading oneself that, according to the gospel's standards, they are justified in their actions more than those who surpass them in all moral duties? It is certainly not an accurate portrayal of Christianity for blasphemers, drunkards, profane individuals, and the impure to persecute those who, for the sake of their religious convictions, demonstrate visible piety, sobriety, temperance, prayerfulness, and good deeds.

However, these privileges and affirmations did not always serve as impenetrable shields for sinners. Every now and then, arrows of conviction would pierce through their minds and consciences, causing significant unease and trouble. Whether through a glimmer of truth from the gospel, the voice of conscience, fear, or the anticipation of divine judgments, certain occasions would arise that unsettled them inwardly and went beyond what the aforementioned advantages could assuage. These moments had the potential to awaken them from their state of security and prompt them to inquire about what God truly required from them. It was during such times that the additional aids and remedies mentioned earlier were discovered and presented to them. "If you find yourself still unsatisfied with your general participation in the church's benefits, if sin continues to trouble you, then you must resort to confession, penances, and works of redemption, along with other approved methods and remedies for troubled souls. But if anyone's conscience remains stubborn and unyielding even after these soothing treatments, and the wound refuses to heal, rest assured that everything lacking will be fully resolved and secured in purgatory, where no soul has ever been lost."

Through such means and others like them, the majority of humanity became completely indifferent to the pursuit of gospel holiness. They neither comprehended it, felt any necessity for it, nor had any inclination towards it. Eventually, a distorted form of blind devotion, filled with various superstitions, took its place and was mistakenly regarded as true holiness. Consequently, the world became immersed in ignorance, profanity, and all sorts of wicked behavior, while the true message of Christ and the gospel was nearly lost among humanity under the banner of the church and its privileges. This pattern will continue wherever these same principles prevail to varying degrees. If it were not for certain restraints that influence people's minds, it would be impossible for so many self-professed Christians to surpass heathens and followers of other religions in wickedness in their lives and conduct. The commands of the gospel are inherently holy, its promises are magnificent, and its threats are profoundly severe. Yet, under the guise of professing adherence to all these, many individuals live lives that are even worse than those who are ignorant of the holy standard, the promises, and the eternal consequences upon which the highest state of blessedness and deepest misery for our human nature depend. To entertain the notion that the gospel in any way supports or condones such a mindset is to show the utmost disrespect and contempt towards it. This outcome is primarily a result of the misapplication of outward symbols of God's favor and assurances of eternal bliss to individuals living in a state of sin, by those who claim to have been entrusted with their administration by Jesus Christ. It is unrealistic to expect a return to a way of life that aligns with the principles of the gospel among Christians until the church establishes proper order, ensuring that no one can delude themselves into thinking they possess a supposed entitlement to the promises and privileges of the gospel while living in open disobedience to its precepts. As long as everything is jumbled together indiscriminately, and being labeled a Christian requires nothing more than being born in a particular place or belonging to a certain nation, as long as there is no requirement of submission to and compliance with all its

commandments, we must resign ourselves to enduring the consequences of the widespread departure from the truth that plagues the world.

III. Significant examples of individuals in positions of prominence surrendering themselves to a bold pursuit of sin have played a pivotal role in the advancement and intensification of this apostasy throughout the later centuries of the church. This influence has been particularly pronounced when these individuals profess to be religious leaders. The scandalous and immoral lives led by many popes and high-ranking prelates of the Roman Catholic Church, for instance, have driven numerous individuals into the depths of atheism and provided validation for a carefree, indulgent, and sensual lifestyle. The impact of such behavior is incomprehensible, as an entire generation of self-proclaimed Christians can swiftly be corrupted and debased by the example set by a person who holds a prominent religious role, acting as the figurehead of publicly practiced faith and bearing the ultimate responsibility for its guidance, as is the case in various regions under the Papacy. When an individual in a position of leadership, whose conduct is highly visible due to the eminence of their office, exhibits vanity in speech, profanity in their beliefs, sensuality in their way of life, and negligence in the performance of their duties, failing to rebuke open sin but rather deriving pleasure from those who engage in it, it is astounding how quickly an entire era or generation of professed Christians can be influenced, corrupted, and morally debased. For what can be expected of a household when its stewards resemble the wicked servant described in Matthew 24:48-51? As individuals are consistently admonished not to be wiser than their teachers but rather to obediently follow their guidance, they generally fail to perceive any reason why they should conduct themselves better than their leaders or venture down a different path than the one they have paved. When the sons of Eli, who succeeded him as high priests and directly assumed the priestly office, set an openly profane and immoral example before the people, the entire nation quickly became so corrupted that God's judgments, including the initial captivity of the land, followed soon thereafter. Presently, the world is so impetuous and headstrong in its pursuit of sin that even the best examples are incapable of partially curbing the torrents of immorality. However, when encouragement is provided to individuals by prominent examples of sin, which helps alleviate the remaining restraints of fear, shame, and reputation, their audacity in sinning escalates to an excessive and uncontrollable level of outrage. Thus, the defection from holiness, which we lament, has been greatly fostered in every era, as few, if any, periods have lacked an abundance of such examples. In truth, the initial visible decline of Christianity coincided with and was caused by the evident pride, ambition, strife, contention, and conformity to the world that pervaded the minds and tarnished the lives of the majority of prelates and prominent church leaders following its alliance with the Roman Empire. Men sought to secure a stake in religious benefits or at the very least, a representation of them, by endowing power, wealth, and honor upon individuals who were no better than themselves but had acquired the name and title of "clergy" or "guides of the church." They endlessly contended over these matters, which brought shame upon the Christian faith and resulted in the ultimate loss of its genuine power and virtue for the majority. In subsequent ages, as conditions deteriorated, the immoral and wicked lives of popes, prelates, and others, who gained notoriety for their power and prestige, gradually led to a public conformity with their vices, whenever circumstances and capability coincided. Therefore, wherever individuals fall within the sphere of the church's ministry or are elevated to positions of eminence and dignity as guides of the church, irrespective of the principles on which they have been raised, if they do not surpass others in visibly exemplary holiness or if

they are not blameless in a godly conduct that genuinely reflects the grace of the gospel—such as humility, meekness, detachment from worldly pursuits and sensual pleasures, and zeal and diligence in the dispensation of the word—then the apostasy from the true power and holiness of the gospel will inevitably persist and be furthered. It is imperative that those in leadership positions within the church exemplify the transformative power of the gospel through their lives, for their actions have a profound impact on the spiritual well-being and moral direction of the entire community. Only when leaders strive for personal holiness and faithfully discharge their responsibilities will there be a restoration of genuine devotion to the gospel and a rejection of the prevailing apostasy.

IV. This apostasy has been greatly influenced by persecution. I am not referring to the persecution suffered by sincere and steadfast followers of Christianity at the hands of its avowed enemies, based on their profession of the faith. Such persecution is far from being a cause or occasion for a departure from the holiness of the gospel. On the contrary, it has been the distinctive glory of our religion and a significant means of its growth. This applies to the overall doctrine of the gospel as well as to specific aspects of it. In its early days, Christian religion exhibited its splendor in the face of universal opposition from the world, not only maintaining its position but also flourishing amidst the most severe persecutions until it accomplished the glorious conquest it was intended for. These persecutions not only ensured the survival and expansion of Christianity but also played a role in preserving its purity and manifesting its power in the hearts and lives of its adherents. The church never ultimately lost either truth or holiness due to violent persecution by its acknowledged enemies. However, I am not referring to the outrages committed against the flock of Christ by wolves disguised as sheep; rather, I am referring to the persecution among professing Christians themselves, concerning differences in their understanding of spiritual matters and the practice of divine worship. This form of persecution, particularly prevalent in later ages, raises doubts as to whether more blood has been shed, families ruined, and nations devastated by those who professed the same religion in general, than by all the Pagans in the world since its inception. Anyone who impartially reads the Gospel cannot fathom how such things could ever occur among those who claim to embrace it as their rule and guide in any measure. The entire purpose and all the principles of the Gospel are so explicitly opposed to any such practices that it would be inconceivable for anyone not to have learned the contrary from the consequences, without having renounced the Gospel itself beforehand. Yet, as time passed, such occurrences did happen, causing irreparable scandal and harm to the Christian religion. This was foretold, for the primary intention of the book of Revelation is to prophesy and depict a state of apostasy in which the prevailing external power within the church would persecute, destroy, and kill those who refused to conform to the apostasy. For this reason, that state is referred to as Babylon, along with its idolatry. We all know how this unfolded under the power and influence of the Roman Catholic Church. Furthermore, it is worth noting that after the downfall of Babylon, it is said, "In her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth," which pertains to the gospel and its profession. Thus, anyone who commits violence against the lives of others solely because of their profession of the gospel and the religion of Christ, regardless of their pretext, aligns themselves with that apostate state that will be destroyed. Our Lord Jesus Christ came to restore the love of God that had departed from our human nature, along with the love for and among mankind that was originally required by the law of creation. He elevated this love to a higher level of worth and excellence by adding new motives, duties, and goals to it. He came to

save lives, not to destroy them—to deliver people from a state of enmity and mutual hatred and usher them into a state of peace and love. Can any sensible person believe that harming, imprisoning, fining, banishing, killing, and destroying individuals solely because they believe in Christ and worship Him in the manner they are firmly convinced they should is a proper representation of Christ's purpose? On the contrary, it is evident that such practices obscure the glory of His mission, obscuring the primary attractive qualities of the gospel and teaching the world a distorted version of Christianity that is fierce, cruel, oppressive, vindictive, and bloody, completely contrary to its true essence. There is no more effective way to divert people's attention from one of the main purposes of Christ's mediation, which is to turn them to the true gospel, than for those who profess to follow Christian religion to persecute others of the same faith simply because of their beliefs, and to claim that such persecution is a duty of their religion. Therefore, when the majority of people are persuaded, based on what they hear and see, that this is the true religion—namely, to persecute others in various ways and eventually destroy those who profess the same faith but differ from them on certain matters—they have indeed lost the true gospel and all the benefits that accompany it.

Moreover, any religion that does not reflect the spirit, virtues, and character of its author cannot be aligned with the gospel; rather, it signifies a significant deviation from it. In fact, engaging in external coercion and persecution appears more akin to the practices of Mohammed and Antichrist than to the example set by our Lord Jesus Christ. This approach infects people's minds with false notions and misconceptions about the essence of Christian religion, leading them astray from its true glory and power. It has been extensively demonstrated elsewhere how fundamentally contrary this practice is to the clear principles and ultimate goals of the gospel. Whenever such forms of persecution prevail among Christians, there remains no semblance or trace of genuine Christianity among people. The essential qualities of love, charity, peace, meekness, humility, mercy, compassion, and kindness that are inherent to Christian religion are utterly disregarded, giving way instead to anger, strife, vengeance, baseless accusations, disorder, violence, and every form of evil. Therefore, when this course of action has been adopted and maintained in various parts of the world, as it continues to be, it is inevitable that the majority of individuals will be profoundly misguided about the truth of religion. For any profession of faith that aligns with such practices is in no way guided by the teachings of the gospel. Consequently, when people's minds are shaped by this approach, they become ill-suited for the fulfillment of any other evangelical duties. Although some may claim certain benefits and advantages for the truth through this means in a few isolated cases, it is impossible to deny that it has served a thousandfold more to promote falsehood. No purported advantage of truth can outweigh the corruption of Christian morality that has been introduced and endorsed through such practices.

V. The lack of vigilance against the infiltration of national vices and prevailing sins of any given era has effectively contributed to a departure from evangelical holiness among the majority of Christians. Certain vices, crimes, or sins tend to be more prevalent in specific nations (without delving into the reasons for this phenomenon), and as a result, they abound within those societies. The power these vices hold over people's minds and their ease of imposition are evident. Individuals are constantly surrounded by them in their daily lives, and their commonness diminishes the sense of guilt associated with them. Behaviors that would be considered severe moral transgressions in one nation are casually overlooked in another due to the influence of

custom. Therefore, the progress of the gospel within a particular nation can be measured by its success in confronting these well-known national sins. If these sins are not, to some extent, subdued by the gospel, if people's minds are not turned away from them and made vigilant against them, if the true guilt of these sins is not exposed without the veneer or camouflage provided by their commonplace acceptance, then any profession of adherence to the gospel is in vain and serves no purpose. The apostle Paul acknowledged the prevalence of national sins among the Cretans when he said, "One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, 'Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.' This testimony is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith" (Titus 1:12-13). Regardless of their profession of faith, if they were not delivered by the gospel from the grip and practice of these deeply ingrained national sins, to which they were naturally inclined, they would not remain steadfast in their faith nor bear the fruit of obedience for long. Similarly, among the Jews, there existed a distinct type of stubbornness and obstinacy surpassing that of any other nation on earth, a characteristic evil that God lamented throughout their successive generations and that continues to define them to this day. Hence, King Josiah was highly esteemed for having a tender heart (2 Chronicles 34:27). He resisted the prevalent sin of his people, which, in fact, encompassed all other forms of evil. To find someone with a tender heart among the Jews was a rarity. And we can clearly observe (as it is easily demonstrable) that the significant departure from true faith and practice among nations that have embraced Christianity consists of a regression into the customs, manners, attitudes, and ways of life that prevailed among them before the introduction of Christianity. If we disregard the outward profession and mere formalities of worship, the majority of people in most nations live as they did in the past, and indulge greatly in the same vices that were prevalent during their pagan times. This serves as compelling evidence that the power of the gospel truth has been lost among them, for its efficacy lies in transforming the inherent vices of human nature and rectifying the evils to which people were most accustomed, as the prophet Isaiah eloquently declares (Isaiah 11:6-9). For instance, sensuality of life, characterized by excessive eating and drinking and its associated consequences, has long been regarded as a prominent sin in this nation. Recently, this has been accompanied by a preoccupation with vanity in clothing, adopting foolish, frivolous, and lascivious styles and attitudes, as well as an immodest boldness in conversation among both men and women. These corruptions, influenced by neighboring nations and interwoven with our own traditions, have borne the fruit of vanity and pride in abundance. It is a clear indication of a degenerate society when people are inclined to embrace the vices of other nations but disregard their virtues, even if they excel in any particular aspect. Thus, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life join forces with the lust of the flesh, forming a complete antithesis to God in the world we inhabit. Some individuals may restrain these tendencies due to the dominance of other vices such as greed and a strong desire or ambition to amass wealth for their families and establish a lasting reputation among fellow human beings. However, this is simply another manifestation of the same sin, as it stems from the same root desire for self-exaltation, which can be traced back to the builders of Babel and their pursuit of "making unto themselves a name" (Genesis 11:4).

Now, when sins are so deeply ingrained in the fabric of a nation and are commonly practiced, it becomes easier for individuals to protect themselves from a raging epidemic than to remain untainted by their influence to some degree. It is almost indescribable how effectively these sins insinuate themselves into the minds and lives of people. They surround individuals from every side with temptations and occasions for indulging in them, presenting themselves with enticing

justifications. The only safeguard against them is to be fully equipped with "the whole armor of God," a matter that few truly understand or earnestly pursue. Without such protection, it is impossible for individuals to withstand and prevail against the collective alliance of a nation in sin. Those who refuse to align themselves with such sinful practices or in matters where an entire population may consent to wrongdoing must be willing to be "signs and wonders," subjected to disdain and even ridicule (Isaiah 8:11-12; Isaiah 8:18). Nevertheless, it is evident that these national sins openly and visibly promote the general apostasy we are addressing.

Some individuals are ensnared by these sins due to a corrupt upbringing, while others are lured into them through laziness, negligence, and a false sense of security. The commonness of these sins causes some to lose a sense of their guilt, while others succumb to the arguments put forth for their justification or mitigation. In one way or another, multitudes of people from all walks of life are led astray from obediently following the gospel. Consequently, Christianity, in terms of customs, behaviors, vanities, vices, and ways of life, has sunk down into heathenism. Prevailing national sins have overwhelmed its transformative power, leaving only a superficial semblance of the faith in the world. In such a state, the life, essence, and genuine benefits of the gospel are abandoned. The gospel's purpose is not merely to transition people in their outward profession from "dumb idols to serve the living God," or to change the external form and state of religion, as some Roman missionaries have done in converting indigenous people by replacing their old idols with new images and substituting new saints for their former deities. Rather, its aim is to turn individuals away from "all ungodliness and worldly lusts, to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." When this transformation does not occur, it suggests that either the gospel never truly took hold among people or they have departed from it. Furthermore, when individuals profess a religious faith and reject and condemn national vanities, vices, and customs, the public endorsement of these sinful practices leads to numerous individual apostasies every day. This is a primary reason why the Protestant faith has been on the verge of extinction in certain neighboring nations, as they are unable to withstand the national vanities and vices that receive public endorsement, ultimately leading them to renounce the religion that condemns such practices. I consider this to be the main cause of the widespread departure from evangelical holiness that prevails in most nations. The gospel enters a nation like a wilderness or forest filled with wood, thorns, and briars, as the soil itself is naturally inclined to produce. It cuts down these impediments to the ground and replaces them with good and noble plants, transforming the barren wilderness into a fruitful field for a time. However, without continual care and cultivation, the earth naturally gives rise to the weeds and briars that are inherent to it. These rapidly sprout and suffocate the other plants and useful herbs, causing the once fruitful field to revert to a wilderness. All that is required for this apostasy to occur is for national vices, momentarily suppressed by the power of the Word, to overrun the majority of the population, resulting in the suffocation and suppression of the graces of the gospel. The national sins, allowed to flourish unchecked, ultimately strangle the growth of these graces, leading to a widespread apostasy. It is crucial, therefore, for individuals and society as a whole to remain vigilant against the insidious influence of national vices and prevailing sins. This requires a concerted effort to uproot and reject these sinful practices, promoting a culture of righteousness and holiness that aligns with the teachings of the gospel. Only through such watchfulness and steadfast adherence to the principles of the faith can the tide of apostasy be stemmed, and the transformative power of the gospel restored in the hearts and lives of people.

Mistaken notions regarding the beauty and glory of the Christian religion have played a significant role in the apostasy from its power and holiness. It has always been acknowledged that Christianity should possess a certain glory that would attract and inspire awe in people. This is true, provided that those individuals possess the ability to perceive and accurately judge that glory. To cater to this human inclination, religion was outwardly depicted and symbolized among the Jews. The apostle Paul affirms that the worship of God in the administration of the gospel is truly glorious, surpassing that of the law. Christian religion, in and of itself, is genuinely honorable and encompasses everything that God and enlightened reason deem as such. However, grievous errors have arisen concerning the true understanding and perception of this glory and honor inherent to religion. Its essence primarily lies in the magnificent internal work of the Holy Spirit, who renews our nature, transforms us into the image of God, and produces the fruits of His grace in righteousness and genuine holiness. It manifests in a meek, humble, gracious manner of living and the faithful performance of all duties in accordance with the divine standard. Unfortunately, few possess the discernment to recognize the beauty, glory, and honor in these aspects. Consequently, where these qualities go unnoticed, the gospel is inevitably scorned and forsaken, replaced by something else. This misconception has greatly contributed to the widespread apostasy and remains a powerful force that keeps multitudes ensnared in its grip even in the present day.

Due to a loss of spiritual enlightenment and a neglect of God's grace, the leaders of the church had reached a point where they themselves could no longer perceive the true glory in the essential aspects of the religion taught in the gospel. This remains the case for the majority even today. Consequently, any profession of faith in these aspects is commonly regarded as hypocritical and superstitious, and is thus despised. In fact, there is nothing more scorned in the world than the possession and declaration of those ways that are truly, if not exclusively, noble. Since the leaders of the church had lost sight of these truths, it was not to be expected that they would be instrumental in opening the eyes of others or diligent in teaching them how to seek after that which they themselves did not discern.

They were fully convinced that these things held no inherent splendor in the eyes of the general populace, whom they deemed it wise to accommodate their religious notions to. Just as the Jews failed to see any beauty in the spiritual power of Christianity when they rejected Christ because it did not align with their expectations, so too men naturally struggle to perceive the glory of religion. It was deemed their responsibility to present and portray religion as truly glorious and honorable in the eyes of people. However, instead of aligning their judgments with those of God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit as revealed in Scripture, they conformed to the carnal understandings of those with whom they interacted, which also suited their own preferences. Thus, they did not conceive or expect that the true glory of religion resided in a humble and holy ministry within the church, characterized by diligent service and marked by the graces and gifts of the Spirit. They did not perceive that worship ought to be simple, unadorned, and spiritual, deriving its vitality and excellence from the invisible and efficacious workings of the Holy Spirit. They did not grasp that meekness, self-denial, the mortification of sin, and the fruits of righteousness arising from the grace of the Holy Spirit constituted the essence of glory. The world, on the contrary, generally assumes the direct opposite of all these qualities to be honorable and glorious. It craves religious practices that exude a sense of grandeur and sophistication, a form of worship adorned with

outward ornaments and modes that appeal to the senses while also satisfying both lust and conscience. Consequently, as the power of religion dwindled into an empty and superficial form, the supposed glory of Christianity in the world manifested itself in three distinct ways:

(1.) The first manifestation of the supposed glory of Christianity was through the secular splendor and extravagance displayed by the leaders of the church. This was intended to inspire reverence towards their positions and authority, without which religion itself would be disregarded. It is understandable how, through this pursuit, their minds became detached from a proper consideration of the truly honorable aspects of their roles. Neglecting these essential elements would inevitably lead to the loss of the power of religion among the majority. Once they had secured the honor, respect, and reverence they deemed necessary for the glory of religion, and found it to be in line with their personal desires and objectives, there was little incentive for them to trouble themselves with the demanding duties of exemplary self-denial, mortification of the flesh, and diligent labor in the ministry. After all, everything they sought or needed had already been prepared for them. The corrupting influence of this approach to leadership has been discussed previously.

(2.) The second manifestation of the supposed glory of Christianity was in the form of a pompous and ceremonial worship. It began with a pretense of solemnity and eventually devolved into plain superstition and idolatry. As a result, people's minds were diverted and distracted from pursuing the genuine spiritual exercise of the graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit, which constitute the true beauty of evangelical holiness.

(3.) The third manifestation of the supposed glory of Christianity was evident in grand displays of magnificence and generosity, through which the clergy amassed wealth and appeased the consciences of people engaged in sinful or unholy practices. Once the world became convinced that these things constituted the beauty and glory of religion, and found them to be in perfect alignment with their own sinful desires and ignorance, true holiness and obedience as required by the gospel were increasingly neglected and scorned. Moreover, the extent of wicked and scandalous behavior that emerged from these principles, including pride, ambition, divisions, and contentions among the leaders of the church, is indescribable. A significant portion of ecclesiastical history became occupied with fierce disputes and quarrels concerning preeminence, dignities, privileges, and jurisdiction among the prelates. Even wise and sober observers among the heathens recognized this evil within Christian circles, perceiving it as a debasement and corruption of their religion. Ammianus Marcellinus provides an account of such wickedness in his description of the bloody and scandalous conflict between Damasus and Ursicinus over who would become the bishop of Rome (lib. 27 cap. 6).

VII. Throughout these periods, Satan, ever watchful for his own opportunities and advantages, was not absent; and those who do not perceive his workings even in the present time are completely ignorant of his strategies. It is impossible for the glory of the gospel to diminish in any age, time, or place without his involvement. He is the chief instigator and leader of every apostasy from God. It was in apostasy that he commenced his work in this world, and he will continue to promote it until its completion. Just as he exerted all his power and cunning against the Head of the church, displaying his utmost pride and malice against God, he is not discouraged from pursuing the same objective against the entire church. The path outlined here has been the

primary route he has taken, for from the very beginning of Christianity, he sought to intertwine himself with all the sinful desires of humanity in order to incite and effect a departure from the power and purity of the gospel. He waged his attack in both his capacities, resembling a lion and a serpent. As a lion, he instigated, acted, and animated all the brutal persecutions by which the Jews and the pagan world sought to annihilate the Christian faith for three hundred years. Yet, his success in this endeavor was commensurate with his defeat in his attempt against the Head of the church and will always be so, owing to the victory achieved by the Lord Christ in the same type of conflict. Once the power of the devil and the world had been fully broken and subdued by Christ, they would never ultimately prevail against his followers. Satan, in alliance with the world, may create a tumultuous uproar like a roaring lion, scattering the churches of Christ for a time, but he will never triumph in destroying the church through these means. And even if, at times, he succeeds in temporarily expelling the gospel from a place or country through national devastations, it will ultimately work to his disadvantage and the advantage of the gospel in general and in other places. Therefore, let no one fear his bloody fury when it comes to the cause of Christ and the spread of the gospel in the world. Just as he was conquered and triumphed over at the cross of Christ, he will ultimately be defeated in all his attempts. Blessed and fortunate are those whose blood and temporal ruin break his power at any time. This was evident in his initial attempt against the Christian religion, where, through the efficacy of Christ's grace and the steadfastness of countless holy souls, he was overcome until he was cast out of the heavens of the world and his rage was quelled. However, during this time when the enemy of the church raged as a lion and raised storms of persecution that many Christians were prepared to endure, he also secretly worked as a serpent. He gradually infected the minds of many with ambition, worldliness, superstition, and a neglect of the power and simplicity of the gospel. The apostle attests to his work as a serpent in 2 Corinthians 11:2-3, where he disguises himself as an angel of light, enticing people away from the gospel by suggesting greater piety or devotion, or by introducing outward practices beyond what the gospel requires. This was evident even in the days of the apostles, as referred to as the "mystery of iniquity" in 2 Thessalonians 2:7. Satan worked secretly, employing insidious methods to draw people away from evangelical truth and holiness, sowing the seeds of ambition and superstition that eventually spread throughout the visible church. He was the driving force behind the gradual apostasy that occurred in the following ages. Though those who were involved in the apostasy were largely unaware of the overall design, they contributed to its growth by adding various elements to it opportunistically. But Satan himself had devised and carried out the plan from the beginning. Hence, it was called the "mystery of iniquity" due to the unfathomable methods or depths of Satan, wherein those who served his purpose were often ignorant of their own actions, despite being sufficiently warned in Scripture of his intentions and the future events. Therefore, after being unsuccessful in his attempts through outward force and persecution (as he always will be), he turned to exploit the darkness, ignorance, errors, ambition, and lusts of men to gradually draw them away from the truth and holiness of the gospel. He did not cease until Christian religion came to be seen primarily, if not solely, as comprised of the things that were introduced into it through his craft and human desires. He pursued this work almost unnoticed, until the majority of those who professed Christianity were given over to the power of sensual lusts on one hand or brought under the sway of superstition on the other. All of this he attempted and, to a large extent, accomplished by his own accord. However, after people willingly surrendered themselves to his delusions, rejecting the truth and holiness of the gospel out of their love for and

delight in them, God, in His righteous judgment, gave them up to be infatuated by Satan and hardened for their eternal ruin. This is expressed by the apostle in 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12 : "Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness." Thus, the apostasy was completed under the Papacy, and through the same cunning tactics, Satan continues to work among us and deceive people for the same ends and purposes. Satan, in his relentless pursuit, seeks to lead individuals and even entire nations astray from the truth and power of the gospel. His tactics remain consistent throughout history, employing a combination of worldly allurements, false doctrines, and spiritual delusions to draw people away from genuine faith and obedience. It is crucial, therefore, for believers to be vigilant, discerning his schemes, and standing firm in the truth of God's Word. By relying on the power of Christ, who has already defeated the enemy, and being led by the Holy Spirit, we can resist the deceitful schemes of Satan and hold fast to the beauty and glory of the true Christian faith. In doing so, we thwart his attempts to promote apostasy and ensure that the gospel shines forth with its transformative power and holiness in the world.

VIII. Furthermore, among the factors contributing to the current decline of holiness and the influence of Christianity in the world, we must acknowledge the scandal caused by, or rightly taken at, those who have professed unwavering obedience to the teachings of the gospel. It is not difficult to find prominent examples of such occurrences, as they are abundant and evident. I do not refer to offenses that some individuals maliciously pursue or baselessly create, but rather to those that are genuinely committed and readily observable by people from all walks of life. I will mention only two of these instances, as they are the most prominent and far-reaching. And so, —

Offense has been taken at the divisions that have occurred among them, and continue to do so, along with the contentious manner in which they have been handled. The Lord Christ has declared and commanded that the mutual love among his disciples should serve as a profound testimony to the truth of his teachings and the authenticity of their obedience. He has also enjoined them to be united in heart, mind, and affection, praying that they may be so. His commands and instructions in this regard are well known to those acquainted with the gospel, and thus need not be repeated or emphasized here. The blessed outcomes and fruits of unity were evident among the early followers of the gospel, and their love for one another provided a compelling argument for the truth, effectiveness, and holiness of the doctrine they professed. For where unity and love prevail, there is peace, order, and a readiness to do good works for the benefit of humanity. Conversely, the absence of unity and love leads to strife, envy, confusion, disorder, and all manner of evil deeds. It is true that certain divisions occurred among the early Christians, but they were swiftly resolved through the apostolic authority and the prevailing love among them. However, as time went on, matters deteriorated, and the initial deviation of Christianity became evident in the strifes, divisions, and contentions among its adherents, particularly among their leaders. These divisions eventually escalated to extreme levels and were driven by a spirit of pride, ambition, envy, and malice, to the extent that even the pagans took pleasure in their conflicts. They observed that there was no group more prone to and entrenched in strife than the Christians of those days. Yet, once one party gained power and seized the sword of force and violence from the pagans, which had been tainted with the blood of holy martyrs, they began to persecute one another in the pursuit of their divisions. Carnal individuals, having tasted the sweetness and advantages of such

persecution as it gratified their envy, malice, and ambition, and seemingly secured their earthly interests, refused to let it go. This continued until it became the cornerstone of many people's religious practice. It was only due to God's immeasurable care and mercy that the gospel did not become abhorrent to all humanity. For who, lacking the light and grace that could shield them from the influence of such temptation, could witness the fierce, devouring, and bloody contentions among its followers solely on its own account, and not assume that the gospel itself was born out of a spirit of malice, strife, and disorder? Nevertheless, the truth and faithfulness of God preserved it against all opposition, even in the face of treacheries perpetrated by its supposed allies. This was evident in the early times when the initial substantial hindrance to the advancement of the gospel arose, and it became a significant factor in corrupting the conduct of many individuals, instilling within them a disposition that stood in direct opposition to the teachings of the gospel. The differences that arose among the first reformers, along with their unfavorable handling, constituted the primary obstacle that impeded the universal success of their work. Is it not much different among the strictest types of believers today? Do some not appear to aim solely at multiplying and divisions, finding delight in living and arguing amidst the flames of discord? There is no difference of opinion in matters of religion, however small, that these individuals do not consider sufficient grounds for perpetual quarrels and contentions. Such ways and actions give scandal to the world, which is inclined towards apostasy and actively seeks occasions or justifications for it. These things are not done in secret. Those who are unaware of the inward power and virtue of the religion professed by such individuals, upon witnessing these disorders, become truly estranged from all the good that they profess. Not only that, they use it as justification for their own immorality and profanity, considering themselves in a better state than these quarrelsome individuals could ever offer. As a result, religion has lost much of its awe-inspiring authority in the world, which had often served to restrain the minds and consciences of those who were not guided by its power. The rules by which we ought to conduct ourselves in the midst of these differences, and the best means to bring them to an end, have been explored in a treatise dedicated to that purpose. However, it must be acknowledged that attempts to rebuke these disorders, reconcile dissenters, and unite believers have largely been conducted from principles and a mindset that have only served to intensify and exacerbate them, rather than calming or diminishing them. The world is greatly offended by the lack of usefulness displayed by believers, as they fail to fulfill their role as a blessing and benefit to humanity as they ought to be. Many are driven by a selfish spirit, satisfied with merely abstaining from known sins and fulfilling their religious duties in worship, without being of any real help to others. While some may show kindness, generosity, and goodness to a certain extent, they place unwarranted boundaries and restrictions on their acts of benevolence. They reserve their care and attention only for their own household and fellow believers, based on their own opinions or prejudices. As for love, humility, benevolence, and a willingness to help and assist all people, even the worst of them, as opportunities arise, they fail to understand the significance of these virtues or make various excuses to exempt themselves from practicing them. However, as Christians, we are called to "abound in love for all people" (1 Thessalonians 3:12), and demonstrating genuine obedience to the gospel involves doing good to everyone, being beneficial to all, and showing kindness throughout the earth. The actions of a single believer who is kind, humble, accommodating, charitable, and genuinely helpful to others can bring more glory to the gospel than a hundred who are perceived as living solely for themselves. In the past, there was a saying, "Caius Sejus is a good man, but evil because he is a Christian." Religion gradually gained

influence through such convictions. If the world witnessed that as individuals embraced a strict profession of faith, they also became kind, benevolent, merciful, charitable, and useful to all people, it would undoubtedly enhance the reputation of the religion they profess. However, observing the contrary disposition and limited usefulness of some believers can only lead to the opposite effect. Due to these and similar shortcomings, where some believers fail to adorn the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and instead bring reproach upon it, others are increasingly hardened in their alienation from anything related to it.

These are just a few examples I have provided to illustrate the various means and methods through which a general apostasy from the holy teachings of the gospel, as the standard for our obedience, has been initiated and perpetuated. There are many other similar instances that could be added, but it is pointless to extensively discuss the nature of a disease when it shows no regard for any possible remedies. However, there is still hope in sovereign grace, to which this state of affairs is ultimately directed. In its own measure and extent, this apostasy shares in the guilt described in the scripture passage that serves as the foundation of this discourse. In this apostasy, Christ is figuratively "crucified afresh and subjected to open shame." This is because, in departing from the truth and holiness of the gospel, we dishonor Christ and bring disgrace upon Him.

All individuals who profess the Christian faith but have deviated from its holiness have effectively renounced and forsaken the commands of Christ, which are accompanied by His promises, in exchange for the fleeting pleasure and rewards of sin. In doing so, they openly declare and affirm, as a judgment and resolution of their minds, that the commands of Christ lack excellence, and that obedience to them does not possess goodness, beauty, desirability, or satisfaction that should be preferred over worldly pursuits and sinful pleasures. As a result, certain commands of the gospel (and those of significant importance for promoting holy obedience) are disregarded and neglected by the majority of Christians. For instance, the commandment to love one another, which should be a defining characteristic of Christian conduct, is scarcely evident in the world today. The superficial display of love that some may point to as satisfactory, limited to peaceful interactions within civil and ecclesiastical settings, is no different from what can be found among adherents of other religions or even non-religious individuals in similar circumstances. While such displays of love are commendable insofar as they align with the principles of natural morality, they fall short in comparison to the genuine evangelical love that the Lord Jesus Christ expects from His disciples. The watchfulness over one another with love, care, and tenderness, the mutual admonitions, exhortations, and consolations that the gospel repeatedly and earnestly enjoins upon us, are not only neglected but even despised to such an extent that the mere mention of these duties is met with scorn, as if it were a hypocritical display of excessive piety. Many other commands of Christ face a similar reception among the majority of those who are called Christians. Through their actions and conduct, many openly profess that they see no compelling reason to comply with Christ's commands, and it is difficult to conceive of a greater dishonor or contempt they could show toward Him.

Furthermore, by maintaining an outward appearance of Christianity, they falsely depict Christ and the gospel to the world, thereby openly disgracing Him. In professing allegiance to Him and placing their hope for eternal life and happiness in Him through the gospel, they also imply that He approves of the sinful paths they tread and that His teachings endorse all forms of immoral behavior. Anyone who lacks knowledge of Christ or the gospel except through the portrayal

presented by these apostates' depraved conduct would understandably form such a judgment. However, I have previously discussed this line of reasoning in more detail elsewhere.

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12. CHAPTER 11.

CHAPTER 11.

APOSTASY FROM EVANGELICAL WORSHIP.

THIRDLY, The next aspect to be considered is the apostasy present in the world from the purity of the gospel worship as ordained by Jesus Christ. This constitutes the main defection mentioned by our apostle in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12, and is also prophesied in the book of Revelation. However, since I have discussed this topic on various occasions and certain matters pertaining to it are subject to debate among those familiar with the warning regarding the apostasy, I will refrain from addressing specific details that may give rise to differences of opinion. Instead, I will focus on aspects that the majority of Christians, particularly Protestants, can readily acknowledge.

Firstly, it is assumed that our Lord Jesus Christ instituted and established a sacred worship of God to be perpetually and unalterably observed until the end of the world. The primary purpose of maintaining any church on earth is to facilitate the proper celebration of this worship. It is through this public display of glory that God demands from believers in this world. All other duties of the gospel can be performed by individuals in their personal capacity, even if there were no churches in existence. Churches greatly misunderstand their responsibilities and their very reason for existence if they do not prioritize the careful observance of the worship ordained by the Lord Christ. Just as Moses was faithful in God's entire house, as mentioned in Hebrews 3:5-6, and the life, existence, happiness, and well-being of the church of Israel depended on their adherence to the law given by Moses at Horeb, including the statutes and judgments (as stated in Malachi 4:4), so too does the Christian church's existence and flourishing rely on faithfully observing and practicing all that has been commanded by Jesus Christ in the worship of God (as expressed in Matthew 28:20), for He is faithful as the Son overseeing the entire house of God.

Besides, it is universally acknowledged — and we will, God willing, expound on this further when we examine the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews — that through the gospel, the Lord Christ has altered and abolished all the solemn worship, ordinances, and institutions established by God Himself under the old testament, which were meant to continue until the time of reformation. Thus, it is now absolutely unlawful for anyone to worship God according to those previous institutions. God Himself publicly affirmed this by promptly destroying the very place and seat of those institutions when the Lord Christ, through the proclamation of the gospel, nullified their authority and binding power, forbidding His disciples from using them any longer. To this day, those who desire to use those institutions cannot do so in a legitimate manner. Shall we then believe that the Lord Jesus Christ abolished the old solemn worship of the church without establishing anything in its place? Or that He removed what had been established by the wisdom of God, even if only for a time, and left the church, in terms of its primary duty and main purpose in this world, to the inventions and imaginations of men? Denying the establishment of a solemn worship of God to continue unalterably until the end of the world leads to one of these two blasphemous conclusions.

Furthermore, if anyone faithfully and obediently practices and engages in all the aspects of divine worship that the Lord has appointed, I am convinced that no one would have the audacity to claim that something is lacking to make it a solemn and acceptable service, although some may debate the convenience of certain additional customs. Therefore, I assume at present that the Lord Jesus Christ has appointed such a solemn worship under the gospel, which all His disciples are obligated to observe constantly and unwaveringly, as He declares in Matthew 28:20. In relation to this, individuals can fall away and apostatize from the gospel, committing sin of no lesser gravity and consequence than if they were to depart from the mysteries of its doctrine or the holiness of its precepts. There are two ways in which this can occur: 1) by neglecting and refusing to adhere to what He has appointed, and 2) by introducing our own additions to His appointments that are inconsistent with and destructive to what He has ordained.

I. The first way in which we see apostasy from the worship of the gospel is evident among certain individuals within our midst. While they may engage in certain actions that appear to align with what Christ has commanded, such as gathering on the first day of the week and engaging in prayers and speaking, they neither observe the Lord's day nor offer prayers or speak in obedience to any of His instituted practices. They justify their actions solely based on convenience and their own internal understanding. Furthermore, they completely reject the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, which are integral parts of the mystical worship of the church, employing flimsy excuses to dismiss them. Similarly, they disregard the establishment of a designated ministry as appointed by Christ, instead opting to establish their own.

Because this disregard also results in openly shaming Christ, it is important for us to briefly examine the grounds and reasons for this departure from the obedience owed to His commands. The main reason, encompassing all others, why some individuals have abandoned the gospel in regard to the administration of its ordinances is that they are in no way compatible with, nor do they align with, the faith and obedience they have adopted. The ordinances of the gospel serve as representations of the beliefs we hold and as a means of conveying their efficacy to us. They are suited for confirming our faith and building us up in it, and for no other purpose. However, since these individuals have strayed from the faith of the gospel, as we have previously described, in its mysteries and the spiritual obedience it requires, what use can the ordinances of worship have for them? For example, the ordinance of the Lord's Supper is instituted to commemorate the death of Christ, His suffering on our behalf, the sacrifice He made of Himself, the atonement or reconciliation with God that He accomplished, and the sealing of the new covenant with His blood. For what reason should anyone worship God solemnly through this ordinance if they, in essence, do not believe any of these things, or at least do not believe them as presented in the gospel, namely, as the primary causes and sources of life, righteousness, and salvation? Those who believe in God through these truths, who experience their effects in righteousness and peace, cannot help but delight in engaging in this act of faith through this ordinance, knowing it to be their duty to do so. However, it is evident that neither this ordinance nor the ordinance of baptism contributes anything to the advancement, growth, or establishment of that inner light within individuals to which they attribute their faith and obedience. In fact, in their true and proper significance, both ordinances direct us towards the sanctifying and justifying blood of Christ, which is diametrically opposed to and distinct from what they attribute to their inner light. Therefore, it is not surprising that these individuals would forsake the ordinances of gospel worship, as accepting

them in their true and intended use and meaning would undermine the entire framework of the religion they have constructed for themselves. When the faith of the gospel is abandoned, the ordinances of worship must also be forsaken, and all divinely instituted worship neglected, or other practices devised that align with the imaginations to which people have turned.

Another reason for this is the lack of spiritual enlightenment to see beyond the outward forms of these institutions and the absence of faith's wisdom to experience communion with God in Christ through them. Our worship under the gospel is inherently spiritual or immediately connected to the spiritual realm. However, these institutions have an outward and tangible aspect, and it is concerning that many may find satisfaction solely in these external elements, not progressing further in their worship of God beyond the actions and words employed. Yet, as appointed by Christ, they are vehicles that lead and transport the soul into a profound communion with God. To achieve this, three things are required:

(1.) We must submit our souls and consciences to the authority of Christ in these institutions. Without this foundational submission, the entire service will be in vain for us.

(2.) We must rely on the truthfulness of Christ for the working of His grace and the fulfillment of the mercy depicted and sacramentally exhibited through these institutions. They will not benefit those who do not mix the promises of Christ, implicitly contained within them and accompanying them, with faith. We cannot believe the promise unless we submit to the authority of Christ in the appointment of the sacrament to which it is attached.

(3.) We must grasp, to some extent, the mystical connection between the outward symbols of the ordinance and the Lord Christ Himself, along with His grace symbolically represented through them. Within this understanding lies the essence, purpose, and significance of these institutions. And all of these factors are necessary to maintain a genuine delight in these institutions and a conscientious practice of them. However, in the case of those we are discussing, it is evident that they lack all of these essential elements. They neither understand, acknowledge, nor embrace them. They possess no spiritual insight into the true nature of these things, nor do they possess the spiritual gifts necessary for their administration and edification. Following the dictates of their own principles, it was inevitable that they would reject these institutions and consequently deviate from the worship prescribed by the gospel. In doing so, they bring dishonor upon the Son of God, who is the author and Lord of all these sacred institutions.

II. Another way in which people can, and indeed have for many ages, deviated from the gospel in relation to its worship, is by rejecting its simplicity and pure institutions and replacing them with a superstitious, and even idolatrous, worship of their own. This can be seen in the case of the Roman Catholic Church, for they have added numerous rites and institutions of their own, some of which are superstitious and others bordering on idolatry. They have corrupted every single ordinance and institution of Christ to such an extent that their nature and purpose have been completely distorted. By removing the true ordinances and introducing a different system in their place, they are not representing Christ to the Church but rather Antichrist, thereby openly disgracing Christ himself. The specific methods and strategies employed to bring about this apostasy, through the cunning of Satan and the worldly interests of men, need not be detailed here. It is sufficient to observe that as people became more carnal, losing the spirit, life, and power of the gospel, they found it necessary to introduce a carnal, visible, and grandiose form of worship

that appealed to their inward desires and understanding. Just as the Israelites in the wilderness, being carnal in their hearts and accustomed to carnal forms of worship, demanded that Aaron make them visible gods to lead them in the absence of Moses, resulting in the making of the golden calf, these individuals, lacking visible representations of the presence of God that their carnal hearts and minds craved, fashioned their own idols. Since there were still many in those times who remained truly spiritual and worshipped God in spirit and truth, this idolatrous worship could only be introduced and maintained gradually over an extended period of time. Throughout this entire process, the "mystery of iniquity" worked effectively towards its ultimate goal. Those who worshipped God in truth either fell victim to the deceit of the apostasy's incremental progress, seduced by the appearance of humility and devotion in the new practices, or lamented the situation without being able to remedy it.

If these brief reflections on the nature of the current apostasy in the world, which has led to a departure from the true power of Christian religion in its fundamental aspects, as well as the causes and reasons behind it, inspire and motivate someone with more time and expertise to conduct a thorough and valuable investigation into these matters, it would be a rich reward for my efforts.

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13. CHAPTER 12.

CHAPTER 12.

INFERENCES FROM THE FOREGOING DISCOURSES — THE PRESENT DANGER OF ALL SORTS OF PERSONS, IN THE PREVALENCY OF APOSTASY FROM THE TRUTH AND DECAYS IN THE PRACTICE OF EVANGELICAL HOLINESS. The final part of this discussion aims to provide cautionary advice to those who still remain steadfast or believe they remain steadfast in the face of the widespread departure from the gospel that we have examined thus far. Additionally, we will offer some guidance on how to prevent being affected by this apostasy.

We adopt this approach in line with the apostle's example, who, after revealing the apostasy and subsequent downfall of the majority of the Jewish church, uses this as a cautionary lesson for others who currently profess the truth. He addresses the Gentile believers, saying, "You will say then, 'The branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.' That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, and you stand by your faith. So do not become proud, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. Note then the kindness and severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness toward you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off" (Romans 11:19-22). On a similar note, in another passage, he says, "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Many people tend to believe that the preservation of true religion in any place solely depends on the prudence and diligence of those entrusted with its external affairs. They view the interests of some and the responsibilities of others in managing human laws and institutions as sufficient and the only means to maintain it. Those who hold this view consider themselves personally unconcerned, except to align themselves with the masses and accept whatever fate awaits them. Such individuals may dismiss our cautions, as they perceive no relevance to their own confidence and fears. However, it is essential to recognize that the preservation of religious profession within the Christian community relies on the power of faith and devotion within individuals. It is the foundation upon which true religion can flourish and endure. Hence, we shall not engage with those who deem our guidance unnecessary or futile, for even the most skillful exercise of human wisdom cannot replace the stability that comes from divine wisdom. If the power of truth and holiness is not upheld in the hearts and lives of individuals, the profession of faith in churches or the mere pretense of it in nations (which are all that will remain) will neither be acceptable to God nor beneficial to the souls of humanity.

Some individuals consider themselves to be little concerned with these matters. While they cannot deny the existence of the defection from the gospel that has been lamented, they may acknowledge its pernicious nature for those who are caught up in it. They believe it is appropriate to warn others of its danger and provide guidance to avoid it. However, they perceive such warnings as necessary for others, not for themselves. They believe they do not face the same temptations or circumstances as those who have previously apostatized or are currently at risk.

Furthermore, they assert their own unwavering resolution, stating that even if everyone were to forsake the gospel's teachings and requirements, their steadfastness would remain unshaken.

However, I do not believe these perceptions are sufficient to render our warnings unnecessary. We do not have control over occasions and temptations, and our present freedom from them does not guarantee immunity from future assaults. Peter did not foresee his impending dangers and fears when he confidently declared his unwavering loyalty to his Master, yet he experienced them within a few short hours. Our spiritual adversaries are cunning, and we can sometimes be under the influence of temptation when we least expect it. It is beyond human reasoning to fully comprehend all the causes, means, and ways in which temptation can be effective and prevalent. If we ever consider ourselves immune from the hour of temptation, which tests all those who dwell in the world and affects many, leading them to become secure and indifferent to the means of our preservation, we are at the greatest risk of being ensnared by it.

Even the strongest resolutions are of no avail without earnest effort. The great apostle had thought and resolved not to deny or forsake Christ, and while this confidence did not betray him into his fall, it did not prevent it either. It was from his own experience that he later offered the holy advice that we should "give a reason for the hope that is within us with meekness and fear" (1 Peter 3:14-15) and "conduct ourselves in fear during our time as sojourners" (1 Peter 1:17). The highest levels of present confidence have often proven to be deceptive indicators of future stability. Therefore, the primary purpose of the following cautions is to prompt individuals to recognize the danger they face, so that they may not be caught off guard by the perilous security in which this rush grows.

Considering the widespread nature of this apostasy may be helpful for this purpose. Ignorance, profanity, worldliness, and a life of sensuality have become prevalent throughout Christendom. The prophet's lament in Isaiah 1:4-6 is fitting for the present state of affairs: "Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, children who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the LORD, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged. Why will you still be struck down? Why will you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and raw wounds." When we hear about individuals who have apostatized from a profession of holiness and turned to a sinful, worldly lifestyle or embraced pernicious errors, it should serve as a warning to examine and be vigilant about our own spiritual state. The apostle offers this counsel in 2 Timothy 2:17-19. So what should be our response when we witness nations, churches, and multitudes of people degenerating from the power of godliness they once professed? If we hear that one person in a city has been afflicted with a plague, we are not completely unaware of our own concern and danger, knowing how easily the infection can spread. But if the entire city is infected and thousands are falling victim to it each week, no one would be foolish enough to require much warning about the danger they are in. Should we not then be even more concerned for our immortal souls and their eternal condition than we are for these perishable bodies that only last a few days in this world, which, even if they escape one illness, can quickly succumb to another? This spiritual "plague," once confined to darkness, now rages as a destructive force even in broad daylight. Nations are depopulated by its influence, and cities are left desolate in terms of their connection to God and the gospel. Is it not high time for us to "be watchful" lest the infection reaches us as well, causing us to "fall away" and come short "of the grace of God," being

"hardened by the deceitfulness of sin"?

Just as our bodies share the same natural composition and susceptibility to disease, being exposed to the same contagion, so do our souls and minds possess the same sinful inclinations and love for the world as those who have been infected, enticed, and led astray, eventually resulting in apostasy. Should we assume that we will always be easily preserved and remain unaffected by the very same temptations that have swept away multitudes before us? Are we inherently better than them or any of them? Do we possess a guarantee of preservation while neglecting the necessary ways, means, and diligence prescribed by the rule of faith? God presents to us not just one, but numerous examples of churches and nations, saying, "Go to those places where I once established my name and see what has become of them, and how I have dealt with them. Will you follow in their footsteps? Do you desire to become like them? Do not presume to say, 'We have Abraham as our father; we have the outward privileges and advantages that they lacked,' for they also enjoyed the same until they forfeited them through their apostasy." Undoubtedly, the widespread prevalence of this evil signifies a danger that no wise person, no one concerned about their own salvation, can or should disregard.

Therefore, as it is always incumbent upon Christians, if ever, to be watchful, to stand guard, to put on the complete armor of God, to be vigilant about themselves, and to remain constant and diligent in utilizing all means, both public and private, for their preservation, the time to do so is now. Even if professors of faith remain unresponsive, unwilling to rouse themselves with the gifts and graces they have received, content in their complacency, and bold and confident in the ways of the world, I lament for them with a heart full of sorrow! For surely they will not be able to withstand the temptations that have come upon the earth to test all those who dwell therein. The outer court has long been trampled upon by the world, and we do not know when the enemies may roar within the very sanctuaries and erect their banners as signs of their conquest. The current state of this defection bears a dangerous aspect. Physicians say, "Nemo moritur in declinatione morbi" - "No man dies in the decline of his disease." When a public epidemic is in its waning or declining phase, the danger is considered largely over. However, while a disease is still growing and spreading its contagion, while the mortality rates increase each week, it is only the hardened and reckless individuals who become indifferent and numb to its common occurrence. The same can be said about the evil that is being lamented today. There is almost nothing in the world that all sensible people universally agree upon, except for the fact that the world is deteriorating day by day. Can anyone provide an example of a sin decreasing or diminishing in its prevalence or practice? On the contrary, we can all testify that certain sins have become even more boldly and confidently committed than in previous times or generations. What evidence do we have of spiritual revival amidst our decline? What concerted efforts are being made towards that goal, except by those who lack influence and means, who are unable to bring about any significant change? The world is deeply divided on matters of religion, engaging in fierce disputes and rivalries, each faction and denomination seeking to attract individuals away from others. The sole preoccupation of the Roman Catholic Church is to employ every possible tactic to draw people into their communion, subjecting their souls, consciences, and entire earthly and eternal interests to the authority of the pope. Others strive to the best of their abilities to hold on to what they have and rescue people from their deceptions. Despite having the advantage of truth on their side and often superior intellectual resources to defend their cause, they are visibly losing ground

day by day. For every person who abandons the Roman Catholic influence, many more are added to it. The only explanation for this phenomenon is the increasing prevalence of apostasy, and this is just one manifestation of it. The efforts that would have formerly converted an entire city from Catholicism now prove insufficient to preserve even one individual. In the meantime, across various religious professions, people continue to disregard the pursuit of true godliness and obedience to the Gospel. While they argue over external forms, the essential power of genuine piety is neglected. Can we identify any instances in the world where holiness is making a recovery or where there are thriving initiatives to revive it? The reputation and essence of true faith are increasingly being held in contempt. Can you provide an example wherein this apostasy from the Gospel does not openly manifest itself - whether it be in atheism, Popery, hatred or mockery of the mysteries of evangelical truth, worldliness, profanity, vanity, sensuality of life, or the lack of love and fruitfulness among believers? Is there any aspect of this apostasy that is not progressing before our eyes? In such circumstances, is it a time for us to be complacent, careless, or negligent? Are we certain that this widespread infection will not find its way into our own dwellings? Have we not already experienced its attempts in some form or another? Can we not discern any decline in zeal or love among ourselves, any attachment to the world that is incongruous with our present state and calling, any neglect of our duties, any infrequency in experiencing God's presence, any lack of spiritual vitality and delight in communion with Christ, or any detrimental growth of worldly wisdom and its accompanying vices? Have we not personally felt the assault of these evils? It is to be feared that those who fail to observe any such symptoms within themselves are afflicted with the spiritual ailment of Laodicea. And if we do not awaken and rouse ourselves to a level of diligence, care, and vigilance that exceeds the ordinary, it is to be feared that before long, the majority of professing Christians will find themselves in a state similar to the church of Sardis - having a reputation of being alive, but in reality, spiritually dead in the eyes of Christ. As this apostasy continues to progress, its ultimate outcome remains uncertain. God has the power to halt it at any time, as He has set limits that it cannot surpass according to His divine purposes. However, provoked by the ingratitude of a wicked world, it is unknown how long God will withhold the more powerful influences and extraordinary manifestations of His Word and Spirit that are necessary for the healing of nations. While I hope and pray for better things, I have no certain assurance that this apostasy will not grow to the extent that it engulfs all visible professions of faith. The entire world, at least in the parts I am familiar with, may once again become dominated by the papacy or be corrupted in their principles and profane in their lives, rendering their religious profession of little consequence. There are two things that I do know and believe: (1) the foundation of God stands secure, bearing the seal of His knowledge of those who are truly His own, His elect who fear Him and faithfully serve Him. They will be preserved from eternal perdition and from anything that necessarily leads to it; (2) God has appointed a time when He will not only put an end to this defection from the Gospel but execute His written and recorded vengeance upon the throne, power, and kingdom of the Antichristian apostasy. In one day, the plagues of Babylon will come upon her, and God will restore a pure language among the people, so that they may all worship Him with one accord. He will revive the beauty of worship and the glory of holiness on the earth. However, in the meantime, I cannot predict what may come to pass. Those who claim to have clearer insight into the future would do well to thoroughly examine the basis of their predictions, as many have been put to shame by their erroneous forecasts, declaring that the yoke of Babylon would be broken within a certain timeframe. This is all I can say for

myself; I have no infallible assurance that the apostasy we are discussing will not, in some way or another, become universal and prevail against any open and visible profession of pure gospel worship and holiness. Even if this is not the case for others, it should serve as a warning to me personally, urging me to strive to be counted worthy to escape and stand before the Son of Man. I am certain that there is at least enough danger to warrant the consideration of all who are concerned about their eternal salvation. If things were to reach such a point, only a few, not many, would be preserved entirely. The majority would suffer some form of loss, and it is not an easy thing to be counted among the few in such a time. Can we believe that those who are careless in their devotion, lukewarm in their zeal, indifferent in their love, unproductive in good works, attached to the world and conformed to its ways, lacking in spiritual illumination, uncertain in their state, ineffectual in the world, and fearful of trials would be among that number? They are gravely mistaken if they find solace in such notions. Different principles, different ways, different courses, and different practices will be required of those who are to be hidden and safeguarded in that day. The prevalence of this defection in various ways should serve as a warning for us to be on guard. If it were limited to one particular form or employed a single method for its advancement, it might be easier to resist or avoid its evil and danger. However, as we have previously categorized it into three general aspects—doctrine, holiness, and worship of the gospel—we find that under each category there are numerous ways and means by which it is promoted. The infection of this plague can be contracted in countless ways, just as Hebrews 12:1 states. Some are infected in their workplaces or specific vocations, while others are affected by the societies in which they belong, both civil and ecclesiastical. Some are ensnared by the vanities and pleasures of the world, while others are enticed by its profits and advantages. Unbelief, the deceitfulness of sin, corrupt lusts and affections, spiritual sloth, and the cares and love of riches all stand ready to entertain and embrace any opportunity, advantage, or means by which this apostasy may find a place in people's lives. Hebrews 3:12-13; Hebrews 12:15-17 provide further insight into this matter. Meanwhile, Satan works diligently through his subtle influence to corrupt our minds, poison our desires, and provide us with alluring or provoking objects (2 Corinthians 11:3; 1 Peter 5:8). In this state of affairs, for every public temptation in the world, there are just as many general ways and means by which this apostasy prevails. The temptations are countless, and therefore people fall into this evil in various ways and to varying degrees. Some are led astray by errors and damnable heresies, denying the Lord who purchased them. Others succumb to superstition and idolatry, while some hold contempt for the mysteries of the gospel and prioritize alternative forms of duty over evangelical obedience. Ambition and pride of life ensnare some, while others are enticed by the love of the world and neglect their spiritual and moral duties under a deceiving profession. Still, others allow their carnal wisdom and sensual lusts to consume their convictions and their efficacy. Uncertainty of mind can lead some to indifference regarding all things supernatural and divine, while vain-glory and the fear of being associated with the scorned society of the truly religious can lead others astray. Countless individuals are initiated into irrecoverable profaneness through the empty pageantry and spectacles of the age. There are many other ways, too numerous to mention, by which this evil is propagated and people fall under its power. Through these means, even the common air we breathe becomes infected (1 Corinthians 15:33). Everywhere we tread, there are snakes in the grass and scorpions under every stone. Snares are laid all around us, some of them adorned and presented in such an appealing manner that many loose professors have taken them up and wear them as ornaments. Those who manage to escape one evil often

fall into others daily. In the face of so many dangers, how can they expect to escape if they neglect any duty or means of preservation that God has appointed and made useful for their protection?

It is important to consider that there is an apostasy that leads to irrecoverable, eternal ruin. This is what we have been discussing in this context, as previously explained. No one in this world can be considered unsavable according to the gospel, meaning that they cannot be deemed unavoidably destined for destruction by any known rule of God's revealed will, unless they become apostates. There are different types and degrees of apostasy that may have various causes and effects, leading to different outcomes. Strong temptations, surprises, and negligence in guarding against the deceitfulness of sin can result in temporary denials of Christ and the gospel, lamentable deviations from the proper observance of His commands, and wandering into foolish opinions. However, individuals can be restored from all these and brought to salvation through repentance. There are remarkable instances of God's grace and patience that exemplify this. Therefore, there is no reason for despair for those who are awakened in this world and have the opportunity to seek deliverance from any sin or destructive course of sinning. When a person is called to deal with God regarding their eternal well-being, they should not assume the role of the absolute judge of themselves. Such despair says, "I am in the place of God in this matter. There is no goodness, grace, or mercy for me unless I can comprehend it." God has counteracted this mindset through notable examples of the recovery of great apostates. However, as we have previously discussed, there is indeed an apostasy that is irrecoverable. God permits many examples of this in the world to instill awe not only in bold and presumptuous sinners but also in those who are careless and negligent. The apostle explicitly reminds the Hebrews of God's severity against apostates in this passage and in Hebrews 10:26-27. In one instance, he highlights unprofitableness under the means of grace, and in the other, negligence in attending to the administration of gospel ordinances. Therefore, if anyone experiences the beginnings of decay and decline from the holiness and worship of the gospel, all of which have an inherent tendency toward irrecoverable apostasy, should they not be constantly vigilant over themselves, lest they exceed the boundaries of God's patience and grace? Should we not be careful about every sin or neglect of duty that has the potential to lead to such a woeful outcome? The apostle reveals the end of apostasy in this passage to serve as a warning against its beginnings. For further assistance on this matter, readers may refer to our discussions on Hebrews 4:3. It is not an easy task to halt a course of backsliding once it has begun. In conclusion, I offer two directions for this purpose: (1) Beware of engaging in a course of any sin. Although not every sin immediately leads to final apostasy, persisting in any sin does. (2) Be cautious about approaching specific sins that have a particular inclination toward apostasy, as previously explained. Our final consideration revolves around the nature and guilt of this sin, wherever it may be found, along with God's severity against it. We can view it in its totality, as described by the apostle in Hebrews 6:4-6. Based on our previous exposition of the passage, we can conclude that total apostasy from the gospel, once professed, is a greater and more heinous sin than the act of the Jews crucifying the Lord Christ during his earthly ministry. This has been sufficiently demonstrated in our explanation. It remains for us to briefly examine what factors contribute to such a total apostasy, further emphasizing the accuracy of the exposition and the necessity of the warnings provided. Although I will specifically address total apostasy from all profession, the following aspects can be found, to some degree, in all those who are guilty of the partial defection we have described. Thus, the following elements are always present in this grave offense:

(1.) The loss of all appreciation for any goodness or excellence in the gospel, its truth, or the state of its profession and worship. Every person who has earnestly professed the gospel, beyond mere pretense and custom, has experienced some kind of taste, relish, or sweetness in its teachings. They have "tasted of the good word of God and the powers of the world to come." Whether in the substance of the gospel itself, the manner of its proclamation, or the prescribed acts of worship, they have found something that has brought satisfaction to their minds and consciences. Just as a person walking in a pleasant garden in spring will catch the scent of flowers, even if they do not pluck any; or as one tasting well-seasoned food will savor its flavor, even if they lack the desire or appetite to eat it; or as a person walking in the sun will feel its warmth, similarly, those living under the preaching of the gospel and professing its doctrine will inevitably be affected by its excellence and goodness to some extent. However, in the case of total apostasy, this taste and relish are lost. This typically occurs through a love for sin and the pleasures of the world. When the soul becomes filled and consumed by these things, all its faculties grow numb to spiritual matters, unable to discern or appreciate any value in them. Instead, it despises and rejects them as contrary to what it has immersed itself in or surrendered to. This loss of taste and relish usually occurs as the initial stage of apostasy. Individuals who were once hopeful and promising in their faith suddenly find nothing in Christ or the gospel that delights or attracts them anymore. The prevalence of this phenomenon among those who once showed signs of faith is truly dreadful to contemplate.

(2.) Subsequently, there is a loss of all pervasive evidence and conviction regarding the truth of the gospel doctrine. All who profess the gospel are expected to possess this conviction, and those who profess it sincerely indeed have it. Otherwise, why would they make a profession of it if they did not assent to its truth based on conviction and evidence? We are not referring here to those whose profession is merely based on custom or upbringing. Rather, we are addressing those whose persuasion is grounded on valid reasons and evidences that effectively overcome temptations and objections. Apostates, however, lose this conviction in the next stage. The truth of the gospel remains unchanged, as do the arguments and evidences supporting it. However, these no longer have any impact or authority on their minds. They may not immediately denounce the gospel as a falsehood or a fabricated tale; instead, they may let the concepts of it lie dormant and neglected in their minds for a period, without giving them the attention that acknowledged truths of that nature deserve. They do not receive any influence from its authority. When individuals lose these convictions, they no longer assent to the truth of the gospel based on its proper evidence and become outright unbelievers. This will ultimately lead to a formal renunciation of the truth in its entirety. Once individuals reach this state of mind, they will reveal themselves through a lifestyle completely disregarding the precepts of Christ and through flippant, irreverent expressions concerning the Scriptures, which will flow freely from their hearts when given the opportunity. This progression toward total apostasy follows the preceding stages. Once individuals have lost all taste and relish for the goodness and excellence of the Word of God in their hearts and affections, they will not long maintain a prevailing conviction of its truth in their minds.

(3.) Consequently, there is a contempt for the things promised in the gospel. The promises of the gospel encompass the very essence of human blessedness and happiness, including peace of mind in this world and eternal felicity in the presence of God. These are things that humanity, in its essence, cannot despise unless it descends into atheistic brutishness. However, individuals can and often do despise and hold in contempt the manner and conditions in which these promises are

presented and declared through the gospel. They reject and disdain the idea that eternal happiness and the enjoyment of God can only be attained through Jesus Christ. They reject the notion that the only way to attain present peace of mind and serenity is through faith in and obedience to Christ. This rejection naturally follows the loss of conviction mentioned earlier. When the evidence of the truth of the gospel is lost, the promises themselves are despised. Herein lies one of the most severe aggravations of this sin. While individuals inherently desire the substance of the promises contained in the gospel, as they represent their blessedness, they will, out of enmity towards Jesus Christ, reject and despise them, thereby depriving their souls of them for eternity. They would rather have no relationship with God than have it through Christ. This rejection of the promises of the gospel, considering them undesired or untrustworthy in their content or truthfulness, is an incredibly offensive sin. It casts the greatest reproach upon Jesus Christ, undermining both His truth and power, which even the Jews could not impugn when they took His life.

(4.) They choose alternative ways or means to replace Christ and the gospel for the ends they once sought through them. This was the case for those who turned to Judaism. They believed that they would find in the law and ceremonies what they could not find in the gospel. There are two types of individuals who do this: [1.] Those who retain their general aim of worshiping God, doing what is acceptable to Him in religion, and believing what is right about Him, but they reject the gospel as an insufficient and deceptive guide in these matters. This can be done either entirely, by those who apostatize to Judaism or Islam, or partially, by those who turn away from the purity, truth, spirituality, and mystery of the gospel to embrace forms of Christianity that deviate from its essence, such as Catholicism or similar practices. I do not intend to assign the entire guilt of this sin to the latter group, but I do emphasize that they bear a significant part in it, and without repentance, they will share in the punishment it deserves. This contemptuously undermines the truth and efficacy of Christ and the gospel, portraying them as inadequate and deceitful in fulfilling their intended purpose. It also implies that falsehood, diabolical inventions, or delusions are preferable to them, which is the gravest provocation to the glory of God. [2.] The latter group completely abandons the general aim of pleasing God and living for Him. Initially, they believed that this pursuit would bring them considerable satisfaction and used the gospel for that purpose. However, having fallen under the influence of the preceding degrees of apostasy and holding the gospel in contempt as incapable of providing satisfactory answers to their expectations, they now indulge in the lusts and pleasures of the world. They prefer these over all the promises of Christ and disdain all the threats issued against those who pursue them. Countless examples of such apostates can be found in the world.

(5.) In addition to the aforementioned factors, there is a perfect hatred and contempt towards those who remain steadfast in their adherence to and profession of the gospel. It has been observed that great apostates often become great persecutors, either through their words or actions, according to their power. Just as those who love Christ also love all who belong to Him, apostates who hate Him also hate all who belong to Him. Their hatred extends to the entire group, and they despise them for their adherence and trust in the very things that the apostates have abandoned. They consider them weak and foolish, relying on themselves, their reason, and their pride. They harbor revenge against them, viewing them as guilty of the most heinous villainy and desperate wickedness. Deep down, they know that believers have a future judgment awaiting them from their

Lord, and this drives them to desire their complete eradication from the face of the earth. While those who crucified Christ in His physical person did so only once and could do no more, these apostates continue to persecute believers every day, as any harm done to His followers is regarded as harm done to Christ Himself: "Why do you persecute me?"

(6.) Individuals who reach this stage also develop a particular contempt for the Spirit of God and His entire work in the dispensation of the gospel. The promise of the Holy Spirit's work is a distinct privilege and glory of the gospel. The Spirit is sent and given by Jesus Christ in a special manner after His exaltation. His entire purpose is to glorify and exalt Jesus Christ and make His mediation effective in the souls of people. The Spirit's work in relation to Christ is vital to the life and essence of the gospel. Therefore, those who apostatize from the gospel harbor a unique enmity towards the Holy Spirit and His work. This enmity often manifests itself early on in the fatal backsliding of individuals. Once they "trample underfoot the Son of God" and consider "the blood of the covenant, by which they were sanctified, an unholy thing," as seen in the earlier instances, they will inevitably "insult the Spirit of grace" (Hebrews 10:29). The specific ways in which this is done will be further examined in that passage, if God permits and we have the opportunity. It is at this stage and degree that the sin of apostasy becomes formally unforgivable.

(7.) Finally, openly professing a detestation of the gospel, as far as it aligns with their worldly interests and advantages, completes the soul-ruining sin of apostasy. They may live in times and places where openly renouncing Christ would be detrimental to their worldly pursuits. However, when the only restraint from openly declaring their renunciation is their secular disadvantage, their mindset is considered a full profession of apostasy. In light of all these factors, along with potentially other contributing elements, I will conclude two things regarding the sin of apostasy: (1) It is a far greater sin than that committed by the majority of Jews who crucified Jesus Christ in His earthly ministry, as previously asserted. (2) It is inconsistent with the holiness, righteousness, honor, and faithfulness of God to restore individuals who are fully and openly guilty of apostasy to repentance. Repentance may be granted to them in Hell with no disadvantage to the glory of God. When individuals obstinately reject the only remedy and provision that God has provided for sinners, despite having experienced some conviction of its truth and excellence, and in doing so show contempt towards the entire Triune God and each person's unique role in the dispensation and application of grace, God, out of His faithfulness and holiness, cannot and will not extend further mercy to such presumptuous sinners. While He may endure them for a time in this world without visible signs of His wrath, it is solely as "vessels of wrath fitted for destruction" and as those whose damnation is not delayed. These warnings should suffice to alert individuals to the danger of this evil. They serve as calls from heaven to consider these matters, unless one is hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. The judgments of God impending over or already inflicted upon a wicked and apostatizing world further emphasize the need to ponder these warnings.

Now, although most people seem to be secure enough and unaffected by considering matters of this nature, there are some who may, due to their own misunderstandings, become discouraged and hindered in their pursuit of obedience. Therefore, I will take a moment to address and alleviate the objections that these individuals raise, which are the source of their discouragement. I will provide some guidance tailored to their particular situation.

Firstly, some individuals may believe that they are implicated in the described backsliding and apostasy, leading them to fear that the threatening mentioned in the text applies to them as well. They may feel that they are judicially condemned to impenitency, as they had previously achieved a higher level of holiness, readiness, consistency, and constancy in their obedience than they currently maintain. They have sadly and drastically deviated from a better state, experiencing spiritual deadness, fruitlessness, neglect of duties, and possibly even engaging in sinful behavior for an extended period of time. Consequently, they fear that since they are aware of having forsaken and distanced themselves from God, He will completely abandon them, leaving them trapped in impenitency.

Answer: As this situation often occurs, it is also often addressed. Therefore, I will not dwell on it extensively, but only in relation to our current purpose and discussion. Here's what I have to say:

It is important to acknowledge that all such instances of backsliding are not only sinful but also dangerous in terms of their outcome. Those who find themselves under their influence or have been overtaken by them should not only consider the guilt of the specific sins committed and duties neglected but primarily reflect on the overall state of their souls and the risk of being "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." In such a state, no one can have any spiritual assurance or security that they will not fall completely and ultimately from God. Any belief to the contrary is a deceptive presumption that will only contribute to their apostasy and ruin. There is no truthful word or promise from God that guarantees His love and favor while one remains in such a condition. Therefore, it is undoubtedly the duty of anyone who is aware of any such wrongdoing in their heart or actions to diligently address it, considering the eternal well-being of their soul.

It is possible for individuals to experience a decline, a falling away from the level of holiness and obedience they had previously attained, and this may occur for a prolonged period, perhaps due to a specific sin. However, this does not automatically place them under the absolute power of the threatening mentioned in the text. The necessary circumstances and aggravations of sin have been explained in the previous discussion. It can be considered a safe general principle that anyone who is spiritually aware of their backsliding is undoubtedly in a recoverable condition. Some individuals may be recoverable even if they are not yet aware of it, as long as they are capable of being made aware through convictions. No one is beyond the hope of salvation until they are beyond the possibility of repentance, and no one is beyond the possibility of repentance until they have become completely hardened against all gospel convictions. Therefore, there is such a thing as recoverable backsliding. Here are a few reasons why: (1) Christ calls people to such a recovery, demonstrating His approval and willingness to assist those who sincerely devote themselves to their duty (Revelation 2:5; Revelation 3:1-3). (2) God has promised to heal and restore such backslidings in believers (Hosea 14:4). With these assurances, there should be sufficient encouragement for individuals to strive for their own recovery. Those who resist making such efforts are likely driven by either unbelief or a love for sin. Therefore, it is important to take action and seek restoration.

If individuals have experienced a decline in their pursuit of holiness and obedience, but it did not stem from a dislike of Christ and the gospel, and they have not deliberately chosen another path of duty or sin in place of Christ, then there is a great necessity and encouragement for them to diligently seek a blessed recovery. Even if their decline has been caused by the power of

temptations and the deceitfulness of sin, combined with their own sloth and negligence, which is the worst-case scenario in this situation, if they resolve in their hearts to return to their former commitment to Christ, recognizing that it was better for them then, the Lord Christ calls them to do so, and He is ready to receive them upon their return, as evidenced in the promises of the gospel. However, these individuals must remember that the command to return is urgent, just as it was for Lot when he was instructed to flee from Sodom. They must not hesitate or delay. It is a matter of their souls, and the present moment, in which they are being warned, is the only opportune time for their escape. If anyone lingers, as Lot did, the Lord will lay hold of them and bring them forth by the power of His grace for their deliverance. The specific ways and duties these individuals need to undertake, as well as the means they are to employ, are not the focus of our current discussion. My intention is simply to demonstrate that those who express such concerns should not be discouraged by this context and its exposition from seeking a recovery, in which they will find acceptance with God.

Secondly, it may be argued that the ultimate outcome is the same whether we fall from gospel holiness or never attain it in the first place. Some may claim, "This is our situation. Despite our previous perceptions of ourselves and others' opinions of us based on our profession, we now realize through experience that we have not achieved the level of holiness required by the gospel." They assert that their corruptions, perhaps specific ones, are too strong for their convictions. Despite believing they had overcome these corruptions, they have repeatedly succumbed to them. They find that the power of certain sinful desires has become so ingrained in them that they continually fall under its control. Consequently, they may have lost much of their awareness of the guilt associated with these sins and their ability to resist them. It must be acknowledged that this condition is spiritually perilous and, if not delivered from, may lead to total apostasy. To address this situation properly, we should note the following:

There are three degrees of sin's power and dominance, and it is crucial to determine under which degree those who voice this complaint find themselves. The first degree is mentioned in Romans 7:23, where the apostle Paul declares:

"I see a law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin." In this condition of being captive to sin, there are two important considerations: The will, in its desires and inclinations, remains steadfastly opposed to the power and influence of sin. Even in its dominance, the will experiences hardship and recognizes its captivity. This captivity to the law of sin does not extend to the outward commission of sin, but rather encompasses the internal struggle within the mind and affections regarding sin. No person in this world is completely free from this condition; to some extent, everyone grapples with it, just as the apostle Paul did. He groaned for deliverance from it (Romans 7:24).

There is another degree of sin's prevalence described in Romans 6:16; Romans 6:19 : "Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?" This refers to a state where individuals willingly give themselves up to the service of sin, disregarding any checks from conscience or understanding. However, we are not presently discussing those who willingly serve sin without resistance.

Between these two degrees, there is a middle ground, described in 2 Peter 2:19. People in this state can be considered "servants of corruption" since they are overcome by it and brought into bondage. They are not willing servants of sin who submit without any struggle or conflict. On the other hand, they surpass those who complain of being captives to the law of sin since they are explicitly referred to as "servants of corruption," which is not the case for the others. These individuals, therefore, appear to be those who, despite their convictions and efforts, are still under the power of a prevailing and habitual lust, leading them to engage in repeated acts of sin.

If this is the condition that is being complained of, it must be acknowledged as a state of significant hazard and danger. Those who are not deeply aware of this are likened to someone lying in the midst of the sea or atop a mast, as described in Proverbs 23:29-35 in reference to those who indulge in excessive wine. Therefore, unless a remedy is found in this situation, it will deprive individuals of, or prevent them from attaining, any assured participation in gospel holiness. At this point, I must refrain from discussing the nature and means of mortifying sin in general. I have already addressed this in other discussions, providing the best guidance and advice I am capable of offering. I would direct those concerned to seek guidance and counsel from capable spiritual guides where available. It is worth noting that such actions have sometimes shattered, defeated, and dispersed sin's forces in the soul, where individuals, relying on their own wisdom and strength, were unable to contend with it. This seeking of guidance is an ordained means of God's provision for this purpose, as stated in James 5:16 : "Confess your faults one to another," etc. It is important to recognize that the misuse of this divine ordinance by Satan, by turning it into a mandatory confession of all sins to a priest with the power of absolution, has led to numerous evils and proved to be a destructive mechanism, hindering individuals from receiving the intended benefits of this practice. Therefore, if anyone has experienced sin being and continuing to be too powerful for them, and they find themselves in a state where the wise saying "Woe to him who is alone" applies, let them seek advice from those who have the knowledge and ability to speak a timely word to the weary and faint-hearted. They will find relief in doing so. God will reveal the hidden evils of this kind that individuals try to conceal to their own detriment, and He will expose festering wounds that individuals may attempt to cover up, which, if left unattended, can lead to further decay and harm.

Secondly, the desired outcome will never be achieved without exerting violence against ourselves when it comes to occasions of sin, especially concerning the specific corruption that is assumed to be prevalent. In this case, when known situations arise that could provoke or enable the complained-about evil to manifest, we must not entertain any deliberations, inclinations, or compromises. Instead, we must act with force and promptly execute the resolutions we have made, without engaging in any debate or discussion. This is the condition in which we must heed our Savior's advice, as mentioned in Matthew 5:29-30, about "plucking out a right eye" and "cutting off a right hand," which metaphorically signifies the need to forcefully suppress our affections and desires. This aligns with the counsel given in Proverbs 4:14-15 : "Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away." The repetition of these expressions emphasizes the necessity of acting with resolute determination and holy violence in this particular obedience. There are three aspects to this holy violence concerning occasions that may lead to the dominance of a particular corruption: The mind must reject the initial solicitations of these occasions. When circumstances arise or are occurring

in a person's life where their lust or sinful inclination typically manifests itself, these temptations will present themselves and appear enticing, as mentioned in Psalms 50:18 and Proverbs 23:31. Various thoughts and justifications may arise in the mind to make the occasion seem necessary or at least not dangerous. However, if these insinuations are not immediately and firmly rejected without any hesitation or delay, the soul will likely become entangled and overcome once again.

Expressing a firm rejection of any reservations or compromises, even if the occasion is tempting, so that the mind refuses to entertain them under any pretext. Such reservations may arise, suggesting that although a person may indulge in their present inclinations to a certain extent, they will stop or avoid what those actions may lead to. However, when the mind is fully aware of the deceitfulness of the heart in this matter, it will recognize its own foolishness in entertaining false promises or reservations, and vehemently reject any such thoughts.

Making practical changes, such as avoiding the place itself, social settings, or company where such occasions are presented, while exerting a determined effort to control one's affections. This aligns with the emphasis and exhortation in the aforementioned passage from Proverbs 4:14-15.

These practices of holy violence are necessary for individuals who desire to be freed from the power of a persistently prevailing corruption. Those who do not consider their deliverance worth such vigilance and care will continue to live under the dominion of sin.

Thirdly, maintaining constancy in private prayer as a means of combating the power of such corruption. This is the only way for a person to address God concerning this evil, as certain thoughts, circumstances, and pleas are not suitable for sharing with others. It is often found that consistent, fervent, and faithful private prayer is like Moses and Amalek. When Moses' hands were lifted up, Israel prevailed, but when they were lowered, Amalek gained the upper hand. If a person engages in dedicated prayer to oppose a specific sin or corruption, regardless of their own resolutions or confidence in their own intentions, as their constancy or fervency in that duty weakens or wavers, the power of sin within them strengthens and will successfully tempt them on the next occasion. The most meticulous efforts, wisdom, or abilities will not bring about deliverance in this case without a conscientious commitment to and fulfillment of this duty.

There are many other similar things that could be discussed, but I must not deviate too far from my main purpose. I thought it necessary to offer these points as guidance for those who may be hindered in their pursuit of "perfect holiness in the fear of God."

* * *

14. CHAPTER 13.

CHAPTER 13.

DIRECTIONS TO AVOID THE POWER OF A PREVAILING APOSTASY. In addition to the warnings given in the previous chapter, some directions may be added that could be useful for those who want to avoid the occasions, causes, and dangers of the apostasy that has been discussed thus far. Although, as mentioned before, a vigilant commitment to all gospel duties and the active exercise of gospel virtues in general are required for our preservation, there are certain aspects that specifically relate to the present state and circumstances of the mentioned evil, and these should be particularly noted. The fact that some people despise such things should not deter us from diligently attending to them, as long as they are prescribed in the Scripture for similar cases. The contempt of these directions stems only from the pride and complacency that are significant aspects of the apostasy being discussed. Our first direction of this nature is that we should strive to genuinely and truly comprehend the significance of God's glory in this matter and understand our duty in relation to it. Without this understanding, we are susceptible to the grip of the security that leads to the broad path and wide gate of apostasy. In fact, if our hearts are not primarily and fundamentally affected by the concern for God's glory in any evil that occurs in the world, then our professed faith lacks sincerity. When God threatened to disinherit and destroy the Israelites in the wilderness due to their rebellious provocation, Moses was deeply affected by the concern for the glory and name of God in that situation. This can be seen in Numbers 14:11-19. Similarly, Joshua also displayed this concern when the same people sinned and faced punishment. He asked, "What will you do for your great name?" (Joshua 7:8-9), which has unfortunately become a subject of mockery in our times.

We inevitably think about these matters as they are commonly discussed among people. However, if our thoughts are limited to our own well-being and that of a few individuals close to us, while lightly regarding the evil that has befallen other parts of the world, we are unlikely to be delivered from the destructive consequences that these things openly lead to. Should we not be concerned that many nations where the profession of the gospel and the open submission of soul and conscience to Jesus Christ once flourished have now been completely overtaken by Mohammedanism, paganism, and atheism? Do we think these events are mere coincidences or the result of random shifts in worldly affairs, to which all things are susceptible? Has any nation or people ever lost the gospel in terms of their profession without first rejecting it in terms of its power, purity, and obedience? Is the glory of God and the honor of Christ not deeply involved in all of this? Should we not be deeply concerned that countless souls, who still outwardly profess the name of Christ, have fallen into such a state of degeneration from the mysteries, holiness, and worship of the gospel? Their actions have provoked the holy God to subject them to woeful bondage and slavery for generations, without any sign or hope of relief. It is truly lamentable that the power of this apostasy has been so strong that they have not accepted the consequences of their sins nor been improved by the sufferings they have endured. Doesn't the holy name by which we are called suffer in these circumstances? Isn't it evil spoken of because of them? The miseries,

prolonged calamities, and oppressions of numerous nations who profess to be Christians have become a stumbling block and a temptation, casting doubt on the truth of the gospel and the power of Jesus Christ. These nations experience distress and deprivation comparable to that of the Jews, lacking any assurance of divine protection and remaining unrepentant in their afflictions. While it is true that the church may face great trials and persecutions even in its best state, God orchestrates these trials in a way that brings glory to Himself and spiritual growth to those who endure them. Ultimately, the gospel and its faithful followers do not suffer loss through suffering. However, when we consider the horrific judgments that have befallen many parts of the apostate Christian world, there is nothing but cause for lamentation and temptation. Should we not be deeply concerned that a significant number of those who bear the name of Christians, enjoying worldly prosperity, openly engage in idolatry? This not only brings unspeakable scandal upon the Christian religion but also exposes them to the imminent danger of eternal ruin. Should we not be troubled that many of these individuals renounce the humble and meek spirit of Christ and the gospel, instead choosing to persecute, ruin, and destroy other Christians who may even be more righteous than themselves, simply because they refuse to submit their souls and consciences to their imposed authority? Is it not alarming to witness the dreadful consequences of this apostasy, resulting in all manner of heinous sins that plague the world?

Certainly, if we do not feel a deep sense of distress regarding these matters, if our souls do not grieve in secret over them, if we are not concerned about the diminishing presence of truth and holiness in the world, then we ourselves are at significant risk of being swept away by the deluge of apostasy.

If we truly understand the importance of upholding the glory of God in these matters, it would be appropriate to consider what our duties are in light of this realization.

1. The first requirement of us is to privately mourn over the lamentable state to which the profession of Christianity has deteriorated in the world. God specifically recognizes those who grieve over the prevalence of sin and the apostasy of the church, as indicated in Ezekiel 9:4. He will not pay heed to anyone else when executing judgments upon ungodly apostates. While we may choose to suffer alongside those with whom we do not sin, it is our lack of concern for the sins of others that leads to apathy in the face of their suffering. Therefore, it is only those who, out of a deep awareness of God's dishonor and genuine compassion for the souls of perishing sinners, sigh and cry over these abominations, who will either be preserved from the public calamities that may ensue or find comforting support amidst them. The fact that there is a general indifference among the best of us towards these matters is a foreboding sign that things are deteriorating further. Who among us sheds tears because people disregard God's law? Who sufficiently laments the decline of faith, truth, and holiness in the world? Most people, like Gallio, are either apathetic towards these concerns or, at best, only seek to protect their own interests amidst the impending destruction. Many measure all things solely by personal advantage and fail to see any faults in the profession of religion, except in those who voice their grievances. Although the degeneration of Christianity among its present-day adherents has become a common topic of conversation, very few are truly moved by it in their hearts as they ought to be. In this state of affairs, it is essential for us to engage in continual prayer, invoking the promises recorded in the Word of God for the restoration of the original glory, power, and purity of the Christian faith. This was the means by which the church was restored in the past, and it remains our duty today (Isaiah

62:6-7). Our hopes are anchored in this pursuit. Nothing is too difficult for God. If He chooses to work in this matter, no one can hinder Him. The situation is not beyond His healing touch. He can send peace, truth, and righteousness from above and cause them to prevail on the earth. If everything were left solely to the wills of fallen humanity in their corrupted state, we could only expect a further increase in abominations. Sovereign and effective grace can still provide relief; nothing else has the power to do so. Truly, salvation is not to be sought from the lofty mountains and hills, but in the Lord our God lies the salvation of His people. However, God must be diligently sought after. Remaining steadfast in this duty, praying for others out of a deep sense of the importance of God's glory and a zeal for the honor of the gospel, is the most effective means of our own deliverance and preservation.

We are also required to demonstrate unwavering testimony against the prevailing apostasy. This entails two aspects: (1) openly and boldly professing and defending the faith and truth of the gospel. The prevailing trend of casting contempt and ridicule on essential evangelical truths can discourage many from openly acknowledging and professing them. People often consider various factors before engaging in the defense of truth, leading them to find no opportune moment while pernicious errors are boldly propagated each day. Thus, now, more than ever, it is crucial for all who hold God's ways in their hearts to earnestly contend for the faith that was once delivered to the saints. Neglecting this duty due to sloth, self-love, fear, or worldly ambitions will eventually bring unrest and trouble. (2) Exemplifying holiness, righteousness, and fruitful good works is also part of the testimony against the prevailing apostasy that is required of us. While this is our constant duty at all times, the advancement of the pernicious evil we are addressing necessitates a redoubled diligence in this regard, thereby shining a light upon it.

Secondly, in such a season, it is crucial for those who desire to be preserved to exercise a careful and vigilant watch over their own hearts, considering their duty and the dangers they face. While temptations abound, accompanied by various circumstances that increase their effectiveness, and external factors contribute to this evil, the root of every person's spiritual decline lies within their own hearts and spirits. The differing effects of these influences on individuals' minds and lives primarily stem from their own choices. Their level of care, diligence, and watchfulness on one hand, or their slothfulness, carelessness, and negligence on the other, determine whether they will be preserved or overcome. Therefore, the advice I offer is that which is given by the Holy Spirit in this matter (Proverbs 4:23), "Guard your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life," or, as emphasized in the original text, "Above all else, guard your heart." People in the world are most occupied with preserving and increasing their possessions and belongings, for which they employ great care, watchfulness, diligence, and the utmost wisdom and effort. It is common knowledge, except among those who are consumed by their lusts and given over to wastefulness and extravagance. However, the care and diligence required to guard our hearts (as determined by the Holy Spirit) should surpass any measure applied to other matters, yet it is evident that such wisdom is lacking among us. Many people show little diligence in guarding their hearts. As long as they can safeguard their other interests, they leave their hearts to follow their own course. In fact, the heart is often neglected and lost precisely in the pursuit of keeping other things. While it is occupied with preserving our lives and the world and its possessions, it becomes consumed by worldliness, covetousness, earthly wisdom, negligence of spiritual duties, and barrenness in producing righteous fruits. It is an unfavorable exchange, as nothing is truly gained through this

neglect, and ultimately, everything, including the heart and the world, will be lost. The Holy Spirit plainly conveys this message in the directive to guard our hearts above all else. We are not only commanded to do so, but a compelling reason is provided to enforce our obedience: "For from it flow the springs of life." All events depend on the state of our hearts. When our hearts are guarded, the course of our entire lives will align with God's will, and the end will be the enjoyment of Him in eternity. Neglecting this duty will result in the loss of life, both in terms of obedience in this life and the eternal glory to come. Therefore, this is the primary instruction to be applied in the present situation. If anyone wishes to avoid being overcome by the power and prevalence of the causes of apostasy mentioned earlier, let them carefully examine their own hearts, as the springs of life flow from within. The term "heart" in Scripture refers to all the faculties of our souls, encompassing our entire rational capacity for moral and spiritual operations. We also understand it in the same way. Keeping the heart entails preserving the proper order and functioning of these faculties, as they engage in all things according to their distinct powers, and fulfilling the soul's duty towards God. In the context of the present duty, several specific aspects are involved: The heart must remain awake and attentive to its own deceitfulness. The wise man warns that "Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool" (Proverbs 28:26). The root of all complacency, which leads to inevitable harm, lies in individuals leaving their hearts to their own devices and placing their trust in them. According to the judgment of the Holy Spirit, a person is unwise if, despite the numerous instructions and warnings in Scripture about the deceitfulness of their hearts, they carelessly entrust their eternal welfare to it. Peter, the apostle, once trusted in his own heart with unwavering confidence, and we know the outcome of that. It is a common tendency for many people in this matter. They believe and convince themselves that even if everyone else were to abandon the gospel completely or fail to maintain the level of obedience they have achieved, they would not do the same. However, numerous visible examples demonstrate the disappointment of such claims. Every apostate once believed they would never fall away. We are specifically referring to those who possessed the light and conviction of their duty, and consequently made resolutions to remain steadfast. Therefore, maintaining a constant, vigilant suspicion towards our own hearts regarding their deceitfulness, their inclination to be deceived, and their hidden justifications for yielding to temptations, serves as the foundation for all other necessary duties to preserve our faith.

Even this truth is despised by some. They deny the existence of deceit in their own hearts and fail to recognize it in others. While they acknowledge the prevalence of deceit in human interactions, they cannot conceive of deceit and treachery within their own hearts concerning their actions, duties, ways, God, and eternal state. They wonder, if one cannot trust their own heart to be loyal to its spiritual and eternal interests, whom or what can they trust? How fortunate would they be if such beliefs governed their present obligations and future judgment! However, is it not possible that a dominant self-love blinds individuals and leads them to impose false perceptions and notions regarding sin and duty upon their minds and affections? Is there no disorder in the faculties of our souls, no confusion in their operations? Are there no remnants of sin that are inseparable from them in this life, accompanied by various forms of spiritual deceitfulness? Are there no corrupt reasonings that arise, prompting the postponement of important duties? Are there no inclinations toward undue pride and presumption? Is there no vanity or uncertainty in the mind? Can all these countless aspects be present without any deceit or association with deceit? As one person said to the Druids long ago, "Solis nosse Deos et coeli Numina vobis Aut solis nescire

datum," —

"To know only the gods and the divine powers of the heavens, Or to know only ignorance, is granted to you."

...may be applied to those who hold such beliefs: either they alone possess knowledge of the state of the human heart in relation to God, evangelical obedience, and one's eternal well-being, or they alone are ignorant of it. Until we have greater confidence in this purported new discovery, we must continue to emphasize the importance of individuals being diligently aware of the deceitful tendencies of their own hearts. Neglecting this duty would render all our efforts futile, no matter what else we do. Blessed is the one who maintains constant vigilance! Such mindfulness will lead people to carefully and conscientiously avoid any situations, both internal and external, that may have the potential to steer them away from the gospel. Engaging in a bold, reckless, and carefree mindset that exposes oneself to various influences, indulges in frivolities, and partakes in profane conversations, with a fearless confidence in the allurements of seduction orchestrated by deceitful individuals, has been the downfall of countless believers. The virtues of self-distrust, humility, and a reverent fear of causing offense, along with similar graces that safeguard the soul, can only be nurtured and exercised when individuals are fully awake to the deceptive nature of their own hearts.

We must keep our hearts awake and attentive to the help and relief that can only be found in Christ Jesus, the leader of our salvation. Despite Peter's confidence, it was only through the intervention of Christ that he was saved from complete ruin: "I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail." If anyone succeeds in dissuading people from seeking all their spiritual help and relief from Christ, relying on Him alone for daily supplies of grace and strength, for continuous guidance, assistance, preservation, and the establishment of grace (as they attempt in various ways), there is no need to fear that they will easily be led astray by whatever others, Satan, or the world may desire. However, our discussions are based on different principles. We consider Jesus Christ to be the source and origin of all grace, the One who alone can preserve us in faith and obedience, and who imparts effective supplies of grace to believers for that purpose. Therefore, we are to continually approach Him through faith and prayer for our preservation, as directed in Hebrews 4:15-16. He alone can "protect us from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world to test those who dwell on the earth" (Revelation 3:10). Hence, those who wish to be safeguarded from the power of temptations that threaten apostasy from all directions must keep their hearts perpetually attentive to their only source of help and relief. Those who have not recognized the danger they are in will see little reason to concern themselves with these instructions. However, for those who are affected by the evident ruin of countless individuals and their own apparent peril, caused by prevailing factors and innumerable occasions thereof, whose eyes have been opened to observe the prevailing tendency in the world to abandon the core principles of the gospel and the diverse ways in which this inclination is encouraged, followed, and pursued — they will understand the importance of being reminded of a refuge and sanctuary to which they can turn and be preserved.

Let us keep our hearts attentive to their own spiritual condition, whether there is progress or decay in holiness. We have already discussed in our exposition of Hebrews 4:12-13 the subtle and often imperceptible beginnings of spiritual decline, along with the reasons and causes behind them. I will

only add that in a time like the one we are currently experiencing, it is crucial to frequently examine ourselves, to assess the state of our inner being — the health of our spiritual life, whether our faith and love are thriving or waning, and whether our affections are inclined towards God or the world. Failure to do so will expose us to greater dangers than we may be capable of escaping on our own. These considerations are not only useful, but necessary for our ongoing obedience. What is particularly emphasized here is their practice and implementation in light of the evil and danger under discussion. Even when we have faithfully fulfilled our duties, we can only rejoice in God's grace if we are preserved and delivered. However, if we are found to be slothful, negligent, and complacent, what hope can we have of withstanding the pervasive evil that surrounds us on all sides? There is no method of deceit or force that we are not or could not be attacked by. The subtle strategies employed by this apostasy are so numerous that they cannot all be listed. The current, fueled by various winds of temptation, is strongly against us. Each day brings new additions to its strength. New arguments and excuses against the truths and holiness of the gospel are constantly devised and utilized. Some seek to undermine them secretly, while others openly despise them, and Satan's hand is involved in all of these endeavors. If we were to neglect the watchful care over our hearts and the diligent pursuit of all means for their preservation in sound doctrine and holy living, what assurance would we have of ultimately escaping its clutches?

Having provided these general directions, the following ones must specifically address some of the particular ways and means by which this decline has been carried out and promoted, especially those to which the present age and season are most susceptible. Due to the length of this discussion exceeding my initial intention, I will only mention a few things to indicate the nature of the directions that could be further elaborated upon. Here, I will name just two. Therefore,

Thirdly, Be cautious not to find satisfaction or place trust solely in the outward privileges of the church or in participating in the administration of the gospel ordinances within it. We are aware of the diverse opinions regarding the specific forms of outward worship and the state of the church held by different individuals. However, since all people approve of and adhere to some form of church-state and worship, I am not singling out any one in particular but addressing everyone according to their own chosen way of worship. As previously mentioned, the world was greatly deceived by false pretenses regarding these matters. We cannot exempt ourselves from the need for vigilance in this regard simply because we believe that we currently enjoy the administration of these ordinances in purity, according to the institution of Christ. Even when administered correctly, they remain susceptible to abuse, corruption, and defilement. In some cases, they may be even more prone to misuse, as there is a greater temptation to place excessive confidence in them.

It is indeed a special mercy for anyone to be entrusted with the privileges of the church and the institutions of the gospel. In fact, it is the greatest outward honor and distinction that one can attain in this world. Theodosius, one of the greatest emperors in history, affirmed that he considered being a member of the church to be a greater honor than his imperial crown. While it is true that the downfall of the Jews was primarily due to their misplaced confidence in their spiritual and church privileges, the apostle acknowledges that they had great preeminence and advantage, which could have brought them significant benefit. Those who currently enjoy the administration of holy things, which far surpasses the beauty and glory of what was entrusted to the Jews, have an even more excellent and superior position, as stated in 2 Corinthians 3:10. Therefore, whoever despises or neglects these things, regardless of the excuses they may offer, are completely

ignorant of gospel holiness. For how can holiness exist when individuals openly disobey the commands of Christ and neglect the use of the means He has appointed to engender and preserve it in our souls? Nothing should be said to diminish the excellence, dignity, and necessity of the privileges and ordinances of the church when we seek to dissuade people from placing excessive confidence in them, which can be detrimental. If individuals cannot find a middle ground between rejecting all the ordinances of the gospel and blindly trusting in the mere outward performance or observance of them, they have no one to blame but themselves for their spiritual ruin, stemming from their own darkness, pride, and unbelief.

Once again, there is no aspect of our obedience where the continual exercise of faith, spiritual wisdom, diligence, and watchfulness is more essential than in the proper use and application of gospel privileges and ordinances. The giving of glory to God and the eternal well-being of our souls depend on nothing else as prominently as they do on this. A spiritually thriving Christian is one who understands how to rightly utilize the institutions of worship in the gospel and does so accordingly. These institutions serve as the ordinary means through which the Lord Christ imparts His grace to us, and through which we express our love, praise, gratitude, and obedience to Him. This spiritual communion forms the essence of our spiritual life and significantly impacts our growth or decline in holiness, as well as our perseverance or apostasy in our profession of faith. The proper use of these privileges is therefore of utmost importance.

Therefore, in accordance with my current objective, I simply wish to warn against placing undue reliance on these external aspects: the name, title, privilege, and mere observance of them. Countless individuals have been deceived into a false sense of security and have fallen into apostasy by doing so. There are some (and not an insignificant number) whose entire religious practice consists of attending church and remaining there for the duration of the worship service that aligns with their preferences. They believe that by doing this, they have fulfilled all their obligations towards God, especially if they partake in the sacraments at the appointed times. There are also many others who, it is feared, content themselves with merely listening to the preaching of the word and thus pacify their consciences into a state of tranquility and complacency. Otherwise, it would be impossible to explain why so few among the large crowds that gather to hear the word are truly converted and led to wholehearted and obedient devotion. However, my specific concern is for those who profess to surrender themselves to gospel obedience and consequently partake in all the privileges afforded by the gospel in accordance with the established order. I urge them to be cautious not to place excessive reliance or trust in these external elements, as doing so can be detrimental to their spiritual well-being in various ways.

One area where men can deceive themselves is through spiritual gifts, which are among the privileges of the church. Some individuals find contentment in the gifts possessed by others and the satisfaction they derive from them. The use and exercise of these gifts can stir people's emotions and even evoke temporary faith and fleeting joy. Regrettably, some individuals rely solely on these experiences without pursuing a continuous source of living water within themselves. Others may place their confidence in their own gifts, whether it be their knowledge, understanding, or ability to pray or speak about spiritual matters. However, the apostle's intention, as previously discussed, is to emphasize that even the most remarkable spiritual gifts, along with their impact on the souls and lives of those who possess them, or their contribution to the edification of the church, will not guarantee immunity from complete apostasy. At the final

judgment, some individuals will be rejected despite being able to boast about their prophetic abilities and their ability to cast out demons in the name of Christ, even claiming to have performed "many wonderful works" in his name. This is evident from the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:22-23. Consequently, when his disciples (who were true believers but still spiritually immature) became enthralled and possibly prideful due to their successful experiences of casting out demons in Jesus' name, he redirected their focus away from relying on such accomplishments for their eternal well-being. Instead, he urged them to place their trust in God's sovereign electing grace and its accompanying fruits, as recorded in Luke 10:20. The reason for this redirection is that these gifts are not inherently linked to any of the specific and distinctive causes of salvation. That which was obtained through his death, given into his power upon his resurrection, and first shared on his ascension. But all that follows from this is that they are inherently good and holy, and intended for good and holy purposes - namely, the confirmation of the gospel and the edification of the church. However, it does not necessarily mean that they bring salvation to those who receive them, unless they are accompanied by special grace towards them and their obedience to God's commands. These two aspects can be separated. Therefore, it is of great importance for all those who have received these spiritual gifts to ensure that they are animated and guided by special grace. Without careful attention, these gifts can give individuals a false sense of what they possess and elevate their significance beyond what they truly deserve. Since these gifts pertain to spiritual and heavenly matters, similar to the realm of special grace, people are prone to assume that they are exercising genuine grace when, in reality, it may be far from them. Additionally, these gifts can enhance the outward appearance of one's profession, making it appealing to others and satisfying to oneself. Both of these tendencies clearly contribute to the destruction of souls if not managed and utilized wisely. Therefore, to provide some insight into this matter, it is worth noting a clear distinction between the operations of spiritual gifts, which are limited to specific functions, and the comprehensive nature of saving grace. Gifts have their designated works, in which they act powerfully, but they do not exert any influence on the soul beyond those specific tasks. On the other hand, the work of saving grace is universal, equally relevant in all times, occasions, seasons, and duties. While it may manifest more prominently at certain times or in specific instances of duty, it enlivens and prepares the heart for obedience in all aspects of life. A more detailed exploration of the differences between spiritual gifts and saving grace, as well as their nature and purpose, will be addressed extensively in another discourse, with the help of God. For now, it is important to caution against finding comfort or security solely in the exercise of these gifts during times of genuine spiritual decline in grace and obedience.

However, placing too much importance on a particular form of worship can lead some individuals to develop a harmful confidence in these matters. Believing that they alone have attained the correct way of gospel worship and the administration of its ordinances, and perhaps based on misconceptions, they begin to highly regard themselves and then despise all others, and if possible, even persecute them. This gradually leads them to place their trust in what they consider to be excellent, to the point of neglecting more significant matters. It is not uncommon to observe individuals who are strongly committed to a particular religious opinion and practice, making it their sole focus, using it as the measure for everything and everyone, and using it as the basis for communion and genuine love. They evaluate and esteem themselves and others based on whether they embrace that opinion or not. This bears resemblance to what God laments in the prophet Isaiah 65:5. It is unfortunate that such principles and practices often coincide with a

decline in love, humility, meekness, self-doubt, condescension, and zeal in other areas. When this occurs, regardless of one's outward profession, the danger of apostasy is present. Therefore, while it is important to value and strive for the proper order of the Church of Christ, the purity of worship, and the orderly administration of ordinances, we must be cautious not to overestimate our own achievements. If we do so, we are likely to justify other forms of neglect, which will undoubtedly lead to spiritual sickness and decline. Undue confidence is evident when any or all of the following characteristics are present among us:

(1.) Neglect of personal spiritual disciplines is a detrimental sign. This unfortunate outcome often arises among believers due to being overly engrossed in worldly affairs or being controlled by a dominant sinful desire, or by mistakenly relying solely on public worship. Unless God awakens the soul, when these factors converge, the individual is in a perilous state. Specifically, when individuals are content with public religious practices or communal worship to the extent that they neglect their personal devotional times, they are on a dangerous path towards apostasy.

(2.) Indulging in any private sinful desire to gratify the flesh is another red flag. This significant deficiency in the power of godliness is often accompanied by outward strictness in its form. It is a profound deception of sin when it convinces people to justify a particular sin using the names, titles, reputation, and privileges of the church or the participation in its ordinances. Detecting the hidden influence of this deception is no easy task.

(3.) Likewise, when believers adopt a loose and careless lifestyle, it is a cause for concern. It is indeed perplexing how many gospel-professing individuals have embraced a negligent and carefree manner of living, but the reality is undeniable. It is widely acknowledged that walking closely and strictly with God, with conscientious fear of sin, is essential for acceptable evangelical obedience and holiness. However, numerous believers exhibit a degree of laxity and recklessness in their behavior, displaying audacious boldness when confronted with opportunities for sin and engaging in a liberty or rather licentiousness in their conduct that is entirely incompatible with such obedience. While there may be various contributing factors, one possible reason is that they find excessive satisfaction in their association with the church and its privileges, as well as in their adherence to public worship and the observance of its ordinances according to their respective roles and capacities.

Therefore, the essence of this guidance is that if we want to be protected from the prevailing apostasy of our time, we must pay close attention to our principles and actions regarding the privileges of the church and the practices of gospel worship. Neglecting or disregarding them means rejecting Christ's authority, and we cannot expect His acceptance or involvement in our lives if we defy Him. On the other hand, if we become so reliant on these privileges that we tolerate any of the mentioned evils, we will follow in the footsteps of those who, under the guise of the church and its privileges, openly abandoned Christ and the gospel. The same causes will yield the same effects in us as they did in them. However, there is a balanced approach between these extremes, which, when followed, brings rest and peace to our souls. This approach involves humbly, carefully, and conscientiously utilizing these privileges for their intended purposes. It might be helpful to mention some indicators by which we can assess whether our hearts are upright and properly disposed in the use of gospel ordinances. Let us evaluate ourselves in this regard:

If our hearts are improved or humbled by them, or if we feel remorse when they do not have the desired effect. Their purpose, as far as we are concerned, is to stimulate and manifest all aspects of grace. Therefore, if we notice that our faith and love are strengthened, that we take pleasure in God, that we yearn for increased grace and holiness, that we detest sin, that we bear fruit in good works and perform all our duties of obedience, that we experience joy in spiritual matters, that we humble ourselves and marvel at grace, then we need not condemn ourselves for lacking sincerity in these acts, even if we are aware of our weaknesses and imperfections. However, due to the influence of our corrupt nature, temptations, the frailty of our flesh, and the prevalence of unbelief, there may be times when we fall short of a palpable experience of this effect on our souls through these means. In such cases, it is still possible to find comfort in the evidence of our sincerity by refusing to entertain other excuses and prejudices and instead holding ourselves accountable for our unfruitfulness, which should lead us to humble ourselves. The absence of this humility has led some to reject the efficacy of gospel ordinances, considering them lifeless and pointless, while others have become formal, careless, and unfruitful despite having access to them. When all disguises are removed and unveiled, these attitudes will be exposed as the fruit of pride and the deceitfulness of sin.

It is so when, in the administration of the ordinances, spiritual realities are made tangible and close to us. When we encounter Jesus Christ being vividly portrayed and crucified before our eyes in the preaching of the word, when the essence of the teachings becomes imprinted on our minds, when we have a sense of feeling and grasping the word of life, and when the things we hope for acquire a degree of reality in our souls, then we are engaging in this aspect of obedience in the appropriate manner. The apostle speaks to this effect in Romans 10:6-9. The preached word and other ordinances do not merely direct us towards distant realities; they bring the Lord Christ and all the benefits of His mediation into our hearts. However, if we content ourselves with mere intellectual understanding, with detached notions of spiritual matters, if we find satisfaction in the outward performance of our own duties and those of others, then we have reason to be concerned that our hearts are not right in the sight of God in this regard. When we observe that our conscientious participation in all the appointed worship ordinances stimulates our diligence and watchfulness in fulfilling all other required acts of obedience, we are engaging with them in the proper manner. Conversely, when individuals, under the pretext of these ordinances and a mistaken satisfaction in them, allow themselves to neglect other duties, they create a pathway for further apostasy from holiness, as previously explained. Therefore, the greatest evidence of our proper attendance to these ordinances is when they inspire, invigorate, expand, and establish us in the pursuit of universal obedience. Thus, those who conscientiously make use of church privileges and gospel ordinances are the ones whose hearts are most devoted to fulfilling all other duties through them.

Lastly, it is of great significance when, in the administration of gospel ordinances according to Christ's command, we have a personal experience of His grace to the extent that we are strengthened to endure suffering for Him and for the sake of these ordinances when called upon to do so. A time will come when mere intellectual understanding and conviction of truth, as well as the possession of ministerial gifts, will not secure individuals in their profession. However, those who have tasted the graciousness of Christ through the means He has ordained will not easily waver from their determination to follow Him wherever He leads.

Fourthly, Beware of being influenced by the prevailing vices of the nation. I have previously explained what I mean by this caution. It is especially crucial when these vices are most widespread among the people, as familiarity diminishes the sense of guilt, and societal acceptance gradually erodes shame. Moreover, when some individuals indulge in open excess, others are inclined to justify themselves in vain practices and sinful behaviors, considering their actions less provocative compared to those who engage in more extreme behavior. Consequently, lesser forms of vanity, such as extravagant clothing, indulgence in pleasure-seeking activities, wasting time in idle chatter, overindulgence in food and drink, engaging in corrupt conversations, and adopting a carelessly bold demeanor in common interactions, become increasingly prevalent among us. Some individuals openly display their true desires, restrained only by reputation and the power of convictions, rather than a genuine love for gospel holiness that restrains them from descending into the same unrestrained indulgence as others. In the past, Israel dwelt apart and was not counted among the nations (Numbers 23:9), while the remnant of Jacob was intended to be a blessing in the midst of many people (Micah 5:7), without being corrupted by them. If professing believers immerse themselves so deeply into the practices of the wider population that they unconsciously adopt their behaviors, they will be carried along with the current towards destruction. The danger of this is greater than most people realize. Under the Old Testament, God only imparted His grace sparingly to the community, and after giving the law, He did not trust them to live among other nations, nor did He trust other nations to live among them, understanding their inability to resist the temptations of conforming to their practices. Consequently, God ordained that the nations inhabiting the land should be completely eradicated, so that the Israelites would not learn their customs (Leviticus 18:30). However, under the gospel, the Spirit is poured out more abundantly, and now God entrusts all who are called to obey it to live among nations throughout the world. Nevertheless, He warns them of the dangers inherent in this and requires them to remain constantly vigilant. This is what the apostle James refers to as "keeping ourselves unspotted from the world" (James 1:27). However, most people mistakenly believe that it is enough for them to avoid openly committing sinful acts, without considering the worldly behavior and attitudes that may stain their lives. They are unaware of the ultimate consequences of such contamination.

Someone may argue that unless we conform to prevailing customs in matters such as clothing, appearance, and behavior, we will be despised by the world and receive no respect for ourselves or our families.

I respond as follows: First, I am not arguing about trivial matters or prescribing specific modes of dress or conduct for anyone. I have no regard for making religion about clothes, gestures, or the refusal of appropriate and courteous interactions. Nor do I hold any harsh judgments against distinctions in these matters among individuals based on their social status or position, although it is clear that excesses exist in all spheres. What I mean is a conformity to the world in things that closely align with and represent the prevailing vices of our time and place. And even if you believe that you will be despised for not keeping up with the rest of your social class in these matters, you will still face contempt unless you fully embrace all the abominable practices of the world (1 Peter 4:3-4). Therefore, you must consider whether it is appropriate to forsake God, Christ, the gospel, holiness, and morality in order to gain the friendship of the world.

Secondly, make sure to surpass others in unwavering integrity, kindness, benevolence, usefulness, gentleness, a spirit of moderation, charity, compassion, and a readiness to help and support others to the best of your abilities. By doing so, you will quickly discover, even in this world, how little concern you should have for the contempt of the most depraved individuals that you seem to fear.

Furthermore, it is crucial to carefully avoid the misconduct of professing Christians that causes others to have a negative view of the gospel and encourages contempt towards the Christian faith. We have already mentioned some of these behaviors, and many more of a similar nature could be added. Just as the scandalous and immoral lives of those who claim to be Christians have caused offense and brought about contempt and detestation of Christianity among Jews, Muslims, and people from all over the world, resulting in the use of force and violence in religious matters, the failings of even the most strict professors of the faith greatly contribute to the dislike and enmity against genuine godliness. If we persist in such behavior, we share in the guilt of the current apostasy. Without going into specific details, these failures can be categorized into three main areas:

Lack of love and unity among fellow believers.

Failure to demonstrate usefulness and kindness towards all people.

Spiritual pride, being judgmental, and hastily passing judgment on others.

These are the common accusations leveled against certain professors of the faith. While it may be the case that only a few individuals are guilty of these charges, or perhaps not to the extent that they are accused by others, it is still essential for all of us to understand what we should particularly avoid, so as not to give any opportunity to those who seek it and would rejoice in our failings. Our duty is to silence the ignorance of foolish people through a watchful and holy conduct in all aspects of life. We should strive to universally demonstrate our sincerity before God and humanity, so that even if we are spoken ill of and portrayed as wrongdoers, others may be put to shame when they witness our virtuous behavior in Christ, and ultimately glorify God on the day of visitation. This is the standard by which we have bound ourselves, not to become agitated and seek revenge when we are slandered and maligned, but to triumph over all the evils that may be cast upon us through patient and persistent good deeds. If we are not willing to embrace this law and principle, it would be best for us to renounce our profession, for it is an essential requirement for all disciples of Jesus Christ. Those whose hearts are fortified by grace to do good even in the face of slander will find immediate satisfaction in the knowledge of their acceptance by Christ, making them affirm that "this yoke is easy, and this burden is light." It is particularly important to carefully avoid the behaviors mentioned earlier, as well as any appearance of them, which may cause public offense and provide evildoers with an excuse to justify their sins. While you may think that your efforts in this regard may have little significance in halting the general decline of gospel holiness, it is hoped that others have been warned in a similar, or even more effective, manner than you. Nevertheless, every individual must take responsibility for their own actions, for "the just shall live by his own faith," and "each one of us will give an account of himself to God." You are only required to fulfill your own personal duty.

While it may not be possible to completely eliminate differences, divisions, and lack of love among professing believers, you can take responsibility for ensuring that none of these things can be justly attributed to you. Love the fellow believers sincerely, bear with patience and meekness those who hold different views without compromising essential doctrines, refrain from imposing your opinions on those who cannot accept them, and avoid hasty judgments of perceived shortcomings. Be ready to engage in universal fellowship in all religious duties with those who genuinely love the Lord Jesus Christ. Not only are these actions our duties, but they also serve as effective ways to represent the Lord Christ and the teachings of the gospel to others. Moreover, by doing so, you disarm Satan and the world of a powerful weapon they use to harm the cause of religion.

Furthermore, if all professing believers were meek, peaceable, and quiet in their communities and among their neighbors, leading sober, humble, and temperate lives; if they were kind, benevolent, and condescending to all; and if they remained cheerful in trials and afflictions, always rejoicing in the Lord, those who do not hold them in contempt would eventually come to admire and seek to emulate them. Similarly, if believers were to diligently adhere to the rules prescribed for their conduct in this world, it would greatly benefit the cause of religion. These guidelines include focusing on whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, and virtuous (Php 4:8), maintaining good conduct among unbelievers so that they may see your good works and glorify God (1 Peter 2:12), examining yourselves to ensure that you are living in obedience to the faith (2 Corinthians 13:7), casting off the works of darkness and putting on the armor of light (Romans 13:12-13), leading a quiet life, minding your own affairs, and working with your hands (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12), and praying that you may have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things (Hebrews 13:18). If honesty, sincerity, and uprightness were to shine more brightly in the lives of professing believers, manifesting themselves in every aspect of their interactions with the world, it would undoubtedly bring immeasurable benefits to the cause of religion.

Lastly, when it comes to judging or condemning others, there is only one way to do it without causing offense, and that is through the example of our own lives. The practice of holiness serves as a judgment on all those who live in unholiness, as it exposes the sin and impiety within their own hearts. If they are provoked or angered by our holy lives, it only serves to further highlight their own sinful condition. Therefore, rather than engaging in judgment and condemnation through words or attitudes, let us strive to live lives of genuine holiness, which will convict and challenge others by the power of our example.

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