

Exposition on Psalm 7

by St. Augustine

The psalmist prays for salvation from persecutors, recognizes the devil as the true enemy, and requests God's anger against him, while also acknowledging the congregation's sin and need for judgment.

Scripture: Matthew 9:15

Topics: "Psalm Interpretation", "Gods Justice"

Description

St. Augustine preaches on Psalm 7, reflecting on the story of Chusi, son of Jemini, who betrayed King David, drawing parallels to Judas betraying Jesus. He delves into the significance of names like Chusi (silence) and Achitophel (brother's ruin), connecting them to spiritual interpretations. The Psalmist acknowledges God's justice in punishing sinners and protecting the righteous, emphasizing the confession of God's justice rather than the confession of sins. The Psalmist praises God for His righteous judgment and the beauty of His creation, even in ordering the penalties for sinners.

Transcript

A psalm to David himself, which he sung to the Lord, for the words of Chusi, son of Jemini. 1. Now the story which gave occasion to this prophecy may be easily recognised in the second book of Kings. 2 Samuel 15:34-37 For there Chusi, the friend of king David, went over to the side of Abessalon, his son, who was carrying on war against his father, for the purpose of discovering and reporting the designs which he was taking against his father, at the instigation of Achitophel, who had revolted from David's friendship, and was instructing by his counsel, to the best of his power, the son against the father.

But since it is not the story itself which is to be the subject of consideration in this Psalm, from which the prophet has taken a veil of mysteries, if we have passed over to Christ, let the veil be taken away. 2 Corinthians 3:16 And first let us inquire into the signification of the very names, what it means. For there have not been wanting interpreters, who investigating these same words, not carnally according to the letter, but spiritually, declare to us that Chusi should be interpreted silence; and Gemini, right-handed; Achitophel, brother's ruin.

Among which interpretations, Judas, that traitor, again meets us, that Abessalon should bear his image, according to that interpretation of it as a father's peace; in that his father was full of thoughts of peace toward him: although he in his guile had war in his heart, as was treated of in the third Psalm. Now as we find in the Gospels that the disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ are called sons, Matthew 9:15 so in the same Gospels we find they are called brethren also. For the Lord on the resurrection says, Go and say to

My brethren.

John 20:17 And the Apostle calls Him the first begotten among many brethren. The ruin then of that disciple, who betrayed Him, is rightly understood to be a brother's ruin, which we said is the interpretation of Achitophel. Now as to Chusi, from the interpretation of silence, it is rightly understood that our Lord contended against that guile in silence, that is, in that most deep secret, whereby blindness happened in part to Israel, Romans 11:25 when they were persecuting the Lord, that the fullness of the Gentiles might enter in, and so all Israel might be saved.

When the Apostle came to this profound secret and deep silence, he exclaimed, as if struck with a kind of awe of its very depth, O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been His counsellor? Romans 11:33-34 Thus that great silence he does not so much discover by explanation, as he sets forth its greatness in admiration. In this silence the Lord, hiding the sacrament of His adorable passion, turns the brother's voluntary ruin, that is, His betrayer's impious wickedness, into the order of His mercy and providence: that what he with perverse mind wrought for one Man's destruction, He might by providential overruling dispose for all men's salvation.

The perfect soul then, which is already worthy to know the secret of God, sings a Psalm unto the Lord, she sings for the words of Chusi, because she has attained to know the words of that silence: for among unbelievers and persecutors there is that silence and secret. But among His own, to whom it is said, Now I call you no more servants; for the servant knows not what his lord does; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you: John 15:15 among His friends, I say, there is not the silence, but the words of the silence, that is, the meaning of that silence set forth and manifested.

Which silence, that is, Chusi, is called the son of Gemini, that is, righthanded. For what was done for the Saints was not to be hidden from them. And yet He says, Let not the left hand know what the right hand does. Matthew 6:3 The perfect soul then, to which that secret has been made known, sings in prophecy for the words of Chusi, that is, for the knowledge of that same secret. Which secret God at her right hand, that is, favourable and propitious unto her, has wrought. Wherefore this silence is called the Son of the right hand, which is, Chusi, the son of Gemini.

2. O Lord my God, in You have I hoped: save me from all them that persecute me, and deliver me Psalm 7:1. As one to whom, already perfected, all the war and enmity of vice being overcome, there remains no enemy but the envious devil, he says, Save me from all them that persecute me, and deliver me Psalm 7:2: lest at any time he tear my soul as a lion. The Apostle says, Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour. 1 Peter 5:8 Therefore when the Psalmist said in the plural number, Save me from all them that persecute me: he afterwards introduced the singular, saying, lest at any time he tear my soul as a lion.

For he does not say, lest at any time they tear: he knew what enemy and violent adversary of the perfect soul remained. Whilst there be none to redeem, nor to save: that is, lest he tear me, while Thou redeemest not, nor savest. For, if God redeem not, nor save, he tears. 3. And that it might be clear that the already perfect soul, which is to be on her guard against the most insidious snares of the devil only, says this, see what follows. O Lord my God, if I have done this Psalm 7:3.

What is it that he calls this? Since he does not mention the sin by name, are we to understand sin generally? If this sense displease us, we may take that to be meant which follows: as if we had asked, what is this that you say, this? He answers, If there be iniquity in my hands. Now then it is clear that it is said of all sin, If I have repaid them that recompense me evil Psalm 7:4. Which none can say with truth, but the perfect. For so the Lord says, Be perfect, as your Father which is in heaven; who makes His sun to rise upon the good and the evil, and rains on the just and the unjust.

Matthew 5:43, 45 He then who repays not them that recompense evil, is perfect. When therefore the perfect soul prays for the words of Chusi, the son of Jemini, that is, for the knowledge of that secret and silence, which the Lord, favourable to us and merciful, wrought for our salvation, so as to endure, and with all patience bear, the guiles of this betrayer: as if He should say to this perfect soul, explaining the design of this secret, For you ungodly and a sinner, that your iniquities might be washed away by My blood-shedding, in great silence and great patience I bore with My betrayer; will you not imitate me, that you too may not repay evil for evil?

Considering then, and understanding what the Lord has done for him, and by His example going on to perfection, the Psalmist says, If I have repaid them that recompense me evil: that is, if I have not done what You have taught me by Your example: may I therefore fall by mine enemies empty. And he says well, not, If I have repaid them that do me evil; but, who recompense. For who so recompenses, had received somewhat already. Now it is an instance of greater patience, not even to repay him evil, who after receiving benefits returns evil for good, than if without receiving any previous benefit he had had a mind to injure.

If therefore he says, I have repaid them that recompense me evil: that is, If I have not imitated You in that silence, that is, in Your patience, which You have wrought for me, may I fall by mine enemies empty. For he is an empty boaster, who, being himself a man, desires to avenge himself on a man; and while he openly seeks to overcome a man, is secretly himself overcome by the devil, rendered empty by vain and proud joy, because he could not, as it were, be conquered. The Psalmist knows then where a greater victory may be obtained, and where the Father which sees in secret will reward.

Matthew 6:6 Lest then he repay them that recompense evil, he overcomes his anger rather than another man, being instructed too by those writings, wherein it is written, Better is he that overcomes his anger, than he that takes a city. Proverbs 16:32 If I have repaid them that recompense me evil, may I therefore fall by my enemies empty. He seems to swear by way of execration, which is the heaviest kind of oath, as when one says, If I have done so and so, may I suffer so and so.

But swearing in a swearer's mouth is one thing, in a prophet's meaning another. For here he mentions what will really befall men who repay them that recompense evil; not what, as by an oath, he would imprecate on himself or any other.

4. Let the enemy therefore persecute my soul and take it Psalm 7:5. By again naming the enemy in the singular number, he more and more clearly points out him whom he spoke of above as a lion. For he persecutes the soul, and if he has deceived it, will take it. For the limit of men's rage is the destruction of the body; but the soul, after this visible death, they cannot keep in their power: whereas whatever souls the devil shall have taken by his persecutions, he will keep. And let him tread my life upon the earth: that is, by treading let him make my life earth, that is to say, his food.

For he is not only called a lion, but a serpent too, to whom it was said, Earth shall you eat. Genesis 3:14 And to the sinner was it said, Earth you are, and into earth shall you go. Genesis 3:19 And let him bring down my glory to the dust. This is that dust which the wind casts forth from the face of the earth, to wit, vain and silly boasting of the proud, puffed up, not of solid weight, as a cloud of dust carried away by the wind. Justly then has he here spoken of the glory, which he would not have brought down to dust.

For he would have it solidly established in conscience before God, where there is no boasting. He that glories, says the Apostle, let him glory in the Lord. 1 Corinthians 1:31 This solidity is brought down to the dust if one through pride despising the secrecy of conscience, where God only proves a man, desires to glory before men. Hence comes what the Psalmist elsewhere says, God shall bruise the bones of them that please men. Now he that has well learned or experienced the steps in overcoming vices, knows that this vice of empty glory is either alone, or more than all, to be shunned by the perfect.

For that by which the soul first fell, she overcomes the last. For the beginning of all sin is pride: and again, The beginning of man's pride is to depart from God. 5. Arise, O Lord, in Your anger Psalm 7:6. Why yet does he, who we say is perfect, incite God to anger? Must we not see, whether he rather be not perfect, who, when he was being stoned, said, O Lord, lay not this sin to their charge? Acts 7:60 Or does the Psalmist pray thus not against men, but against the devil and his angels, whose possession sinners and the ungodly are?

He then does not pray against him in wrath, but in mercy, whosoever prays that that possession may be taken from him by that Lord who justifies the ungodly. Romans 4:5 For when the ungodly is justified, from ungodly he is made just, and from being the possession of the devil he passes into the temple of God. And since it is a punishment that a possession, in which one longs to have rule, should be taken away from him: this punishment, that he should cease to possess those whom he now possesses, the Psalmist calls the anger of God against the devil.

Arise, O Lord; in Your anger. Arise (he has used it as appear), in words, that is, human and obscure; as though God sleeps, when He is unrecognised and hidden in His secret workings. Be exalted in the borders of mine enemies. He means by borders the possession itself, in which he wishes that God should be exalted, that is, be honoured and glorified, rather than the devil, while the ungodly are justified and praise God. And arise, O Lord my God, in the commandment that You have given: that is, since You have enjoined humility, appear in humility; and first fulfil what You have enjoined; that men by Your example overcoming pride may not be possessed of the devil, who against Your commandments advised to pride, saying, Eat, and your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods. Genesis 3:5

6. And the congregation of the people shall surround You. This may be understood two ways. For the congregation of the people can be taken, either of them that believe, or of them that persecute, both of which took place in the same humiliation of our Lord: in contempt of which the multitude of them that persecute surrounded Him; concerning which it is said, Why have the heathen raged, and the people meditated vain things? But of them that believe through His humiliation the multitude so surrounded Him, that it could be said with the greatest truth, blindness in part is happened unto Israel, that the fullness of the Gentiles might come in: Romans 11:25 and again, Ask of me, and I will give You the Gentiles for Your inheritance, and the boundaries of the earth for Your possession. And for their sakes return Thou on high: that is, for the sake of this congregation return Thou on high: which He is understood to have done by His resurrection and ascension into heaven. For being thus glorified He gave the Holy Ghost, which before His exaltation could not be given, as it is written in the Gospel, for the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because

that Jesus was not yet glorified. John 7:39 Having then returned on high for the sake of the congregation of the people, He sent the Holy Ghost: by whom the preachers of the Gospel being filled, filled the whole world with Churches.

7. It can be taken also in this sense: Arise, O Lord, in Your anger, and be exalted in the borders of mine enemies: that is, arise in Your anger, and let not mine enemies understand You; so that to be exalted, should be this, become high, that You may not be understood; which has reference to the silence spoken of above. For it is of this exaltation thus said in another Psalm, And He ascended upon Cherubim, and flew: and, He made darkness His secret place. In which exaltation, or concealment, when for their sins' desert they shall not understand You, who shall crucify You, the congregation of believers shall surround You. For in His very humiliation He was exalted, that is, was not understood. So that, And arise, O Lord my God, in the commandment that You have given: may have reference to this, that is, when Thou showest Yourself, be high or deep that mine enemies may not understand You. Now sinners are the enemies of the just man, and the ungodly of the godly man. And the congregation of the people shall surround You: that is, by this very circumstance, that those who crucify You understand You not, the Gentiles shall believe in You, and so shall the congregation of the people surround You. But what follows, if this be the true meaning, has in it more pain, that it begins already to be perceived, than joy that it is understood. For it follows, and for their sakes return Thou on high, that is, and for the sake of this congregation of the human race, wherewith the Churches are crowded, return Thou on high, that is, again cease to be understood. What then is, and for their sakes, but that this congregation too will offend You, so that You may most truly foretell and say, Thinkest Thou when the Son of man shall come, He will find faith on the earth? Luke 18:8 Again, of the false prophets, who are understood to be heretics, He says, Because of their iniquity the love of many shall wax cold. Matthew 24:12 Since then even in the Churches, that is, in that congregation of peoples and nations, where the Christian name has most widely spread, there shall be so great abundance of sinners, which is already, in great measure, perceived; is not that famine of the word Amos 8:11 here predicted, which has been threatened by another prophet also? Is it not too for this congregation's sake, who, by their sins, are estranging from themselves that light of truth, that God returns on high, that is, so that faith, pure and cleansed from the corruption of all perverse opinions, is held and received, either not at all, or by the very few of whom it was said, Blessed is he that shall endure to the end, the same shall be saved? Mark 13:13 Not without cause then is it said, and for the sake of this congregation return Thou on high: that is, again withdraw into the depth of Your secrecy, even for the sake of this congregation of the peoples, that has Your name, and does not Your deeds.

8. But whether the former exposition of this place, or this last be the more suitable, without prejudice to any one better, or equal, or as good, it follows very consistently, the Lord judges the people. For whether He returned on high, when, after the resurrection, He ascended into heaven, well does it follow, The Lord judges the people: for that He will come from thence to judge the quick and the dead. Or whether He return on high, when the understanding of the truth leaves sinful Christians, for that of His coming it has been said, Do you think the Son of Man on His coming will find faith on the earth? Luke 18:8 The Lord then judges the people. What Lord, but Jesus Christ? For the Father judges no man, but has committed all judgment unto the Son. John 5:22 Wherefore this soul which prays perfectly, see how she fears not the day of judgment, and with a truly secure longing says in her prayer, Your kingdom come: judge me, she says, O Lord, according to my righteousness. In the former Psalm a weak one was entreating, imploring rather the mercy of God, than mentioning any desert of his own: since the Son of God came to call sinners to repentance. Matthew 9:13 Therefore he had there said, Save me, O Lord, for Your mercy's sake; that is, not for my desert's sake. But now, since being called he has held and kept the commandments which he

received, he is bold to say, Judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness, and according to my harmlessness, that is upon me. This is true harmlessness, which harms not even an enemy. Accordingly, well does he require to be judged according to his harmlessness, who could say with truth, If I have repaid them that recompense me evil. As for what he added, that is upon me, it can refer not only to harmlessness, but can be understood also with reference to righteousness; that the sense should be this, Judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness, and according to my harmlessness, which righteousness and harmlessness is upon me. By which addition he shows that this very thing, that the soul is righteous and harmless, she has not by herself, but by God who gives brightness and light. For of this he says in another Psalm, You, O Lord, wilt light my candle. And of John it is said, that he was not the light, but bore witness of the light. John 1:8 He was a burning and shining candle. John 5:35 That light then, whence souls, as candles, are kindled, shines forth not with borrowed, but with original, brightness, which light is truth itself. It is then so said, According to my righteousness, and according to my harmlessness, that is upon me, as if a burning and shining candle should say, Judge me according to the flame which is upon me, that is, not that wherewith I am myself, but that whereby I shine enkindled of you.

9. But let the wickedness of sinners be consummated Psalm 7:9. He says, be consummated, be completed, according to that in the Apocalypse, Let the righteous become more righteous, and let the filthy be filthy still. Revelation 22:11 For the wickedness of those men appears consummate, who crucified the Son of God; but greater is theirs who will not live uprightly, and hate the precepts of truth, for whom the Son of God was crucified. Let the wickedness of sinners, then he says, be consummated, that is, arrive at the height of wickedness, that just judgment may be able to come at once.

But since it is not only said, Let the filthy be filthy still; but it is said also, Let the righteous become more righteous; he joins on the words, And You shall direct the righteous, O God, who searches the hearts and reins. How then can the righteous be directed but in secret? When even by means of those things which, in the commencement of the Christian ages, when as yet the saints were oppressed by the persecution of the men of this world, appeared marvellous to men, now that the Christian name has begun to be in such high dignity, hypocrisy, that is pretence, has increased; of those, I mean, who by the Christian profession had rather please men than God.

How then is the righteous man directed in so great confusion of pretence, save while God searches the hearts and reins; seeing all men's thoughts, which are meant by the word heart; and their delights, which are understood by the word reins? For the delight in things temporal and earthly is rightly ascribed to the reins; for that it is both the lower part of man, and that region where the pleasure of carnal generation dwells, through which man's nature is transferred into this life of care, and deceiving joy, by the succession of the race.

God then, searching our heart, and perceiving that it is there where our treasure is, that is, in heaven; searching also the reins, and perceiving that we do not assent to flesh and blood, but delight ourselves in the Lord, directs the righteous man in his inward conscience before Him, where no man sees, but He alone who perceives what each man thinks, and what delights each. For delight is the end of care; because to this end does each man strive by care and thought, that he may attain to his delight.

He therefore sees our cares, who searches the heart. He sees too the ends of cares, that is delights, who narrowly searches the reins; that when He shall find that our cares incline neither to the lust of the flesh, nor to the lust of the eyes, nor to the pride of life, 1 John 2:16 all which pass away as a shadow, but that they are raised upward to the joys of things eternal, which are spoilt by no change, He may direct the

righteous, even He, the God who searches the hearts and reins.

For our works, which we do in deeds and words, may be known unto men; but with what mind they are done, and to what end we would attain by means of them, He alone knows, the God who searches the hearts and reins.

10. My righteous help is from the Lord, who makes whole the upright in heart Psalm 7:10. The offices of medicine are twofold, on the curing infirmity, the other the preserving health. According to the first it was said in the preceding Psalm, Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak; according to the second it is said in this Psalm, If there be iniquity in my hands, if I have repaid them that recompense me evil, may I therefore fall by my enemies empty. For there the weak prays that he may be delivered, here one already whole that he may not change for the worse. According to the one it is there said, Make me whole for Your mercy's sake; according to this other it is here said, Judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness. For there he asks for a remedy to escape from disease; but here for protection from falling into disease. According to the former it is said, Make me whole, O Lord, according to Your mercy: according to the latter it is said, My righteous help is from the Lord, who makes whole the upright in heart. Both the one and the other makes men whole; but the former removes them from sickness into health, the latter preserves them in this health. Therefore there the help is merciful, because the sinner has no desert, who as yet longs to be justified, believing on Him who justifies the ungodly; Romans 4:5 but here the help is righteous, because it is given to one already righteous. Let the sinner then who said, I am weak, say in the first place, Make me whole, O Lord, for Your mercy's sake; and here let the righteous man, who said, If I have repaid them that recompense me evil, say, My righteous help is from the Lord, who makes whole the upright in heart. For if he sets forth the medicine, by which we may be healed when weak, how much more that by which we may be kept in health. For if while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us, how much more being now justified shall we be kept whole from wrath through Him. Romans 5:8-9

11. My righteous help is from the Lord, who makes whole the upright in heart. God, who searches the hearts and reins, directs the righteous; but with righteous help makes He whole the upright in heart. He does not as He searches the hearts and reins, so make whole the upright in heart and reins; for the thoughts are both bad in a depraved heart, and good in an upright heart; but delights which are not good belong to the reins, for they are more low and earthly; but those that are good not to the reins, but to the heart itself. Wherefore men cannot be so called upright in reins, as they are called upright in heart, since where the thought is, there at once the delight is too; which cannot be, unless when things divine and eternal are thought of. You have given, he says, joy in my heart, when he had said, The light of Your countenance has been stamped on us, O Lord. For although the phantoms of things temporal, which the mind falsely pictures to itself, when tossed by vain and mortal hope, to vain imagination oftentimes bring a delirious and maddened joy; yet this delight must be attributed not to the heart, but to the reins; for all these imaginations have been drawn from lower, that is, earthly and carnal things. Hence it comes, that God, who searches the hearts and reins, and perceives in the heart upright thoughts, in the reins no delights, affords righteous help to the upright in heart, where heavenly delights are coupled with clean thoughts. And therefore when in another Psalm he had said, Moreover even to-night my reins have chided me; he went on to say as touching help, I foresaw the Lord always in my sight, for He is on my right hand, that I should not be moved. Where he shows that he suffered suggestions only from the reins, not delights as well; for he had suffered these, then he would of course be moved. But he said, The Lord is on my right hand, that I should not be moved; and then he adds, Wherefore was my heart delighted; that the reins should have been able to chide, not delight him. The delight accordingly was produced not in the reins, but

there, where against the chiding of the reins God was foreseen to be on the right hand, that is, in the heart.

12. God the righteous judge, strong (in endurance) and long-suffering Psalm 7:11. What God is judge, but the Lord, who judges the people? He is righteous; who shall render to every man according to his works. Matthew 16:27 He is strong (in endurance); who, being most powerful, for our salvation bore even with ungodly persecutors. He is long-suffering; who did not immediately, after His resurrection, hurry away to punishment, even those that persecuted Him, but bore with them, that they might at length turn from that ungodliness to salvation: and still He bears with them, reserving the last penalty for the last judgment, and up to this present time inviting sinners to repentance. Not bringing in anger every day. Perhaps bringing in anger is a more significant expression than being angry (and so we find it in the Greek copies); that the anger, whereby He punishes, should not be in Him, but in the minds of those ministers who obey the commandments of truth through whom orders are given even to the lower ministries, who are called angels of wrath, to punish sin: whom even now the punishment of men delights not for justice' sake, in which they have no pleasure, but for malice' sake. God then does not bring in anger every day, that is, He does not collect His ministers for vengeance every day. For now the patience of God invites to repentance: but in the last time, when men through their hardness and impenitent heart shall have treasured up for themselves anger in the day of anger, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, Romans 2:5 then He will brandish His sword.

13. Unless ye be converted, He says, He will brandish His sword Psalm 7:12. The Lord Man Himself may be taken to be God's double-edged sword, that is, His spear, which at His first coming He will not brandish, but hides as it were in the sheath of humiliation: but He will brandish it, when at the second coming to judge the quick and dead, in the manifest splendour of His glory, He shall flash light on His righteous ones, and terror on the ungodly. For in other copies, instead of, He shall brandish His sword, it has been written, He shall make bright His spear: by which word I think the last coming of the Lord's glory most appropriately signified: seeing that is understood of His person, which another Psalm has, Deliver, O Lord, my soul from the ungodly, Your spear from the enemies of Your hand.

He has bent His bow, and made it ready. The tenses of the words must not be altogether overlooked, how he has spoken of the sword in the future, He will brandish; of the bow in the past, He has bent: and these words of the past tense follow after. 14. And in it He has prepared the instruments of death: He has wrought His arrows for the burning Psalm 7:13. That bow then I would readily take to be the Holy Scripture, in which by the strength of the New Testament, as by a sort of string, the hardness of the Old has been bent and subdued.

From thence the Apostles are sent forth like arrows, or divine preachings are shot. Which arrows He has wrought for the burning, arrows, that is, whereby being stricken they might be inflamed with heavenly love. For by what other arrows was she stricken, who says, Bring me into the house of wine, place me among perfumes, crowd me among honey, for I have been wounded with love? By what other arrows is he kindled, who, desirous of returning to God, and coming back from wandering, asks for help against crafty tongues, and to whom it is said, What shall be given you, or what added to you against the crafty tongue?

Sharp arrows of the mighty, with devastating coals: that is, coals, whereby, when you are stricken and set on fire, you may burn with so great love of the kingdom of heaven, as to despise the tongues of all that resist you, and would recall you from your purpose, and to deride their persecutions, saying, Who shall separate me from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? For I am persuaded, he says, that neither death, nor life, nor angel, nor principality, nor

things present, not things to come, nor power, nor height, nor depth, nor other creature, shall be able to separate me from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Thus for the burning has He wrought His arrows. For in the Greek copies it is found thus, He has wrought His arrows for the burning. But most of the Latin copies have burning arrows. But whether the arrows themselves burn, or make others burn, which of course they cannot do unless they burn themselves, the sense is complete.

15. But since he has said that the Lord has prepared not arrows only, but instruments of death too, in the bow, it may be asked, what are instruments of death? Are they, per-adventure, heretics? For they too, out of the same bow, that is, out of the same Scriptures, light upon souls not to be inflamed with love but destroyed with poison: which does not happen but after their deserts: wherefore even this dispensation is to be assigned to the Divine Providence, not that it makes men sinners, but that it orders them after they have sinned. For through sin reaching them with an ill purpose, they are forced to understand them ill, that this should be itself the punishment of sin: by whose death, nevertheless, the sons of the Catholic Church are, as it were by certain thorns, so to say, aroused from slumber, and make progress toward the understanding of the holy Scriptures. For there must be also heresies, that they which are approved, he says, may be made manifest among you: 1 Corinthians 11:19 that is, among men, seeing they are manifest to God. Or has He haply ordained the same arrows to be at once instruments of death for the destruction of unbelievers, and wrought them burning, or for the burning, for the exercising of the faithful? For that is not false that the Apostle says, To the one we are the savour of life unto life, to the other the savour of death unto death; and who is sufficient for these things? 2 Corinthians 2:16 It is no wonder then if the same Apostles be both instruments of death in those from whom they suffered persecution, and fiery arrows to inflame the hearts of believers.

16. Now after this dispensation righteous judgment will come: of which the Psalmist so speaks, as that we may understand that each man's punishment is wrought out of his own sin, and his iniquity turned into vengeance: that we may not suppose that that tranquillity and ineffable light of God brings forth from Itself the means of punishing sin; but that it so orders sins, that what have been delights to man in sinning, should be instruments to the Lord avenging. Behold, he says, he has travailed with injustice. Now what had he conceived, that he should travail with injustice? He has conceived, he says, toil. Hence then comes that, In toil shall you eat your bread. Genesis 3:17 Hence too that, Come unto Me all you that toil and are heavy laden; for My yoke is easy, and My burden light. For toil will never cease, except one love that which cannot be taken away against his will. For when those things are loved which we can lose against our will, we must needs toil for them most miserably; and to obtain them, amid the straitnesses of earthly cares, while each desires to snatch them for himself, and to be beforehand with another, or to wrest it from him, must scheme injustice. Duly then, and quite in order, has he travailed with injustice, who has conceived toil. Now he brings forth what, save that with which he has travailed, although he has not travailed with that which he conceived? For that is not born, which is not conceived; but seed is conceived, that which is formed from the seed is born. Toil is then the seed of iniquity, but sin the conception of toil, that is, that first sin, to depart from God. Sirach 10:12 He then has travailed with injustice, who has conceived toil. And he has brought forth iniquity. Iniquity is the same as injustice: he has brought forth then that with which he travailed. What follows next?

17. He has opened a ditch, and dug it Psalm 7:15. To open a ditch is, in earthly matters, that is, as it were in the earth, to prepare deceit, that another fall therein, whom the unrighteous man wishes to deceive. Now this ditch is opened when consent is given to the evil suggestion of earthly lusts: but it is dug when

after consent we press on to actual work of deceit. But how can it be, that iniquity should rather hurt the righteous man against whom it proceeds, than the unrighteous heart whence it proceeds? Accordingly, the stealer of money, for instance, while he desires to inflict painful harm upon another, is himself maimed by the wound of avarice. Now who, even out of his right mind, sees not how great is the difference between these men, when one suffers the loss of money, the other of innocence? He will fall then into the pit which he has made. As it is said in another Psalm, The Lord is known in executing judgments; the sinner is caught in the works of his own hands.

18. His toil shall be turned on his head, and his iniquity shall descend on his pate Psalm 7:16. For he had no mind to escape sin: but was brought under sin as a slave, so to say, as the Lord says, Whosoever sins is a slave. John 8:34 His iniquity then will be upon him, when he is subject to his iniquity; for he could not say to the Lord, what the innocent and upright say, My glory, and the lifter up of my head. He then will be in such wise below, as that his iniquity may be above, and descend on him; for that it weighs him down and burdens him, and suffers him not to fly back to the rest of the saints. This occurs, when in an ill regulated man reason is a slave, and lust has dominion.

19. I will confess to the Lord according to His justice Psalm 7:17. This is not the sinner's confession: for he says this, who said above most truly, If there be iniquity in my hands: but it is a confession of God's justice, in which we speak thus, Verily, O Lord, You are just, in that You both so protect the just, that You enlighten them by Yourself; and so order sinners, that they be punished not by Your malice, but by their own. This confession so praises the Lord, that the blasphemies of the ungodly can avail nothing, who, willing to excuse their evil deeds, are unwilling to attribute to their own fault that they sin, that is, are unwilling to attribute their fault to their fault.

Accordingly they find either fortune or fate to accuse, or the devil, to whom He who made us has willed that it should be in our power to refuse consent: or they bring in another nature, which is not of God: wretched waverers, and erring, rather than confessing to God, that He should pardon them. For it is not fit that any be pardoned, except he says, I have sinned. He, then, that sees the deserts of souls so ordered by God, that while each has his own given him, the fair beauty of the universe is in no part violated, in all things praises God: and this is not the confession of sinners, but of the righteous.

For it is not the sinner's confession when the Lord says, I confess to You, O Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hid these things from the wise, and revealed them to babes. Matthew 11:25 Likewise in Ecclesiasticus it is said, Confess to the Lord in all His works: and in confession you shall say this, All the works of the Lord are exceeding good. Which can be seen in this Psalm, if any one with a pious mind, by the Lord's help, distinguish between the rewards of the righteous and the penalties of the sinners, how that in these two the whole creation, which God made and rules, is adorned with a beauty wondrous and known to few.

Thus then he says, I will confess to the Lord according to His justice, as one who saw that darkness was not made by God, but ordered nevertheless. For God said, Let light be made, and light was made. Genesis 1:3 He did not say, Let darkness be made, and darkness was made: and yet He ordered it. And therefore it is said, God divided between the light, and the darkness: and God called the light day, and the darkness He called night. Genesis 1:4-5 This is the distinction, He made the one and ordered it: but the other He made not, but yet He ordered this too.

But now that sins are signified by darkness, so is it seen in the Prophet, who says, And your darkness shall be as the noon day: Isaiah 58:10 and in the Apostle, who says, He that hates his brother is in darkness: 1 John 2:11 and above all that text, Let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Romans 13:12 Not that there is any nature of darkness. For all nature, in so far as it is nature, is compelled to be. Now being belongs to light: not being to darkness.

He then that leaves Him by whom he was made, and inclines to that whence he was made, that is, to nothing, is in this sin endarkened: and yet he does not utterly perish, but he is ordered among the lowest things. Therefore after the Psalmist said, I will confess unto the Lord: that we might not understand it of confession of sins, he adds lastly, And I will sing to the name of the Lord most high. Now singing has relation to joy, but repentance of sins to sadness.

20. This Psalm can also be taken in the person of the Lord Man: if only that which is there spoken in humiliation be referred to our weakness, which He bore.

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