

## **THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY**

### **1 PETER 5:5-11.**

*Likewise, ye younger, be subject unto the elder. Yea, all of you gird yourselves with humility, to serve one another: for God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time; casting all your anxiety upon him, because he careth for you. Be sober, be watchful: your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom withstand steadfast in your faith, knowing that the same sufferings are accomplished in your brethren who are in the world. And the God of all grace, who called you unto his eternal glory in Christ, after that ye have suffered a little while, shall himself perfect, establish, strengthen you. To him be the dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*

### **HUMILITY, TRUST, WATCHFULNESS, SUFFERING**

1. This is the conclusion of Saint Peter's epistle. It is an exhortation to good works, such as a Christian, or believer, should practice. It is evident that the doctrine of the Gospel is not such as is charged by some, forbidding good works, or not earnestly commanding and urging them. Most diligently and repeatedly it urges the doctrine of works – such works as are, indeed, good works. There are in this epistle four natural heads which furnish us four good sermons.

#### **I. HUMILITY**

2. The apostle has, in the verses immediately preceding our text, exhorted the elders, that is, preachers, to be in their lives “ensamples to the flock,” not “lording it over the charge allotted” to them, but using their office for the service of others. And here in our text he exhorts the others, especially the young, to “be subject unto the elder.” And, in general, he admonishes all to “gird” themselves “with humility, to serve one another.” So Paul likewise admonishes that we should honor one another. Humility is the noblest and sweetest virtue love brings forth, and it is the most essential to peace and discipline. But especially does it become and adorn the young, making them pleasing and precious to God and men, bringing forth an abundance of good fruits.

3. If mankind could be led so to believe this that the virtue of humility would be generally practiced, it would be well everywhere. This would be a beautiful world, filled with

discipline and good works. I would much prefer to see a city in which the young are reared in this virtue than a hundred monasteries of barefooted and Carthusian friars, though they lived ever so strictly. Alas! the greatest and most frequent complaint heard anywhere is concerning the disobedience, wantonness and pride of the younger generation found among all ranks. Therefore it is necessary to use all diligence that this exhortation be instilled into the hearts of the young and urged upon them, in the hope that it may benefit them.

4. First of all, Peter presents the divine command. We are not left to our own good pleasure in the matter – to show humility or not, as we please. God earnestly asks it of us, and asks that we do it lovingly and willingly. Otherwise his anger will be poured out upon us and we will have no happiness nor favor, not even among men. For everyone is a foe to pride and arrogance. These offenses are condemned by the whole world, even by strangers whom they do not concern. One may be guilty of pride and not see his own shame, yet he cannot suffer it in another; he will hate and condemn that one. This vice hurts no one save himself. He makes himself hateful and contemptible before God and men. Everyone calls him a great, proud bag of filth and cries shame upon him. God metes out judgment and scorn to him, witnessing that he will not let this vice go unpunished, but will put the offender to shame. As Peter here says: “*God resisteth the proud.*”

5. Men should be moved by the examples which daily come to light in fulfillment of this passage. If we should have no regard for our own honor and standing before the world, neither for the contempt and the curses of all men; if the illustrious example of the noble character and eternal majesty of God’s Son, our Lord, should not stir us (which ought to move us if we have one spark of Christianity in us), as we behold his unspeakable and incomprehensible humility which, rightly viewed, should melt the Christian’s heart – if all this does not move us, we should be humbled by the many awful examples of God’s fearful wrath which, from the beginning, he has hurled against pride.

6. What is more terrible than the eternal, irreparable fall and banishment of once lofty angelic nature that resulted when the devil robbed himself of the honor and glory enjoyed by the noble blessed spirits, and of the contemplation of eternal God, and brought upon himself everlasting and intolerable damnation by seeking to make himself equal with God, and through similar pride, led the human race to its awful fall? But what a blind, condemned creature are you, who, with your filthy, shameful pride and haughtiness, become like the spirit of evil, thereby turning all the world into your enemy and opposing yourself to the divine majesty, before which even the angels must tremble! If you have no fear of losing the favor and prayers of mankind, at least be afraid lest God send down upon your head his lightning and thunder, with which he crushes iron, rocks, and mountains, and hurl you forever into the abyss, as he hurled down the proud spirit and his angels.

7. Saint Peter exhorts both those who are in the office of the ministry, and other Christians, to whom God has given something, that they abide in their calling and office and conduct the same humbly, gladly obeying and serving others. Right here this vice of pride is the most hurtful to Christianity. For its whole government, life and essence are so ordered by God that no one should exalt himself and lord it over others, as the Pope, the true Antichrist has done.

Only humility and deeds of Christian love and service should prevail in all classes and in all offices and works.

## **PRIDE OPPOSED TO THE FIRST TABLE**

8. Pride in this order of the Church is really and directly opposed to the first table of the law. It is a genuinely devilish pride in God's name and Word on the part of such people as would be wise in matters of faith and would lord it over God's Word. They puff themselves up if, forsooth, they have a gift more than others, and they hold God and all men as nothing. This vice is common among the great, learned and wise bishops and preachers. It prevails among those who learn of them and cling to them, especially beginners who, inexperienced and undisciplined, are brought into prominence. Such puff themselves up and boast: "I also am a learned doctor. I love the Spirit and other gifts just as well as, and even in greater measure than, these preachers." So they think they deserve to be heard and honored above others. They consider themselves so wise that all the world, in comparison, are geese and fools. And the greater one's gifts, the greater and more harmful such pride. It is common in other professions, also. He who has a little ability, or bears the title of doctor, makes much ado about it, and despises others. He acts as if what he has were not given him by God, but as if it were his by nature and birth, and therefore he deserves the praise and worship of all men. Such persons do not realize they are acting in opposition to God, and that they will themselves plunge into the abyss of hell before they can hurl God down from his heavenly throne.

9. See, from the examples of our own time, how God has overthrown such people. Thomas Munzer, with his tumultuous prophets, and later the Anabaptist faction, were proud of heart, would not listen to admonition, and lo! suddenly they went down to ruin, not only in utter disgrace, but to their own miserable and eternal loss and that of many people who had been misled by them. So, too, there are at the present day many proud spirits. Some dare not yet publicly show themselves. Such as have perceived that they are learned, or are held in regard by men, thereupon grow boastful and, despite all their skill and learning, abide without the Spirit and without fruit, even if they do not work more harm in addition to bringing themselves into condemnation.

10. Thus it is in all kinds of gifts and offices where men are not Godfearing and humble. For example, those who are intrusted with the civil government – princes, counselors, lawyers (where they are not "theologians," that is, Christians) are so insolent and proud that they imagine themselves alone to be the people, whom others are to reverence as gods. In their pride, they despise God and men, and by their arrogance they lead the land and the people to destruction. These have already the judgment upon themselves that they, as God's enemies, must be hurled down. For they have cut themselves loose from God's kingdom and grace; and the blessings of baptism and of Christ, with his suffering and blood, are lost upon them.

11. We have now shown how pride conflicts with the demands of the first table of the law. Men do not employ the spiritual treasures and gifts to God's honor nor to the good of their

neighbors. Thus they mar these gifts and, in their wicked course, go to the devil, into whose likeness they have grown.

## **PRIDE OPPOSED TO THE SECOND TABLE**

12. Further, this vice is just as general in the sphere of the second table of the law – among the common people and in the temporal life of the world, each one boasting of himself and despising others. Prince and nobleman think that all the world is nothing in comparison with themselves. Commoner and peasant, puffed up because they have much wealth, imagine they must defy everybody, and do good to nobody. These deserve to be spit upon by all men. Such pride does not become them better than ornaments of gold or silver would become an image of stone or a wooden block. Finally, the women, with their foolish pride of dress, must not be forgotten. One prides herself on being better or more beautifully adorned than her neighbor. She is, in truth, a finely decorated goose. She imagines that no other woman equals her. Yea, there is scarcely a house-servant or maid but brags over others.

13. In short, we have come to the point where all men, with their insolence and boastfulness, seek to lord it over others. None will humble himself to another. Each thinks he has full right to act as he does, and is under no obligation to yield to others. And the civil government has grown so weak that there is no hope of restraining the haughtiness of all classes, from the highest to the lowest. At last, God must strike with thunder and lightning to prove to us that he resists such people and will not tolerate pride. Therefore the young, who can still be led, should be exhorted and trained, as far as possible, to guard themselves against this vice.

14. Peter uses for his purpose a peculiar term when he says, “Gird yourselves with humility.” “Gird” has the meaning of being bound or joined together most firmly; or, as a garment, most carefully woven through and through so that it cannot tear. He illustrates by this term how Christians, with all diligence, should strive after the virtue, and manifest and practice it among themselves, as if upon them as a band it was a special obligation. Thus, he says, must you be twined together and bound to each other, and your hands clasped together. So must you be joined by humility, which cannot be dissolved, dismembered, or torn, even though occasion be given one, here and there, incited by the devil, or the evil word of someone else, to fly into a passion, and grow defiant and boastful, as if to say: Must I suffer such things at the hands of this man? But rather say to yourselves. We are Christians, and must bear with each other and yield, in many things; for we are all one body, and we are placed together here on earth for the sole reason that we may, through love, serve one another.

15. And each should recognize his own weakness. He should remember that God has given others also something and can give them yet more, and that therefore he should gladly serve and yield to others, remembering that he needs their help. Each one is created for the sake of others, and we are all to serve one another. God gives the same grace and salvation to all, so that none may exalt himself above his neighbor; or, if he lift himself up, that he lose the grace conferred and fall into deeper condemnation. Therefore we must hold fast to this humility, so that the unity may not be destroyed. For Satan seeks to destroy this also, and

uses every possible means to lead people to despise each other and to be proud and insolent in their treatment of each other. And these are things to which flesh and blood, even without special incitement, are inclined. Thus humility is easily and quickly lost if men are not alert to fight against the devil and their own flesh.

## **THE BEAUTY OF HUMILITY**

16. Humility is one of the beautiful garments and ornaments with which Christians should adorn themselves before God and the world. Paul, in Colossians 3:12, says, “Put on humility.” He regards this virtue as more precious than all earthly crowns and splendor. This is the true spiritual life. It is not to be sought elsewhere, by running into the cloisters or the deserts, by putting on gray gown or cowl. Peter here admonishes all classes to cultivate this virtue. This sermon on good works concerns every station in every house, city or village. It is for all churches and schools. Children, servants and the youth should be humbly obedient to parents, superiors and the aged. On the other hand, it is for those in the higher stations of life who serve their inferiors, even the lowest. If all men so observed this virtue the world would be full of good works. For it is impossible that humility should do evil. It is profitable and pleasant to all men.

17. By this virtue, true saints and Christians can better be known than by monastic seclusion and holiness. It requires no great effort to wear a gray cowl. It is not even such a great trial to lie on the ground at night and to arise at midnight; scoundrels, thieves, and murderers must often do the same. But to wear and hold fast to this angelic garment, humility – this the world is not so willing to accept as monasticism and its works. And thus it comes to pass that flesh and blood do not strive after this holy life. Each man seeks an easy life, in which he can live to himself and need serve no one nor suffer anything at the hands of others; just as the monks have sought and chosen. Peter adds to this admonition the reason:

*“For God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.”*

18. As I have said above, he strives to show the earnestness of God’s command. The command is accompanied by a threat. He does not simply say, God punishes the proud, or God is hostile to them; but he “resisteth” them, he sets himself against them. Now, what is the pride of all men toward God? Not so much as a poor, empty bubble. Their pride puffs itself up and distends itself as though it would storm the sky and contend against the lightning and thunder, that can shatter heaven and earth. What can the combined might of all creatures accomplish if God oppose himself thereto? And how does a miserable man, whose heart is overwhelmed by a small pestilence, rise against the majesty of heaven which can, any moment, cast him down into the abyss? What are earth and ashes proud of? says Sirach, 10:9.

19. Is it not enough and more than enough that other sin and disobedience are laid to our account, by which we anger God and merit heavy punishment, without our trying further to provoke him with our pride and haughtiness, so that he must arise in his majesty and resist us? With other sins he can have patience, that he may exhort and incite us to repentance. But

if, in hardened impenitence, we defy and oppose him, he cannot but rise up against us. Who is there that will bear it, or be able to stand, when God sets his countenance and his power against a poor man already subject, every moment, to death and the power of the devil?

## **THE CONSEQUENCE OF PRIDE**

20. From the beginning, innumerable instances in history have proved the truth of this saying, “God resisteth the proud.” They show how he has always overthrown and destroyed the proud world and has cast down the haughty, scornful kings and lords. The great king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, was humbled when banished from his royal throne to the companionship of the beasts of the field and compelled to eat grass with them, Daniel 4:30ff. Again, remember how suddenly the great king Alexander was hurled down, when after the victory and good fortune God had given him, he began to grow proud, and wanted to be revered as a god? Again, there was King Herod Agrippa, Acts 12:23. The proud, learned emperor Julian, a virulent mocker and persecutor of Christ, whom he had denied – how soon was he drowned in his own blood! And since then, what has become of all the proud, haughty tyrants, who proposed to oppress and crush Christianity?

21. The Pope, also, has ever, in devilish pride, exalted himself, and in the temple of God set himself forth as God. Further, in worldly pomp and pride he has lifted himself above all others. He has even learned, from heathen emperors, as Diocletian and other tyrants, to have men kiss his feet. Yea, he has forced emperors and kings to submit to this humiliating act. What open, inhuman insolence and pride Pope Alexander the Third practiced when, by threatening against him his empty ban, he compelled the pious and mighty German emperor, Frederick Barbarossa, to prostrate himself at his feet while he stepped upon him and said, Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder; and when the emperor protested against such shameful pride and said, Non tibi, sed Petro (Not to thee, but to Peter), the Pope, with increasing scorn, replied, “Et mihi, et Petro” (Both to me, and to Peter). This is pride carried almost to its highest point.

22. The Turk, too, is prouder now than ever, and, I hope, has reached the heights of pride, beyond which he cannot and shall not proceed. Meantime, may he not attack and humble us! But it will come to pass, in the end, that God will overthrow both pope and Turk through his divine power, and, as Daniel says, without the aid of men. This word will not fail, “God resisteth the proud.” Its truth must appear in human events, so that men may see what is meant by the declaration, “God resisteth”; otherwise no one would believe it. Though the Turk and all the world should be a thousand times more proud and powerful, this should not help them when he who is above sees and grows angry, and lifts his hand. He asks as little about the power of all Turkish emperors and of the Pope as about a dead fly.

23. “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God,” Hebrews 10:31. This, however, is nothing else than with scorn and defiance to oppose his will, so that he, in turn, must set himself against man and must lift his hand. Therefore, let everyone beware lest he boast and grow defiant in the presence of the divine majesty. Not only must he beware, that he may not awaken God’s anger, but that he may have grace and blessing in the things he

ought to do. For, if thou beginnest something in thine own power, and wisdom, and haughtiness, think not he will grant thee success and blessing to carry out thy purpose. On the other hand, if thou humblest thyself, and beginnest aught in accordance with his will, in the fear of God and trusting in his grace, there is given thee the promise, “He giveth grace to the humble.” So, then, thou shalt not only have favor with men, but success shall crown thine efforts. Thou shalt prove a useful man, both to God and to the world, and shalt complete and maintain thy work despite the resistance of the devil. For where God’s grace is, there his blessing and protection must follow, and his servant cannot be overthrown or defeated. Though he be oppressed for a time, he shall finally come forth again and be exalted. So Peter concludes by saying:

*“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.”*

24. Peter shows in these words what true humility is and whence it comes. The heart, through knowledge of its sin, becomes terrified in the presence of God’s anger and anxiously seeks grace. Thus a humility is born, not merely external and before men, but of the heart and of God, from fear of God and knowledge of one’s own unworthiness and weakness. He who fears God and “trembles at his word” ( Isaiah 66:5), will surely defy or hector or boast against nobody. Yea, he will even manifest a gentle spirit toward his enemies. Therefore, he finds favor both with God and men.

25. The cause of this, Peter says, shall be “the mighty hand of God.” As though he would say: Ye may not do nor leave undone this thing for the sake of men, but ye ought to humble yourselves under the hand of God. God’s hand is powerful and mighty in a twofold respect: It dashes down and overthrows the proud and self-secure, however hard and iron their heads and hearts may be. They must languish in dust and ashes; yea, must lie despondent and desperate in the anguish and torments of hell, if he touch them but a little with the terrors of his anger. These are experiences through which the saints also pass, and concerning whose severity they make lamentation. “For thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore. There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine indignation,” Psalm 38:2-3. *“For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping. Because of thine indignation and thy wrath: for thou hast taken me up, and cast me away,”* Psalm 102:9-10. “I am consumed by the blow of thy hand. When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth,” Psalm 39:10-11.

## **THE REWARD OF HUMILITY**

26. In the second place, God’s hand is mighty to raise, to comfort and strengthen the humbled and the fearful, and, as Peter says here, to exalt them. Those who in terror have been cast down should not, therefore, despair, or flee before God, but rise again, and be comforted in God. God wants it preached and published that he never lays his hand upon us in order that we may perish and be damned. But he must pursue this course in order to lead us to repentance: otherwise we would never inquire about his Word and will. And if we seek grace, he is ready to help us up again, to grant us forgiveness of sins, the Holy Spirit, and

eternal life. The Psalms and the Prophets here and there speak of this. “Jehovah hath chastened me sore; but he hath not given me over unto death,” Psalm 118:18. “*Jehovah raiseth up them that are bowed down,*” Psalm 146:8.

27. God will “exalt you in due time,” says Peter. Though God’s help be delayed, and the humbled and suffering seem to lie oppressed all too long under God’s hand, and on that account to languish, nevertheless, let them hold to the promise Paul has given: God “will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able,” 1 Corinthians 10:13, but he will hear your cry, and will, at the right time, help; and with this let them be comforted. But again, let the proud fear, even though he permit them to go unpunished and to continue in their boastful course for a time. He watches their lives, and, when the proper time comes, he will descend all too heavily upon them, so that they cannot bear it. He has already stretched forth his mighty hand, both to cast down the godless and to exalt the humble.

*“Casting all your anxiety upon him, because he careth for you.”*

28. What will become of him who lives a God-fearing and humble life, suffering the insolence, pride and wantonness of the world? Or, where will he find protection and defense, to abide in his godly ways? We see daily how the pious are harassed and persecuted, and are trod on by the world. The Apostle says: “Ye Christians must endure temptation and adversity, want and need, both physical and spiritual, in the world, and your heart is oppressed with anxiety and cares, and ye think within yourselves: O, what will become of me? How shall I be supported? What if I should die?” (The world only concerns itself about how it may be enriched and be filled, and anxious, unbelieving consciences would, through themselves and their own good works, seek to have a gracious God and to die in peace.) “In view of all this,” he says, “only hearken, I will counsel and instruct you aright as to what disposition you should make of your troubles.” There is a brief passage in Psalm 55:22 which reads: “Cast thy burden upon Jehovah, and he will sustain thee: he will never suffer the righteous to be moved.” Follow ye this advice. Let not your burden rest upon yourselves; for ye cannot bear it, and must finally perish beneath its weight. But, confident and full of joy, cast it from you and throw it on God, and say: Heavenly Father, thou art my Lord and God, who didst create me when I was nothing; moreover hast redeemed me through thy Son. Now, thou hast committed to me and laid upon me, this office or work, and things do not go as well as I would like. There is so much to oppress and worry, that I can find neither counsel nor help. Therefore I commend everything to thee. Do thou supply counsel and help, and be thou, thyself, everything in these things.

29. Such a prayer is pleasing to God, and he tells us to do only what we are commanded, and throw upon him all anxiety as to the issue and what we shall accomplish. As also other passages of Scripture declare: “Commit thy way unto Jehovah, trust also in him, and he will bring it to pass,” Psalm 37:5. No heathen, philosopher, jurist, if he have not God’s Word, can throw his care and complaint upon God. He thinks that all the world, especially the great, the wise, who rule, must accomplish everything by their own planning and circumspection. And where trouble arises – for it is quite common for even the greatest- and wisest people to make mistakes – he becomes a madman or a fool, and begins to murmur



and argue against God and his government, as though God's rule merited criticism. But such men receive their deserts when God permits their calculations and hopes to fail, and lets the reverse obtain. For they will not admit they have need of him. They think they have sufficient wisdom and power, and that God must respect their plans. Thus, they spend their lives in many vain, useless cares and projects, and must, in the course of their experience, learn and confess, many a time, that the very opposite of their judgment is the truth.

30. Christians have the rare faculty, above all other people on earth, of knowing where to place their care, whilst others vex and torture themselves and at length must despair. Such must be the consequence of unbelief, which has no God and would provide for itself. But faith understands this word Peter quotes from the Scriptures: "*Because he careth for you.*" It joyfully meditates thereon and does and suffers faithfully. For faith knows this to be its duty. Its trouble, however, it commits to God, and proceeds with vigor against all that opposes. It can call upon God as a father, and it says: I will do what God has commanded me and leave the result with him.

31. The Christian must take this course if he would proceed safely and happily in matters of the highest import. In time of danger and in the hour of death, when, with all his worrying, he cannot discover where he is or how he is journeying, he must, with eyes, senses and thoughts closed to the world, surrender himself in faith and confidence and cast himself upon God's hand and care and protection, and say: God has permitted me to live until this hour, without my solicitude. Moreover, he has given me his beloved Son as a treasure and sure pledge of eternal life. Therefore, my dear soul, journey on in joy. Thou hast a faithful Father and Savior, who has taken thee into his own hand, and will preserve thee.

32. The Christian Church collectively must so proceed in the discharge of its high spiritual office, of which Peter speaks here, that no man or creature, by his own wisdom and power, can sustain or accomplish any work. No power, might, or protection that can comfort, or upon which one may rely, is to be sought in the world. Wholly in God, and in God alone, must help be sought. By his divine power God must uphold the Church. He has, from the beginning, always and wonderfully preserved it in the world, in the midst of great weakness, in disunion occasioned by schismatics and heretics, in persecution by tyrants. And the government is wholly his, though he commits the office and service to men, whom he would summon and use to administer his Word and sacrament. Therefore, each Christian, especially if he fills such an office and partakes of this fellowship, should be intent, in that whereunto God has called and appointed him, upon serving God faithfully and doing that which is commanded him. The anxiety respecting the Church's continued existence and her preservation against the devil and the world, can be left to the Lord. He has taken this upon himself and thus has removed the burden from our shoulders, that we might be certain of the permanence of the Church. If its preservation were committed to human counsel, might and will, the devil, with his power, would soon overthrow and destroy it.

33. Likewise, in every office and station, each one should follow this counsel of Saint Peter. A prince should seek to protect his land and people, to promote God's Word, to maintain discipline and peace, to do justice to every man, to punish the disobedient, etc. Councils,

officials, and those in authority should faithfully advise and direct to this end. Pastors and preachers should rightly and fearlessly declare God's Word and truth. Every citizen and subject should be intent upon his work and duty, and whatever, in connection therewith, is unusual he must simply commit to God. But the world does not pursue this course. Each one says: Why should I incur so much danger, opposition and hostility? Again, why should I labor and toil for naught? I will not accomplish my work at any rate. In this spirit of fear and worry, his proper office and work are delayed, or he is always careless. But let such people know that they are not Christians, nor do they promote God's kingdom or profit the offices conferred on them. If they do not propose to mend their ways, they should give up the office bestowed on them by God. It is not enough to simply sit at ease in one's office and accept the plaudits of men. We all like to render esteem and honor to office and station. But know this, that you are not in office to parade about in beautiful garments, to sit in the front row, and be called "Gracious Master" and "Esquire." You are to conduct faithfully the office with which God has clothed and honored you, regardless of human honor and profit, shame or injury.

34. But men are not generally inclined to believe and trust God. They are not inclined to remember that he cares for us; that he has assumed and must bear the greatest of burdens, which no man on earth can bear; that he cared for us before we were born, and could still, of himself, execute all things dispensing with all human help, but he prefers to accomplish his purpose through human means, and to employ us as instruments in these divine works – governing, punishing, teaching, comforting.

35. The world is particularly culpable in this matter of pride. When divinely charged with some great work, it always seeks to determine, in advance, by its own wisdom, all future danger and accidents, and tries to anticipate them. The world looks for man's help, and seeks friendship and assistance wherever it can. It makes alliances, and resorts to other schemes. It puts its trust in these and then considers itself strong enough to meet opposition, and is sure of its cause by reason of its own efforts. This is not showing faith in God. It is not committing our cause and all care for ourselves to him. It is maintaining the cause through one's own anxiety and forethought. It is ignoring and disbelieving the fact that nothing can be accomplished by one's own vexed effort. No human wisdom has power to foresee the future. If we looked back at the examples furnished by history, we should learn how woefully human wisdom is deceived when it relies upon itself. The results are not what was expected, but the very opposite.

36. The Scriptures give many pertinent examples of the kings of Judah and Israel, whom the prophets often and severely rebuked because they sought refuge and help among strange nations and kings. The prophets warned them that they should not trust in human aid, but should do according to God's Word and command. They told them he would protect and uphold them. But the kings would not hear. They continued to form friendships and alliances with the kings of Egypt, Syria, Babylon and Assyria, and thus invited them as guests into the land, whereupon the heathen kings came with force and led away captive the inhabitants and laid everything desolate. That was their reward for not heeding God's Word; for not believing that he cared for them, and desired to protect and defend them if they would but

trust and obey him. The wisest and most eminent, even among the heathen, have lamented, in the light of their own experience, that they have been shamefully deluded by their counsels, even though founded on the most careful deliberations. Nor can it be said that the world has grown wiser in consequence of its own or others' sufferings.

37. This exhortation is preached to no one except the few who are Christians. They have regard for God's Word, and, now humbled, have learned that they should not rely on their own wisdom and reason, or upon human help and comfort. They have come to the belief that God cares for them. So they do what they know is right and are in duty bound to do, and suffer themselves not to be hindered by such fears as possess the world concerning dangers, injuries, and adversities. They commend all such things to God, and at his word go right through with courage.

38. Let me illustrate from my own experience. What should I have done when I began to denounce the lies of the indulgence system, and later the errors of the papacy, if I had listened and given heed to the terrible things all the world wrote and said would happen to me? How often I heard it said that if I wrote against such and such eminent people I would provoke their displeasure, which would prove too severe for me and the whole German nation. But, since I had not begun this work of myself, being driven and led thereto by reason of my office (otherwise I should have preferred to keep silence), I must continue. I commended the cause to God and let him bear the burden of care, both as to the result of the work and also as to my own fate. Thus I advanced the cause farther, despite tumultuous opposition, than I had ever before dared to think or hope.

39. Oh, how much good would God accomplish through us if people could be persuaded, especially the eminent lords and kings, that what Peter here says is true: "He careth for you!" How much he could do if they believed that truth instead of seeking, through their own wisdom and reason, to equip, strengthen, and compose themselves by aid of human might and assistance, friendship and alliance, for the accomplishment and maintenance of their cause! It is apparent that mortal plans fail and have always failed, and that they accomplish nothing. God hinders and resists man's work when he will not trust him. Hence God can grant no success or favor to that which is founded on human wisdom or on trust in human powers. This is a truth men must finally perceive by experience, and they must lament because they would not believe it.

40. Let him who would be a Christian learn to believe this. Let him practice and exhibit faith in all his affairs, bodily and spiritual, in his doing and his suffering, his living and his dying. Let him banish cares and anxious thoughts. Courageous and cheerful, let him cast them aside; not into a corner, as some vainly think to do, for when burdens are permitted to conceal themselves in the heart they are not really put away. But let the Christian cast his heart and its anxieties upon God. God is strong to bear and he can easily carry the burden. Besides, he has commanded that all this be put upon himself. The more thou layest upon him, the more pleasing it is to him. And he gives thee the promise that he will carry thy cares for thee, and all things else that concern thee.

41. This is a grand promise, and a beautiful, golden saying, if men would only believe it. If a powerful ruler here on earth were to give such a promise, and were to demand that we let him have all the concern about gold and silver and the needs of this life, how cheerfully and contentedly would every one cling to such promise! But now a greater lord says all this, one who is almighty and truthful, who has power over the body and life, and who can and will give us everything we need, both temporal and eternal. We should have in all this, if we only believed it, half of heaven, yea, a perfect paradise on earth. For what is better and nobler than a quiet, peaceful heart? For this all men are striving and laboring. So have we been doing hitherto, running to and fro after it. Yet it is found nowhere except in God's word, which bids us cast our cares and burdens on God and thus seek peace and rest. It counsels us to throw upon him everything that threatens to oppress and worry us. God would not have anxiety dwell in our hearts, for it does not belong there; it is put there by the devil.

42. Therefore, a Christian, even though obliged to suffer all manner of adversity, temptation and misfortune, can cheerfully go forward and say: Dear Lord God, thou hast commanded me to believe, to teach, to govern and to act; this I will attempt in thy name, and I will commend to thee whatever may happen to me in the course of duty. There you have a man who is equal to any task, and can do much good. For he is freed from the greatest misfortune and has laid the heaviest weight upon God, whilst another man does nothing except fill his heart with anxiety and gloom. This other can apply himself to no good work. He becomes unfit both to do and to suffer. He is afraid of every trifle and, because of his vexation or impatience, can do nothing worth mentioning. What is the world doing now? Princes, lords, counselors, citizens, and peasants – all want only power, honor, and wealth. None desires to render service. Everyone fears that this or the other thing might happen to him. Though the world never needed more careful rule than at the present time, lords and princes, simply because they are such, idly sit adorned with beautiful crowns, though they have received their trust from God to discharge their princely office. For the world must be governed, the youth must be educated, the wicked must be punished. But if thou desirest the honor only, and art not willing to step in the mire, to suffer people's displeasure, and through it all learn to trust God and for his sake do everything, thou art not worthy of the grace given for the accomplishment of a good and praiseworthy work. In punishment, resting under God's wrath, thou must remain unfit for every good work.

*“Be sober, be watchful: your adversary the Devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom withstand stedfast in your faith.”*

43. The apostle has set forth two things to be practiced throughout the Christian life; namely, Christian humility – which is fear of God – and faith and confidence in God. Now he admonishes his readers to battle and warfare, that these blessings may be preserved. He shows us our enemy and adversary who seeks to rob us of our treasure and deprive us of our salvation and eternal blessedness. Hence he would say: Be not concerned about living a life of earthly glory, and let not anxious cares fill your soul. But be intent on humbling yourselves before God. Trust in him. Let this be your care, that you may abide in the grace of humility. Let it never be wrested from you. For the devil seeks to instill these forbidden cares, and to produce disobedience against God, that he may tear faith and God's Word out of your heart.

## WATCHFULNESS ENJOINED

Therefore, you must not ignore these facts, and meanwhile strive after something else. You are not to go along in false security or sleep and snore as though there were no danger. You must rather know that you have not been placed in a garden of roses here, but in the midst of heavy conflicts, where you must be on your guard, always watchful and prepared for resistance. For you have an adversary who is not insignificant or to be despised, but is strong, mighty, and moreover wicked and ferocious. He does not fight with stone and wood, destroying rocks and trees, but he has his eye fixed on you Christians. He never grows tired or weary, but without rest and ceasing he pursues you not only to spy upon you and to harass you, in which he can be withstood, but he desires utterly to devour you.

44. His sole purpose and plan is to murder and destroy men, spiritually and bodily; even as, at the beginning, when man had been created, he led and cast him into death. He practices his schemes with awful and deadly effect in the world against those who do not believe in Christ, and he will never stop until the judgment day. One can perceive his incessant activity. He bustles about and openly raves and roars against all Christendom. He uses for his purpose the Turks, and other tyrants and godless people, not to speak of the sorrow and murder he works by so possessing people that in their frenzy they do themselves injury, or without cause murder others. He otherwise, through wicked and shameful snares, leads men into misfortune and sorrow. In short, the world is nothing else than the devil's murderous cave, both spiritually and physically. God, in order to somewhat hinder and restrain physical murder, has ordained temporal government, parental and other authority. These in their office are to be sober, watchful, and diligent. We ought to thank God for his preservation of such authority, for otherwise there would be no peace – everywhere on earth nothing but murder. Nevertheless, the awful murder the devil perpetrates on those who are without God's Word and faith, is not thereby checked.

45. Some other defense and protection, then, another kind of watchfulness, must be sought, in order that men may remain undestroyed and unharmed in the presence of this bloodthirsty murderer. Of this Peter speaks here to the little company of Christians, and says: Ye, through Christ's blood and death rescued from the devil's lies and murderous intent, have been made alive and have been transplanted into the heavenly life, like your beloved fathers, Adam, Abel, and others. They are no longer under bondage to Satan, but live in Christ, though the body lie for a time in the earth and truth and life must be supplied to their body and soul. But because ye still dwell in the world, ye are exposed to all danger. Physically, ye are yet in the murderer's house; therefore ye must take good heed, that he may not kill you again, and murder your souls dwelling in these mortal bodies. It shall harm you none that the soul was ruined and the body is yet subject to death. "Because I live," says Christ ( John 14:19), "ye shall live also." However, ye must struggle if ye are to abide in the truth and life. To this ye are appointed whilst ye live here on earth; otherwise ye would already be in Paradise. But the devil has not yet been consigned wholly to the punishment of his damnation, which will

be at the last day, when he will finally be cast down from his airy height, and from the earth, into the abyss of hell. Then he will no more be able to attack us, and there will no longer be cloud or veil between us and God and the angels.

## **SOBERNESS ESSENTIAL**

46. In order, now, he continues, that ye may be saved from his murderous designs, and may preserve the life you have begun, ye must be sober and watchful; not only mindful of the body, but much rather of the mind and soul. It is true that a Christian who is to resist the devil must be physically sober, for a full hog and drunkard cannot be watchful nor can he plan defense against the devil. Yet must a Christian much more guard himself, lest the soul become sleepy or drunken. As the soul is burdened by the body when the latter is overwhelmed by drunkenness, so, when the soul is watchful and sober, the body also is temperate and prepared to hear God's Word. But where the body is oppressed by drunkenness, there the soul must first have been a drunkard, not heeding God's Word nor giving attention to prayer. Where the soul is drunken and drowned in such security, it will not avail that the body suffer hurt by strict fasting and selfmortification, after the fashion of the Carthusians and hermits.

47. Saint Peter, then, forbids not only bodily drunkenness, but also drunkenness of the soul. One's soul is drunk when he lives in carnal security, without thought and anxiety as to whether he have and hold God's Word or not: when he asks no questions, either about God's wrath or his grace; and when he, moreover, lets himself be filled with the sweet poison of false doctrine through the mob of evil spirits Satan employs for this purpose, until he grows numb, loses faith and clear judgment and finally becomes overfull of drunkenness and spews it out upon others.

48. The same thing results when men begin to be wise in divine things by following human reason. Saint Peter aptly describes this false doctrine with the expression, "cunningly devised fables," 2 Peter 1:16. He says: "We did not follow cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Such are the beautiful words and sermons which make a great show of wisdom and holiness, and naturally please men. For instance it is a cunningly devised fable when one with the aid of philosophy, which reason can understand, sets forth in grandiloquent words what a fine thing it is for a man to live honorably, chastely, and to practice good works and virtues. The aim is, with such pretense, to have us believe that we, through these works (not alone through faith), are justified before God; that is, are redeemed from sin and death.

49. Again, other factious spirits travel about with worthy sayings which they have heard from us – externals do not help souls; the Spirit must do the work – and then they proceed to fling contempt on baptism and the Lord's Supper. So Thomas Munzer, with his seditious peasants, and the Anabaptist rabble, went about, with great demonstration, preaching about the shameful, wicked life of the world, especially of the authorities, declaring that these were godless people and tyrants, and deserved God's wrath and punishment; that therefore men should depose and execute them, and establish a new government, of only pious and holy

people. These and similar things Peter calls “*cunningly devised fables.*” They are exaggeratingly pretended to be the product of great wisdom and art, and are rendered sweet and palatable to reason. So has all idolatry, heresy, and false doctrine, from the beginning on, prevailed, being fashioned and most beautifully adorned by people learned and wise and held in the esteem of the world.

50. How admirable did the position of Arius and his adherents appear in comparison with the true faith concerning the divinity of Christ, when they declared that though Christ should be exalted above all angels and creatures, and that all honor, dominion and power in heaven and on earth belong to him, yea, that he is quite equal to God – all this, yet he is not “homo-ousios”; that is, he is not in one undivided, divine, eternal essence, which is of such unity that it could be imparted to no one else. It would be too much to say that a man is God, etc. With such pretense was a great multitude of Christians seduced. Even few bishops remained in the pure doctrine and faith. And afterward this poison prevailed among the wise people of Asia and Greece, until Mohammed, with his Saracens and Turks, had miserably corrupted the greatest part of the world.

51. Likewise the Pope has adorned and colored with a glorious form his abominations and idolatry, claiming for his order of service that it is a meritorious and beautiful thing. Again, he calls attention to the serviceableness of the beautiful, orderly government and power of the Church, with its well regulated gradations of office and position – bishops superior to the ordinary priests, and over the bishops Saint Peter’s chair at Rome. In that chair is vested the authority for the convocation of general councils so often as these may be necessary. These councils are to judge and decide in all matters of faith, and their decisions everyone must follow and obey. Again, he boasts what great service and consolation to the whole world is the work of the priests in the mass, when they daily renew and offer to God the sacrifice made by Christ on the cross. This is the sweet wine in the “golden cup” of the scarlet harlot of Babylon, with which she has made drunken all kings and nations, Revelation 17:2-4.

52. Where the devil finds those who give ear to such fables, he takes them captive and so fills them with these falsehoods that they neither see nor hear anything else. They think their belief is the only one, and they will not suffer themselves to be instructed out of God’s Word. And so, in their madness, without rightful intelligence of faith and all principles of pure doctrine, they continue in their darkened mind, with their fantastic, lying prattle, without repentance and amendment, having no grace to learn or do anything good. This is amply proved by the example of all seditious spirits.

53. Therefore, Peter admonishes us to be “sober and watchful,” especially in spirit, and to guard ourselves against this sweet poison and these beautiful, adorned lies and fables of the devil. He teaches us how to equip and defend ourselves against his wicked devices. “*Whom withstand steadfast in your faith.*”

54. The true defense and resistance, in which we are to be sober and watchful, is to be well grounded in God’s Word and cling firmly thereto when the devil seeks, with his cunningly devised fables, born of human understanding and reason, to overthrow our faith. Reason is

the devil's bride, and always vaunts itself wise and skillful in divine things, and thinks what it holds to be right and good must be accounted so before God. But faith holds to God's Word alone. It knows that before God, human wisdom, skill and power, and whatever gifts and virtues man may have, count for nothing. Only his grace and the forgiveness of sins in Christ has value. Therefore, faith can repel and defeat all these fine pretensions and cunning fables.

55. Worldly dominion and authority boasts before God in this fashion: My crown is a crown in God's sight, for my power and sovereignty have been given me by God. Therefore, whatever I say he must respect and regard as valid, and everyone must endorse my words and actions. The wise philosopher or jurist would thus give expression to his boasts and pretensions: We are the learned, the Wise rulers of the world, and have admirable laws and statutes. We have superior and beautiful doctrines concerning good works and virtues. Men must listen to us and allow our judgment to have precedence. He who can do, or does, such things as we have done is, in God's sight, superior to others.

### **FAITH, NOT WORLDLY WISDOM, ESSENTIAL**

56. No, dear man, says faith to this, I grant that the things of which thou boastest have been ordained and confirmed by God; but they are not of value save for this temporal life. The world regards it a crown to be known as wise. But in the presence of God thou shouldst lay aside thy crown, let thy might and power, thy law and wisdom, go, and say: God, be merciful to me a poor sinner! Reason has this advantage, that it is equipped and adorned with God's promise to confirm its rule here on earth and to be pleased therewith; but with the provision that reason shall not interfere in God's government, or boast over against him. Let it be known that what is called wisdom and prudence on earth, is foolishness before God. What in the sight of the world is commended and honored as beautiful, valuable, as of honor and virtue, is before God sin, and subject to his wrath. What on earth is called life, is before God nothing but death.

57. If, now, the parental, governmental, and other authority which he, himself, has arrayed and through his word established, and which is even administered by Christians, does not endure before him in that other life, how much less will he allow that to stand which man has devised or subtly contrived out of his own head and heart! Wouldst thou be wise and prudent, then cultivate these virtues in the sphere appointed thee, in thy home, the State, and whatever office thou hast. In these temporal things, rule as well as thou canst. Thou wilt find little enough to help in all thy books, thy reason and wisdom. But when thou beginnest to devise out of thine own reason the things of God, though they may all seem trustworthy wisdom, yet, as Peter says, they are nothing else than fables and lies.

58. For example, a monk's words: Whoever dons a cowl can lead a holy life, for he is cut off from the world, can banish all care and sorrow, and can undisturbed, in peace and quietness, serve God – these words appear wisely spoken, but at bottom they are nothing but unreliable and useless chatter. This is proved from God's Word, which teaches that God has forbidden us to invent our own worship; also, that God would have us serve him in our ordinary life



and station and not by fleeing therefrom. Hence, such monkery can not be a holy, godly life. In Psalm 119:85, we read: “The proud have digged pits for me, who are not according to thy law.” That is, they preach to me about praiseworthy things, and represent their cause as most worthy, in order to overcome me. But when I look at their words aright, I do not find them to be in accord with thy Word and commandments, which (says he) “*are faithful.*” A lie is always beautiful. It attracts and pretends to be truth. It has, further, the advantage that it can adorn itself from the wardrobe of God’s Word, and, perverting the Word, can use it in an uncertain sense. On the other hand, the truth does not so glitter, because it does not make itself plain to reason. For example, a common Christian, a type of the brethren, hears the Gospel, believes, uses the sacraments, leads a Christian life at home with wife and children – that does not shine as does the fascinating lie of a saintly Carthusian or hermit, who, separated from his fellow men, would be a holier servant of God than other people. Yet the latter is useful to nobody. He lets others preach and rule, and labor in the sweat of their brows.

## **GOD’S WORD THE CHRISTIAN’S GUIDE**

59. The one important thing, then, is to see to it that we have God’s Word, and that we regulate all the teachings and claims of men in accordance therewith. We will thus distinguish between the true and the false. We must remember, also, that human reason holds a far inferior position to faith and is not to be acknowledged as trustworthy, save as it is authorized by God for temporal authority. He who has faith can easily perceive when reason conflicts with God’s Word or seeks, in its wisdom, to rise superior thereto; just as, in worldly things, each one in his station, office, or calling, knows full well, when another attempts the same work, whether he does it right or not. So every householder well understands that in his home wantonness and wrongdoing on the part of the servants are not to be tolerated. However, in divine things, reason can so attire and adorn itself as not to be recognized except by one who, guided by faith, has a right knowledge of God’s Word. Reason will not refrain from intruding, with its wisdom and prudence, into the affairs of God, where it has no orders. Thus the devil creates endless misery, as he did at the beginning in the case of our first parents. And yet reason will not permit, in its own domain, the slightest interference of one unskilled in reason’s code.

60. If a cobbler were to arise in the Church and censure the people because they did not wear his make of shoes, and should try to convince people that such a procedure was necessary to salvation, they would pursue him out of the Church with shoes and slippers, and cry after him: Stay at home in your shop with your shoes and lasts! What does that concern the spiritual estate? But when a factious spirit stands up and in his supposed wisdom grunts forth: I am a holy, pious man. I have a special illumination from the spirit. Therefore do not believe what the others say, which is nothing but the dead letter, that one person can be God and man; that a virgin can be a mother; that a man can be cleansed from sin by water and the spoken Word, etc., – when he does this, then there is no one to offer resistance. Reason then gains the victory if it only claims the glory of guidance by the Spirit, of a holy life, etc., even though God’s Word and faith are not present in their purity. Behold, what mischief the Turk, with his Mohammed, has wrought and is still working, solely by claiming the honor of

worshipping the one God, and asserting that he alone has the true God! He declares that only he and his followers are God's people on earth, to honor which God they war and fight against the Christians. He presses his cause the more vigorously because he has such large fortune and victory; so even many Christians who come among them adopt their faith and become Turks. But none of the Turks turn Christian.

61. Therefore, no other counsel can be offered for resisting the devil and escaping destruction by him, than this, that we remain firm in faith, says Saint Peter. One must have a heart which holds fast to God's Word and fully understands the same and holds it to be true. For faith cannot exist or endure without the Word, nor can it hear or understand aught else. One must separate the Word far from all reason and wisdom, placing it above these. He must hold reason as nothing – yea, as dead – in matters pertaining to God's government and to how man is to escape sin and eternal death. Reason must keep silent and give to God's Word alone the honor which belongs to the truth, "bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ," as Saint Paul says, 2 Corinthians 10:5. If reason is to be my teacher in these things, what need is there of faith? And why should I not throw away all the Scriptures? We Christians, says Paul (1 Corinthians 1:20-21), preach something else and higher than reason comprehends, for the wisdom of the world is mere folly. If reason taught me that the mother of Christ is a virgin, the angel Gabriel might have remained in heaven and kept silent concerning the matter. Your faith, says Paul again (1 Corinthians 2:4), should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. Now you have seen the tricks and wiles of the devil with which he seeks to devour you, which he bases on reason as opposed to God's Word.

62. Peter admonishes all Christians, especially the preachers, how to defend themselves against the devil's intrigues and artifices, with which he seeks to capture them. In order that Christians may be properly equipped, Saint Peter calls attention to two things: First, we must know the enemy and realize his purpose; second, we must be armed to meet him and defend ourselves, that we may stand before him and conquer. He is a terrible, mighty foe, says Peter, and is the god of this world. He has more wisdom and more deceptive snares than all men, and can so blind and unsettle reason that it will cheerfully believe and follow him. He is, moreover, a wicked and bitter enemy to you who in Christ have life. He cannot bear to see you Christ's. He thinks and plots about nothing else than your overthrow. And think not that he is far from you, or that he will pursue you from a distance. He has encamped close to you and right around you; yea, in your own territory – that is, in your flesh and blood. There he seeks how to reach you, and overtake you when unguarded, attempting now this, now that. Misguided faith, doubt, anger, impatience, covetousness, evil passions, etc., are points of attack – any place where he finds an opening or discovers that you are weak. Therefore, think not that he is simply jesting. He is more furious and hungry than a famished and angry lion. He does not purpose merely to wound or prick you, but wholly to consume you, so that nothing of body or soul will remain.

63. Whoever would withstand such a foe must be equipped with other armor and weapons than those furnished by human wit and understanding, by human powers or ability. Your defense is nothing else, says Peter, than faith, which holds and grasps God's Word. And

because the believer holds fast to this, the devil can gain nothing. It is God's truth and power, before which, with his lying and murdering, he cannot stand; he must yield and flee. Therefore Ephesians 6:16 says: "Taking up the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one." These fiery darts are chiefly those he hurls into the heart through the beautiful thoughts of human reason. He thus transforms himself into an angel of light, to displace right thoughts and faith, and to introduce human whims and false faith. His aim is, also, to lead into doubt, distrust, hatred, and anger toward God. Thus it is, too, in the other temptations and trials of life, when Satan drives men into sin and disobedience against God's commandment, into such sins as avarice, usury, anger, revengefulness, unchastity, and other vices. Here he uses the same insidious arts, first tearing God's Word out of the heart, then blinding reason with sweet and beautiful thoughts. He says: The thing proposed is not so wicked. God will not be so angry with you. He can afford to be patient with you, you still love the Gospel. With such suggestions as these he carries you away and plunges you under God's fearful anger and condemnation.

64. If you would withstand these wiles, there can be no other plan or counsel than this: Fight with God's Word in firm faith against these suggestions and allurements. Further, keep in mind both your former misery and your present treasures of grace. Remember how you were once under God's wrath when, without fear of God and without faith, you were the devil's own, subject to all his will, and must have perished had not God, in boundless goodness, forgiven you your sin and bestowed on you his grace. And now give heed that you may not lose this treasure, to which end the Holy Spirit has been promised you. You need not succumb if you remain in faith. Again, if you experience weakness and suffer want, you are bidden to call upon him, certain that he will hear you. The promise is: "If ye shall ask anything of the Father, he will give it you in my name," John 16:23. Also: "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you," John 15:7.

65. Peter would, with his admonitions, make Christians bold and confident for resisting the temptations of the devil and defending themselves. He would not have us feel terrified nor despair before Satan, even though that wicked one press us hard through the instrumentality of the world and of our own flesh, as well as by his direct onslaughts. We are not to fear though he seem too strong for us, and though surrender to his prowess seems inevitable. We are to have a manly heart and fight valiantly through faith. We must be assured that, if we remain firm in the faith, we shall have strength and final victory. The devil shall not defeat us; we shall prove superior to him. We have been called of God and made Christians to the end that we renounce the devil and contend against him, and thus maintain God's name, Word, and kingdom against him. Christ, our head, has already, in himself, smitten and destroyed for us the devil and his power. In addition, he gives us faith and the Holy Spirit, whereby we can wholly defeat Satan's further wickedness and his attempts to overthrow us.

66. A Christian should bear all this in mind, I say, and learn to experience the strength and power of faith. So will he not yield to temptation and enticement. Nor will he, from love of the devil or the world, to his own eternal hurt, and for the sake of small temporal advantage,

pleasure, or honor, cast from him God's grace and the Holy Spirit, and put himself again under God's eternal anger and condemnation.

*“Knowing that the same sufferings are accomplished in your brethren who are in the world.”*

67. This is a very precious and comforting passage, the truth of which Peter learned not only by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but from his own experience. One instance of his experience was when, in the high-priest's house, he thrice denied his Lord, and soon thereafter fell into such anxiety and despair that he would have followed the traitor Judas had not Christ turned and looked on him. It was for this reason that Christ, so soon after his resurrection, first of all commanded that the glad tidings should be announced to Peter. Christ also said to him, before all this happened: “Simon, I made supplication for thee, that thy faith fail not; and do thou, when once thou hast turned again, establish thy brethren,” Luke 22:31-32.

## **CONDUCT IN SUFFERING**

Peter makes faithful use of the present passage for his readers' comfort: Ye must expect, in the world, says he, to suffer many and severe things, both in temptations of soul and body, against the first and the second table of the law, Satan lying in wait for you with his deceitful and murderous arts.

68. Weak Christians suffer beyond measure because they are plagued and beset so constantly by the devil. Their afflictions so sorely oppress them that they conclude that no one suffers so severely as do they. Especially does this seem the case in the great spiritual temptations which come to those endowed with peculiar gifts and who are called to positions of prominence in the Church. So Paul often laments his great temptations, which the common people do not understand and cannot endure. God, moreover, is careful to lay on each one just the cross he is able to carry. Still these sufferings are such that even the great and strong must languish and wither beneath them were it not for the comfort God bestows. These troubles grip the heart, and consume the very marrow, as the Psalms often lament.

69. Some of those living in cloisters, and other pious, tender consciences, have learned by experience how hard such burdens are to bear, especially in the darkness of the papacy, where they receive but little genuine comfort. There are, also, some inexperienced and forward spirits who have seen but have not understood these things, and who yet desire to be regarded as people of large experience. When, however, the test comes, they are found wanting. It is related of one of this class, who heard others bemoaning their temptations, that he prayed God to let temptation visit him also; whereupon God permitted him to be tempted with carnal lust. But when he found he could not bear it, he again prayed God, asking that the burden of his brother, whom he regarded inferior to himself, be given him. But when this request was granted, he prayed yet more earnestly that God would give him back his former burden.

70. Amid such temptations Peter comforts suffering Christians by telling them that they are not the first, nor the only ones, to be thus assailed. They are not to feel as if it were a wonderful, rare, unheard of cross which they bear, or that they bear it alone. They are to know that their brethren, the Christians of all times, and scattered through all the world, must, because they are in the world, suffer the same things at the hand of Satan and his minions. It assuages and comforts beyond measure for the sufferer to know that he does not suffer alone, but with a great multitude.

71. It is true that in external temptations this comfort is easily grasped, because of the knowledge of others' experiences. But when Satan assails thee alone with his poisonous darts – for example, when he tempts thee to doubt God's grace, as if thou alone hadst been cast off; or when he suggests horrible blasphemies, hatred of God, condemnation of his government, and so tortures and fills with anguish thy heart that thou art led to think that no man on earth is more fearfully assailed than thyself – then there is need to make use of this comfort which Peter offers thee and all Christians. In other words, Peter would say: "My friend, let not the devil and thy sufferings terrify thee or lead thee to despair. Thou shouldst know this for a certainty, that thou sufferest not alone. No matter how shamefully he attacks thee, he has done and is doing the same to others." The devil seeks, not only our own destruction, but also that of all Christendom. It is ever his purpose to tear out of men's hearts, in the midst of their sufferings, God's Word and faith. He would rob them of their comfort in Christ, and depict God in the most horrible and hostile light, that the heart may have not one kind thought regarding him. And he can do this; not only with lofty, refined, subtle thoughts, but also by gross suggestions from without, before which a man must fear and shudder. I, myself, saw and heard a girl who complained of a temptation of this nature; namely, that while she stood in the church and saw the sacrament elevated, the thought occurred to her: Lo, what a big knave the priest is elevating. And she was suddenly so frightened at the terrible thought that she sank to the floor.

72. Such terror and anxiety proceed from the fact that one imagines that no one else has ever experienced such dreadful assaults. He thinks he has a special, strange, and unusual affliction. Although it is true that men's temptations differ and come from different sources and one may imagine his own a peculiar kind, yet the sufferings and temptations of all Christians are alike in this, that the devil tries to drive them all from the fear and confidence of God into unbelief, contempt, hatred, and blasphemy against God. Therefore, the apostles are accustomed to call Christians' sufferings a fellowship in pain and tribulations. They point all men who suffer to the agonies of Christ our Lord, as the head and exemplar. Peter says Peter 1:11: "*The Spirit of Christ... testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow them.*" And Paul says, "I fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh," Colossians 1:24.

73. If one would speak of specially severe sufferings, surely no human heart can comprehend, much less tell, how great and heavy were the anxiety and sorrow of our first parents on account of their miserable fall. And what sorrow must Adam have witnessed during the nine hundred years of his life in the experiences of his first son Cain, and his children! No man has ever borne such a burden as lay on both parents for nearly a hundred

years after Abel's death, until their third son was born. Truly, these nine hundred years were a period of sorrow and misery. Perhaps, on the last day, we shall discuss with this our father the solitary suffering of that time, of which we know nothing. And we shall willingly confess that in sorrow's school he stands far above us and we have been only insignificant pupils. It must have been most severe and dangerous for him, since he had no example before him of similar suffering with which to comfort himself.

74. Likewise, if thou couldst rightly understand what the other holy patriarchs, the prophets and apostles – especially Paul and Peter – and later all the beloved martyrs and saints, have endured thou wouldst be forced to say that all thy temptation and suffering are nothing in comparison. But above all these must we reckon the experiences of the Lord Christ, whose heart was so pierced by Satan's fiery darts and bitter thrusts that the bloody drops of sweat were pressed out of his body. He has gone before and surpassed us on the way of sorrow. We, with all our suffering, can only follow his footsteps.

## **OF TEMPTATION**

75. Therefore, learn well this saying of Peter, and think not that thou alone endurest this severe, fearful temptation and these onslaughts of the devil. Remember that thy brethren, not only they who are dead – who also have set thee a good example – but also those who live with thee in the world, have suffered and do suffer such terror and distress. For they have the very same enemy Christ and all Christendom have. Thou canst be glad and shout: God be praised! I am not the only one that suffers, but with me there is a great multitude, all Christians on earth, my beloved brothers and sisters, even down to the last who shall walk this earth. And in this passage Peter comforts and strengthens me, as Christ commanded him, who also has tasted of these sorrows, and, indeed, in far greater measure than I and others have.

76. I have at times thought, in my trials, that I should like to argue with Peter and Paul as to whether they were tried more severely than I. For, when he can do nothing else, the devil resorts to the plan of leading a man to fix his attention solely on his own affliction, and oppresses him with the thought: No man has been so cast off by God, or has sunk so deep into anxiety and distress. The devil has often so wearied me with such arguments that at length I could offer no further opposition to him, but simply turned him over to Christ, who can quickly silence him with arguments. If we have not Christ with us, Satan proves far too strong for us. We cannot silence him. He soon renders helpless all our skill, and slays us with our own sword.

77. Ah, these seditious leaders and other self-secure spirits are poor, miserable people, who know nothing at all of this conflict! They drown in their own imaginations, and think they are perfect. And some of them are so shameless and without fear as to blaspheme, saying that God himself could not take their virtue from them. The devil simply strengthens them in these thoughts, and hardens them the more. This very thing is a sign that they do not yet know the devil; they are already blinded and taken captive by him, so that he can ruin them when he pleases.

78. Genuine Christians are not thus self-confident and boastful when they are attacked. In severe conflicts and anxieties they labor that the devil may not deprive them of the sword. I know that I am learned and have seen something of what the devil can do; but I must bear him witness, from my daily experience, that he can overcome me unless I am well established in faith and have Christ in my heart. Thomas Munzer was so firm and inflexible, as he thought, that he dared to say that he would not behold Christ, if he did not himself wish to speak with him. But at last, when the devil began to attack him, men saw what his pride and boasts were. No, they are not the ones to accomplish anything, who go about so boastful, as if they had consumed the devil. They do not see that they, themselves, were long since devoured seven times over by him and are held fast in his jaws.

79. The heretic Arius was also secure and proud enough against the pious bishops and Christians. Yea, when he was punished for his error by his bishop, and admonished to desist, he became the more obstinate. He complained about the bitter persecution to which he was subjected. But his suffering was that they would not approve his horrible blasphemy. Just so in every age the heretics and blasphemers, yea, even open murderers and tyrants, pose as martyrs when they are not permitted to run against God's Word and against pious people. So confident do they try to be that they have no fear of God. They count the devil a dead bee until, at length, he suddenly seizes and destroys them in a moment.

80. But the poor, tempted Christians have need of the comfort and the strength furnished by God's Word. They must anxiously contend lest they lose, in their hours of severe temptation, God, Christ, faith, and Our Father. Therefore, the mission intrusted to Peter, to strengthen his brethren, is most needful. So the same comfort was necessary in his own temptations, and he was even given it beforehand by Christ, who declared that he had prayed for him that his faith might not be extinguished nor fail, which faith, however, from the time of his denial on to the third day did almost die, and scarcely the smallest spark remained. Hence he now, as a true apostle, comforts those who are in the like fears and straits of a sinking and expiring faith. He says to all the suffering and comfortless: My dear brother, think not that thou alone sufferest distress and temptation. Many of thy brethren have suffered quite as heavily, perhaps more heavily. I, myself, have been as weak as thou canst ever be. If thou dost not believe this, look and see what occurred in the house of Caiaphas, the high-priest, when I, who protested my readiness to go with Christ into prison and death, at a word spoken to me by a maid, fell, and denied and abjured most shamefully my beloved Lord. For three whole days I lay in misery. I had no one to comfort me and none who suffered equally with myself. I had no consolation except that my dear Master gave me, with his eyes, one friendly look.

81. Therefore, no one should regard his distress and need as too heavy and fearful, as if it were an entirely new thing, something which had never been experienced by others. To thee it may be something new and untried. But look about thee, at the great multitude of the Church, from the beginning until this hour. The Church has been set in the world to suffer the attacks of the devil, and without ceasing it must be sifted as wheat, as Christ's words suggest, Luke 22:31. My friend, thou hast not yet seen nor experienced what our first parents

endured their whole life long, and after them all the holy fathers until Christ. Peter, also, has been farther in this school than I and thou, and I would say that the same temptation as his could hardly be found. Paul says of him and the beloved apostles ( 1 Corinthians 4:9): “For, I think, God hath set forth us the apostles last of all, as men doomed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, both to angels and men” – so that Satan may torment us according to his will, and thus work out his pleasure upon us. And what are the sufferings of all men combined when compared with Christ’s agony and conflict, in that he sweat blood for thee?

82. When the devil plagues and assails thee with his manifold temptations, refer him to Christ, with whom to dispute about the severe temptations, the death struggle, the anguish of hell, etc. Comfort thyself that thou art one of a great company of sufferers, past present and future. O beautiful, glorious company! All under one lord and head, who took from the devil his power and hell-fire. In short, thy affliction cannot prove so great that thou wilt not find it paralleled in the lives of the apostles, prophets, patriarchs and all the saints, especially of Christ himself; with whom, if we suffer, let us not doubt, says Paul, that we shall “be also glorified,” Romans 8:17.

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