

Third Sunday in Advent;

1 Corinthians 4:1-5

STEWARDS OF THE MYSTERIES OF GOD.

1. This epistle selection illustrates the Gospel lesson for the first Sunday in Advent, wherein we learned the disciples did not themselves ride on the colt, but led it to Christ and set him thereon. That is what the apostle does here. The Corinthians had come to divisions among themselves and to boasting of certain apostles as their leaders. With one party it was Peter, with another Paul, and with yet another Apollos. Each one exalted the apostle by whom he was baptized or was taught, or the one he regarded most eminent. Now comes Paul and interposes, permitting no one to boast of any apostle, and teaching them to laud Christ alone. He tells them it matters not by whom they were baptized and taught, but it is of the utmost importance that they all hold to Christ together and own allegiance to him alone. Paul beautifully teaches how the apostles are to be regarded. The whole passage is a fierce thrust at Popery and the clerical government, as we shall see.

"Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God."

2. The reference is to all apostles and all heirs to the apostolic chair, whether Peter, Paul or any other. Let us, then, be very careful how we regard the apostles and bishops; we must attach neither too much nor yet too little importance to them. Not without reason did Paul – the Holy Spirit, in fact – make this restriction; and without doubt we are under obligation to follow it. The same limit here made concerning apostles applies to bishops. It designates the character of their office and the extent of their power. So when we see a bishop assuming more than this text gives him warrant for, we may safely regard him, as a wolf, and an apostle of the devil, and avoid him as such. Unquestionably he must be Antichrist who in ecclesiastical government exceeds the authority here prescribed.

3. First, Paul warns us against receiving apostles or bishops as anything but "ministers of Christ;" nor should they desire to be regarded otherwise. But the term "*minister of Christ*" must not in this connection be understood as one who serves God, in the present acceptance of the phrase – praying, fasting, attendance upon Church services, and all

the things styled "*divine service*" by ecclesiastical rites, institutions and cloisters, and by the whole clerical order. Theirs are merely humanly devised works and words, whereby Paul's teaching here and elsewhere is wholly obscured, even to the extent of making it impossible to know what he means by the "*ministry of Christ.*" He has reference to the ministry that is an office. All Christians serve God but all are not in office. In Romans 11, 13, also, he terms his office a ministry: "*Inasmuch as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I glorify my ministry.*" And in the epistle selection preceding this (Rom 15, 8) he says: "*I say that Christ hath been made a minister of the circumcision.*" Again (2 Cor 3, 6): "*Who also made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant not of the letter, but of the spirit.*"

4. What language is forcible enough to serve me in the attempt to eradicate from the hearts of all Christians that error so deeply impressed of Popery wherein they interpret the ministry of Christ – or the service of God – in no other light than as their own works, performed to Christ without any authority to do them? Mark you, beloved, to serve Christ, or to serve God, is defined by Paul himself as to fulfil a Christ-ordained office, the office of preaching. This office is a service or ministry proceeding from Christ to us, and not from us to Christ. Note this carefully; it is important. Otherwise you cannot understand the design of the Pauline words, "ministry, ministration, to minister." So he always has it. Seldom does he speak of the service or ministry rendered primarily above them to God; it is usually of the ministry beneath them, to men. Christ, too, in the Gospel bids the apostles to be submissive and servants of others. Lk 22, 26. To make himself clearly understood in this matter of service, or ministry, Paul carefully adds to the word "*ministers*" the explanatory one "*stewards,*" which can be understood in no other way than as referring to the office of the ministry.

5. He terms his office "*service or ministry of Christ*" and himself "*minister of Christ,*" because he was ordained of God to the office of preaching. So all apostles and bishops are ministers of Christ; that is preachers, messengers, officers of Christ, sent to the people with his message. The meaning of the verse, then, is: "*Let every individual take heed not to institute another leader, to set up another Lord, to constitute another Christ. Rather be unanimously loyal to the one and only Christ. For we apostles are not your lords, nor your masters; we are not your leaders. We do not preach our own interests, nor teach our own doctrines. We do not seek to have you obey us, or give us allegiance and accept our doctrine. No, indeed. We are messengers and ministers of him who is your Master, your Lord and Leader. We preach his Word, enlist men to follow his commandments, and lead only into obedience. And in this light should you regard us, expecting of us nothing else than to bring the message. Though we are other persons than Christ, yet you, do not receive through us another doctrine than his; another word, another government, nor another authority than his. He who so receives*"

and regards us, holds the right attitude toward us, and receives, not us, but Christ, whom alone we preach. But he who does not so regard us, does us injustice, discards Christ, the one true Leader, sets up another in his stead and makes gods of us."

6. In Judges 8, 22-23 we read that the children of Israel said to Gideon: "Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also," *to which Gideon answered, "I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: Jehovah shall rule over you."* And in First Samuel 8, 7 we are told that when the children of Israel desired a king of Samuel, God said: "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not be king over them." Thus we see God cannot permit any authority to usurp his own among his people.

7. But perhaps you ask: *"Where was the sin of the people when they desired Gideon to rule over them? Had not God given Gideon leadership in the contest, and did he not later provide many holy kings expressly for them?"* I reply it was not a sin for the children of Israel to have sovereigns; it was not contrary to God's will; for there must be temporal authorities. But the sin consisted in the fact that, not content with God's government, they chose human government instead. Gideon and the holy kings did not extend their authority as rulers a hair's breadth farther than God's command warranted, and they did not regard themselves in any other light than as the servants or ministers of God; that is, they ruled according to God's direction and not according to their own. Thus was perpetuated God's government in its purity, and they were servants in it; as were the apostles servants in the word of Christ. Hence David sings of his own kingdom as identical with God's. He says: *"Arise, O Jehovah, in thine anger: lift up thyself against the rage of mine adversaries, and awake for me; thou hast commanded judgment. And let the congregation of the peoples compass thee about; and over them return thou on high. Jehovah ministereth judgment to the peoples."* Ps 7, 6-8.

8. But where more authority is assumed than God's command gives, and where the magistrate attempts to rule according to human doctrines, or the subjects seek such leadership, idolatry results and the leader assumes a new character. The magistrate is no longer a servant or minister, but rules arbitrarily, without command of God. God says of them as he said to Samuel concerning the children of Israel: *"They have not rejected the magistrate, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them."* I refer here to spiritual matters, to the sovereignty of the soul, which must stand before God. Civil government is a matter that does not pertain to nor concern the soul

9. Where divine leadership is shared with any other than God or Christ, there must also be doctrine and commandments differing from the doctrine and command of Christ. Service of Christ must immediately fail; Christ must be rejected for the establishment of a new sovereignty. Plainly enough, no one can be servant of Christ and at the same time teacher of his own message. The two conditions cannot exist at the same time. How can

one be a servant of Christ if he does not teach Christ's message? Or how can he teach his own message when he is under obligation to teach only Christ's? If he advocates his own counsels, he makes himself lord and does not serve Christ. If he advocates Christ's counsels, he cannot himself be lord.

10. From this you may judge for yourself whence arises Popery and its ecclesiastical authority, with all its priests, monks and high schools. If these can prove they teach nothing but the message of Christ, we must regard them as his ministers or servants. But if we can prove they do not so teach, we must regard them as not his servants. Now it certainly is clear that their teaching is not the doctrine of Christ, but their own doctrine. Hence it is evident they constitute the kingdom of Antichrist and are servants of the devil. For Paul makes a firm stand here and declares: *"Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ."*

11. Their claim that in addition to the teachings of Christ, the commandments of the Church may be taught – and they intimate that their teachings are the doctrines of the Church – is of no significance. Paul's teaching here continues to stand, that the Church belongs neither to Peter nor Paul, but to Christ only, and acknowledges none but the servants or ministers of Christ. You see, then, the blasphemy of the Pope in crying obedience to his doctrines as the road to salvation, and disobedience to them, the road to damnation. Paul here makes obedience to these things a work of the devil; as he does also in First Timothy 4, 1-3: *"But the Spirit saith expressly, that in later times some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons, through the hypocrisy of men that speak lies, branded in their own conscience as with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by them that believe and know the truth."* And Christ says: *"My sheep hear my voice, and a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers. I know mine own, and mine own know me."* Jn 10, 5-14.

12. Note the harmony between Paul's teaching and this statement of Christ's that any other than the voice of Christ is a strange voice, the doctrine of the devil, and to be avoided. You see here Christ's own verdict in regard to doctrines, what his Church hears and teaches, and what are and what are not the commandments of the Church. The Church has no other doctrine than that of Christ, and no other obedience than to obey him. All the Papists say, then, concerning obedience to the commandments of the Church is in the same class with what Paul calls speaking lies in hypocrisy, moved by false spirits and doctrines of devils.

13. The same is the meaning of the phrase "stewards of the mysteries of God." The word "steward" here signifies one who has charge of his lord's domestics; one whose office is the same as that of stewards in monasteries at the present day, or provosts in nunneries, or governors, managers and overseers of the sort. For "oekonomus" is Greek

and signifies in English a steward, or one capable of providing for a house and ruling the domestics. Christ in Matthew 24, 45 calls such a one simply a servant: "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath set over his household, to give them their food in due season?" Such a servant was Eliezer, the steward of Abram's house. Gen 15.

14. Now, God's household is the Christian Church – ourselves. It includes pastors and bishops, overseers and stewards, whose office is to have charge of the household, to provide nourishment for it and to direct its members, but in a spiritual sense. Paul puts a distinction between the stewards of God and temporal stewards. The latter provide material nourishment, and exercise control of the physical person; but the former provide spiritual food and exercise control over souls. Paul calls the spiritual food "mysteries." The practice of providing it has so long been discontinued we do not now know what a steward is nor what is meant by "mysteries." Church officials imagine that when they baptize, celebrate mass and administer other sacraments, they exercise the mysteries, and that now there is no proper mystery but the mass. At the same time they know not the meaning of the term in this connection.

15. I cannot just now find a word in German equivalent to "mysterion," and it will be well to retain the Greek form, as we have with many other words. It is equivalent to "secret," something hidden from our eyes, invisible to all, and generally pertaining to words. For instance, a saying not easily understood is said to contain a hidden meaning, a secret, a "mysterion" – something is concealed therein. The concealment itself may properly be termed "mystery"; I call it a secret.

16. What, then, constitutes the mysteries of God? Simply Christ himself; that is, faith and the Gospel concerning Christ. The whole Gospel teaching is far beyond the grasp of our reason and our physical sense; it is hidden to the world. It can be apprehended only by faith; as Christ says in Matthew 11, 25: *"I thank thee, O father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes."* And as Paul tells us (1 Cor 2, 7-8): *"We speak God's wisdom in a mystery, which none of the rulers of this world hath known."*

17. Expressed in the clearest manner possible, "mystery" reception of the things of faith – that Christ the Son of God was born of a virgin, died and rose again, and all this that our sins might be forgiven. These things eye sees not nor reason comprehends. Indeed, as Paul says (I Cor 1, 23), they are mere foolishness to the wise, and simply an offense to the self-righteous saints. How can the natural man perceive, or reason acknowledge, that the man Christ is our life and salvation, our peace, our righteousness and redemption, our strength and wisdom, Lord of all creatures – that he is even God – and everything else the Scriptures testify of him? None can apprehend these truths except he hears and believes them through the Gospel. They are too far beyond sense and reason to be grasped by the natural man.

18. So, then, the mysteries of God are simply the blessings in Christ as preached through the Gospel and apprehended and retained by faith alone. Paul says relative to the matter, speaking on how men should behave themselves in the house of God: *"Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness; he who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, received up in glory."* I Tim 3, 16. This is spoken of Christ, who was manifest in the flesh. He dwelt among men who had flesh and blood like himself, yet he was still a mystery. That he was Christ, the Son of God, the life, the way, the truth and all good, was hidden.

19. Yet he was "justified in the Spirit;" that is, through the Spirit's influence believers received, acknowledged and retained him as all we have mentioned. "To justify" means simply to pronounce just, or at least to admit as just; as we have in Luke 7, 29: "All the people when they heard, and the publicans, justified God." Again, in Psalm 51, 4: "That thou mayest be justified when thou speakest." This is equivalent to saying: The believer in Christ justifies him, and acknowledges the truth that Christ alone is our life and righteousness and wisdom, and that we are sinners, condemned and perishing. For such Christ is, and such is his claim. He who acknowledges this his claim justifies him in the Spirit; but he who does not justify him relies upon his own works; he does not see himself condemned but contends against and condemns Christ. [This justification of Christ is effected by no one unless he possesses the Holy Spirit, whose work alone it is. Flesh and blood cannot do it, even if it be publicly presented to our eyes and preached into our ears.]

20. The statement in Romans 1, 4, *"Christ was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness,"* has reference to justification. As if to say: *"In unbelievers Christ is nothing; not only despised, but utterly condemned. But the saints whose life is in the Spirit who sanctifies them, strongly and boastfully maintain that he is the Son of God. To them it is proved and firmly settled."*

21. Paul might have said: "We are the stewards of the wisdom of God, or of the righteousness of God," and so on. For all this Christ is; as he says (I Cor 1, 30): "Who was made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption." But this would have been specifying, and he desired to embrace in one word all the blessings in Christ which the preaching of the Gospel brings; so he styles them "mysteries." We may understand it as if he said: "We are spiritual stewards whose duty it is to minister the grace of God, the truth of God – but who can enumerate all? Let us briefly sum them up and say, the mysteries of God; mysteries and hidden things because faith alone can attain them." He adopts the same style in Romans 1, 4 when he comprises in one word how Christ was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, preached to the gentiles, and so on. Similarly, in First Timothy 3, 16 he expresses it briefly in Greek, "oristheis," determined. In short, Christ was declared and determined, was received and regarded, as the Son of God, by angels, gentiles, the world, heaven

and all things; since for this purpose he was manifested, justified, revealed, preached, believed, received, and so on. Hence he indicates it here by the plural word "mysteries," and in First Timothy 3, 16 by the singular "mystery." The words are, however, equivalent in this connection. Christ is all in all, one mystery many mysteries, as expressed in the many mysteries blessings we have from him.

22. It is worthy of note that Paul adds to "mysteries" the modifier "*of God*;" he means the hidden things God grants and which exist in him. For the devil also has his mysteries, as Revelation 17, 5 says: "Upon her forehead a name written, Mystery, Babylon the Great," etc. And again in the seventh verse, "I will tell thee the mystery of the woman." The things over which the Pope and his priests now preside as stewards are mysteries of the latter class; for they intimate that their doctrine and deeds win heaven, when in reality they but conceal death and hell for all who trust therein. But the mysteries of God enfold life and salvation.

23. Thus we arrive at the apostle's meaning in the assertion that a minister of Christ is a steward in the mysteries of God. He should regard himself and insist that others regard him as one who administers to the household of God nothing but Christ and the things of Christ. In other words, he should preach the pure Gospel, the true faith, that Christ alone is our life, our way, our wisdom, power, glory, salvation; and that all we can accomplish of ourselves is but death, error, foolishness, weakness, shame and condemnation. Whosoever preaches otherwise should be regarded by none as a servant of Christ or a steward of the divine treasurer; he should be avoided as a messenger of the devil. So it follows:

FAITHFULNESS IN STEWARDS.

"Moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful."

24. Upon this all depends. After faithfulness God inquires. Angels, men and all creatures look for and demand it; not the mere name or honor of steward will answer. The question is not whether one's bishopric be large or small; nor is it particularly important whether or not he be outwardly pious. The question is, does he faithfully execute the duties of his office, acting as a steward in the blessings of God? Paul here permits us much liberty to judge the doctrines and lives of our bishops, cardinals and all Papists. The same faithfulness is also required by Christ: "*Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath set over his household, to give them their food in due season?*" Mt 24, 45.

25. What is the nature of the faithfulness of the Papists – how does it measure up? Tell me, who would be reformed or profited were any one bishop to have prominence and power enough to possess every bishopric, as the Pope tries to do? Who would be benefited if a bishop were so holy that his shadow would raise the dead? Who would be the gainer if he had wisdom equal to all the apostles and prophets? But none of these

things are inquired after; the question is, Is he a faithful bishop? does he administer to the household of faith the Word of God? does he preach the Gospel and dispense the mysteries of God? Emphatically the inquiry is made upon these points. Here is where the individual is benefited. Above all things, then, faithfulness is demanded of stewards.

26. Now, measure the Pope and all the ecclesiasts by the requirements of this text. Tell me, what is the Pope seeking? Is not the sole purpose of all his grasping and raging to enable him to rule supremely and arbitrarily? His whole concern is for fame, power, position and wealth, for authority over all men. Through the Pope's blasphemous lips the devil deceitfully endeavors to emphasize the importance of obedience to popish laws, and the danger to the soul's salvation from disobedience. The Pope is not concerned about faithfulness to the Christian household. For tell me where in all his innumerable laws and commands – a veritable flood of them – where in the whole extent of his government, did you ever learn of his touching with a single word upon the mysteries of God? or where has he preached the Gospel? All his utterances relate to quarrels, to prebends, or at best to the matter of pates and apparel. Indeed, he openly condemns the Gospel and the mysteries of God. And the bishops and ecclesiasts follow him with their endowments, cloisters and high schools.

27. They have so perverted apostolic faithfulness that with them a faithful bishop, abbot or ecclesiastical prelate is one who loyally manages, guards, improves and increases their temporal possessions – the heritage of St. Peter, the Castle of St. Moretz, the land of the holy cross, the interests of the Virgin and other concerns of the Church, in a word, their own emolument – under the name of God and of the saints; the world, even in its most sordid state, bears no comparison to them. Such are the princes, the bishops and prelates who have the credit of having governed well the Church; it matters not whether or not they have, during their whole lives, read or heard the Gospel, not to mention their disregard for their duty to preach it. The blasphemous tongue of the Pope, in its world-wide unrestraint, calls them good stewards of the blessings of God who are utterly useless, unless it be to fill the place of treasurer, assessor, guardian, bailiff, architect, mayor, plowman, butler or kitchen steward for some temporal lord. Such is their apostolic fidelity; this and nothing more.

In the meantime, souls are perishing. Divine interests are going to ruin. The wolf reigns and devours. In spiritual affairs the popish stewards see no danger and afford no security. They sit unconcernedly counting over their profits, attending to the interests of St. Laurence and with extreme faithfulness providing for the property of the Church – a faithfulness in return for which they are certain Christ has prepared for them no inferior seat in heaven. O wretched, lost, blinded multitude, how securely you are going on toward hell!

28. I cannot pass without notice here – for I must relate it as a warning against similar attempts a trick of the devil which, I heard it said, he exhibited in time past at Merseburg, in our own country. It had to do with the golden cup of Emperor Henry. The

Pope's beloved people zealously relate a certain falsehood, for which they obtain indulgences. They assert that the roasted Laurence, by casting the golden cup into the balance, got so much the better of the devil that he was forced to release the soul of the Emperor, in consequence of which he (the devil) was enraged to the extent of breaking an ear off the cup. Such gross, foolish, idle falsehoods are intended to blind us Christians from perceiving the devil's trickery. What is the devil's purpose in this fabrication? The whole thing is a design to establish by the miraculous, the wealth, luxury and delicate faithfulness of the prelates of which we have spoken. Thereby the weak-minded are to be induced to believe they can overcome the devil by presenting gifts to the Church. But Peter says this conquest is only to be effected by the power of faith. These are the signs Christ and Paul predicted would accompany the misleading of the elect from the faith.

29. A fidelity even more beautiful to contemplate exists among unspiritual lords and faithful stewards of the same class actively engaged in directing the spiritual welfare of souls. Certainly these are true stewards and the right sort! So extremely holy are they, St. Peter will have to be on his guard if he holds his place with them. They are our spiritual fathers – priests, monks and nuns – who exercise themselves in obedience to the Pope, the holy Church and every form of human institutions and orders and statutes. Among them are the paragon, the quintessence, the kernel, the marrow, the foundation – and how shall I enumerate all the honorable titles which they assume and hold from custom? Yes, far enough from custom! The beautiful little cat has pretty, smooth fur.

30. Here is where we find our good stewards and our unheard-of fidelity. How tenaciously, how rigorously and earnestly, they adhere to that sort of obedience and maintain those traditions. Yes, indeed, they are the proper saints. Few bishops who rigidly observe the holy, spiritual law can rank with them. But when we investigate their cloisters and review their doctrines and conduct, we find that no people on earth are less acquainted with the mysteries of God and farther from Christ. Indeed, they act as if mad, maliciously storming Christ with their own inventions. They are the Gog and Magog of the Revelation of John, contending against the Lamb of God. For they exalt their own works to the extermination of faith, and are termed the faithful stewards of God, as the wolf among the sheep is the shepherd.

31. Now, he that hath ears let him hear what Paul says: "It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful"; but he is faithful who is occupied with the mysteries of God. The conclusion, then, is: the Pope, the bishops, monks and nuns, the founders and inmates of universities, and all who with them build upon anything or are occupied with anything but Christ, the Gospel and true faith, though they may have indeed the name of servants and stewards of Christ, are in reality servants and stewards of the devil, their lord, and are engaged with his mysteries or secrets. Christ, in the saying we have quoted from Matthew, tells us further, the servant of the household should be not only faithful, but also wise, able to discern between the mysteries of God and the mysteries of the

devil, that he may safely guard and keep himself and those committed to his care. For, as Paul says in Second Corinthians 11, 13-14, false apostles sometimes fashion themselves into true apostles of Christ, even as the devil transforms himself into an angel of light.

32. Where wisdom to discern the mysteries of God is lacking, the greater the faithfulness the greater the danger; as we perceive in the two mentioned cases of false, seductive faithfulness on the part of the unspiritual saints. Paul well knew how the mysteries of the devil would prevail; so, while silent in regard to every other qualification necessary for stewards, he points out faithfulness. Had our bishops remained faithful stewards of God, popery and its peculiar spiritual orders undoubtedly would not have been introduced; the common spiritual order and life of faith would have been maintained. And were they now to return to faithfulness the strange special orders would soon pass, and the true common ones be restored.

MAN'S JUDGMENT AND GOD'S.

"But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment."

33. First, we must understand Paul's language here, and explain the terms of the original, with which we need to be as familiar as with our mother tongue. He employs the word "judge," or sentence, in a worthy sense; that is, as carrying the thought of esteem. "Judgment," as generally understood, conveys the idea of condemnation. But this is true: Every public judgment operates in two ways. One party is condemned, the other liberated; one is punished, the other rewarded; one dishonored, the other honored. The same is true in private judgment. While the Pharisee in the Gospel praised himself, he censured the publican and others; while he honored himself, he dishonored others. And the attitude of everyone toward his neighbor is either praise or censure. judgment must involve these two things. Hence, Paul here says he is judged, or sentenced, by the Corinthians; that is, their judgment renders honor and praise unto him. By extolling Paul above the other apostles, decision is made between him and the others, to his advantage and with prejudice against them. Some, however, judged in favor of Peter, others of Apollos. That "judgment" is here equivalent to "praise" is evident from the conclusion of the passage: "Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, then shall each man have his praise from God." What is this but saying, Praise not, let God praise? It is God's prerogative to judge, to praise and to crown man; we are not to perform that office for one another.

34. The expression "man's judgment" ("menschliche Tag") implies that judgment of approval whereby man exalts and makes illustrious and renowned those he esteems. The thought is suggestive of the illumination or glory of day, which renders visible things unrevealed in darkness. In the Latin, illustrious people – they who are on

everyone's tongue – are called "praeclari," "nobiles," "illustres." In German, "durchlauchtige" stands for those of high renown, those having name and reputation superior to others. On the other hand, the unrenowned are called "obscuri," "ignobles," "humiles" – insignificant, unknown, humble. The holy Scriptures term kings and princes "doxas," "glorias," "claritates," indicative of glory, splendor and popularity. Peter (2 Pet 2, 10) says of the Pope and his adherents that they tremble not to rail at glories. That means they will curse dignitaries – kings, princes, and all exalted in earthly glory; this when Christ has commanded us to love our enemies, to bless them that curse us, to do good to our persecutors. We see how the Pope defames on Maundy-Thursdays in the "Bulla Caenae Domini"; and, indeed, whenever it pleases him.

35. Man's judgment, then, is expressed in the clamor and ostentation men make before the world. Jeremiah says (ch 17, 16), "Neither have I desired the woeful day; thou knowest." In other words, "They accuse me of preaching new doctrines solely to gain a name, and honor and praise before men; to win their esteem. But thou knowest it is not so; I have not sought such honor and praise." Christ says (Jn 5, 41), "I receive not glory from men." That is, "I do not desire men to laud and extol me." And (Jn 8, 50), "I seek not mine own glory." Again (Jn 5, 35), speaking of John the Baptist, *"Ye were willing to rejoice for a season in his light."* The meaning is, *"It would have pleased you to have John's testimony contribute to your honor and praise; you would have liked to enjoy for a short season the esteem of the people. This is what you sought."*

36. Paul regards it a very trivial matter to command the clamorous honor and praise of men, to gain a reputation with them. He aptly calls such popularity "man's judgment," or human glory. For it is of human origin and not directed of God; and, with men, it shall pass. Paul would say: "I do not desire your praise, nor the praise of all the world." Let men seek for that. Servants of Christ and stewards of God look to Christ and to a divine glory for their judgment.

37. But the apostle surely manifests ingratitude in not sending the Corinthians a bagful of bulls or letters; in not blessing them nor distributing indulgences among them in recognition of their great honoring of the apostolic see. The Pope would have conducted himself in a manner much more worthy of an apostle. Yes, indeed; he would have anathematized them had they not illumined him with the glory of their judgment. He would have said, "I am a Papist; the Pope is the highest, the holiest, the mightiest." Had Paul so desired he might have become pope, might have held supremacy; he had but to utter a single word. He had only to receive them who desired to join themselves to him; the others would have been obliged to yield. But in his stewardship he strove for faithfulness rather than for exaltation. Hence he had to remain a common tent-maker and to travel on foot.

38. From this verse, clearly the Corinthians judged with distinction of persons, preferring that baptism and Gospel which they had themselves received. They intimated

that Paul, or Peter, or Apollos, was supreme. This Paul could not admit. He holds the apostles equal, whatever their individualities. He who is baptized and taught by Paul is as much a Christian as one baptized and taught of Peter, or Apollos, or anyone else. In opposition to this teaching, the Pope fiercely rants, admitting no one a Christian unless instructed of him. At the same time he teaches mere infidelity and the foolish works of men.

39. Now, Paul condemns undue respect of persons, and in the matter of stewardship for God is concerned only about faithfulness. By these very teachings, he removes every reason for divisions; his Church cannot be disunited, but must remain harmonious, allowing equality in all things. How can there be divisions when one minister of Christ is like another, when he is equally a steward of God? So long as there is no difference in privilege, even if one does exceed another in faithfulness, it will not create sects; it will only publish the common Gospel with greater efficiency.

40. Paul's words have reference not to one apostle only, but to every apostle. He does not say, "Let a man so account of me," but "Let a man so account of us;" of "us," mark you. Who is meant by "us"? Himself, Peter, Apollos – they about whom the matter arose. The conclusion necessarily is that Peter and Paul are to be considered equal. Then either Paul's teaching is wrong when he regards all apostles equal servants of Christ and stewards of God, or the claims and proceedings of the Pope must be false and this text a powerful enemy of popedom.

"Yea, I judge not mine own self."

41. You may inquire how it is that Paul should look upon his own judgment of himself as truer than the judgment of any other; for we see how the majority of men praise or highly approve themselves. Naturally one is pleased with himself, but few receive the glory of "man's judgment" – are honored in the sentence of others. We might expect Paul to reverse the statement, saying: "With me it is a very small thing that I should judge myself; I desire neither this human glory of man's judgment, nor the praise of yourselves or of all the world." But he speaks, rather, as a Christian and according to the state of his own conscience before God. The Corinthians exalted Paul in the things acceptable to God. They insisted he was higher, greater and better before God than the other apostles; but certain other Christians extolled Peter. Now, there is with God no better evidence of the soul's condition than what the conscience reveals. God judges not, like men, according to appearance, but according to the heart; as we learn from First Samuel 16, 7: "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but Jehovah looketh on the heart." So it is plain the evidence of our consciences is of greater weight before God than the testimony of all the world. And this evidence alone will stand; as said in Romans 2, 15: *"Their conscience bearing witness therewith, and their thoughts one with another accusing or else excusing them; in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men."*

42. Paul would ask: "Why should divisions arise among you concerning us? What if one is preferred of men before another? It is altogether immaterial. For even our own consciences refrain from judging as to who ranks first in God's sight." Solomon says, "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool." Prov. 28, 26. There are no grounds for divisions. No one knows who ranks first with God. Christ himself does not claim the right to set one soul on the right hand and the other on the left. Mt 20, 23. Since all the apostles are alike before God, since one is a minister of Christ as well as another, and since we may not know who ranks first in God's estimation, let no one presume to judge, much less to exalt himself above another because of temporal power, wealth or popularity. The exaltation of the Pope and the claim that his eminence is from God is in violation of this principle; Paul's words dispute it, teaching that no one is able to know or judge until the last day.

43. But here the keen tongues of the Papists seek to effect a breach. They assume that Paul does not deny the supremacy of Peter, or of the Pope, but forbids judgment of the person himself as to how good or bad he is in God's sight. I admit that Paul does forbid such judgment, nevertheless the design of the Corinthians for which he rebukes them was to exalt the office, the baptism and the doctrine, wholly because of the person; otherwise they would not have said, "I am a good follower of Paul," "I am a good follower of Peter," and so on. Well they knew that doctrine, baptism and office were the same with all the apostles, but their object was to exalt the office and its efficacy with the standing of the individual. Paul, however, takes the opposite stand; he assumes equality of office upon the very ground of equality of individuals in man's sight, since none can know another's standing before God. Had the Corinthians desired to exalt the individual only, and not the office, they would not have created sects and said, "I am of Paul," etc. just as we may hold St. Peter holier in person than St. Augustine and yet not cause division thereby. But it is creating sects for one to say, "I am of Peter," and another, "I am of Augustine," meaning, "*The doctrine taught me is superior to what is taught you.*"

44. The hypocritical Papists, being well aware that their false claim for the supremacy of the Pope cannot stand unless backed by his personal holiness, proceed to bolster up that falsehood by a greater one. They endeavor to give him the reputation of personal goodness by saying he cannot err, for the Holy Spirit never forsakes him, and Christ is ever with and in him. Some of them, knowing the absurdity of denying that the Pope does openly sin, are so bold in their blasphemous utterances as to declare it is impossible for him to remain in mortal sins for a quarter of an hour. Thus accurately have they measured with hour-glass and compasses the extent of the Holy Spirit's presence in the Pope. Why do they tell such blasphemous falsehoods? Doubtless because they are aware of the futility of attempting to maintain supremacy without personal goodness; they would be compelled to admit that exaltation without piety must

be of the devil. It cannot be said the Corinthians exalted the person independently of the office; it was because of his office.

45. Do you ask further concerning Paul, who desired to be regarded a minister of Christ and a steward of God, Why did he not judge himself? I reply: As before stated, the ministry and the office are not his but God's, who enjoined them upon him. As no man can create the Word of God, so no man has authority to send it forth, or constitute an apostle. God has himself accomplished the work; he has constituted the apostles. Hence we should own the work, glory in it, confess it, and give to publish abroad the news of the priceless blessing the one God has bestowed. To illustrate: Though I cannot constitute myself a living soul, I ought to glory in and confess the fact that God has created me a human being. But just as I am incapable of judging how I stand and will stand in the sight of God, so I cannot judge which apostle or steward is greatest before God.

46. But you object: You teach, however, that a Christian should not doubt his acceptance with God, and he that doubts is no Christian; for faith assures that God is our Father and that as we believe so shall it be unto us. I reply: Indeed, I would have you hold fast the assurance of faith in the grace of God; faith is simply a steadfast, indubitable, sure confidence in divine grace. But this is what I say: the Corinthians' intent was to judge the apostles by their personal goodness and works, that according to one's holiness, rank and merit might his office be exalted and his followers secure some honor above others. But Paul overthrows all works and merit, leaving them to God's judgment, and places every apostle in the same rank as to office and faith. They fill one and the same office and are justified by one and the same faith. The question of who ranks first in goodness, position, merit and *achievement must be left to God*; it is not an occasion for divisions in the community. Hence follows: *"For I know nothing against myself; yet am I not hereby justified."*

47. This verse also implies that the Corinthians judged the apostles in regard to the worthiness of person and works; Paul admits his conscience does not reproach him, and confesses to the truth of their judgment so far as his person and conscience are concerned. But, he teaches that such judgment does not suffice before God; and that all decisions based on the same principle are false.

48. Much might be said on this verse. It shows us all works are rejected and no one is made godly and happy by any of them. The fact that Paul dared say "I know nothing against myself" proves him certainly to have abounded in good works; nevertheless he says, "I am not hereby justified." By what is he justified, then? By faith alone. Could one be justified upon the grounds of a clear conscience – knowing nothing against himself – his confidence would rest in himself. He could judge and extol his own character, as do presumptuous saints. Then faith and God's grace would be unnecessary; we would have in ourselves all essentials and could easily dispense with God. The fact

is, however, all depends on our reliance upon the grace of God. Thereby are we justified. The subsequent judgment of our works and character, of our calling and worthiness, must be left to God. We are certain we are vindicated by none of these things and uncertain how God will estimate them.

49. It is easily evident to all, I presume, that Paul refers to his character after conversion when he says he knows nothing against himself; for, concerning his previous life, he tells us (I Tim 1, 13) he was an unbeliever, a blasphemer and a persecutor of the first Christians.

50. The question, however, arises, How can it be that he is not justified by his clear conscience when he declares (2 Cor 1, 12): "For our glorying is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and sincerity of God, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we behaved ourselves in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward"? This quotation contains the answer. The words, "in the grace of God," give it. We are indeed to rejoice in the grace of God, to boast of and glory in it; since it is founded upon the glorying of our conscience. Even had not these words been included, it must necessarily be understood that reference is to the glorying in grace or else to honor before the world. It is the privilege and the duty of everyone to acknowledge before men his innocence, to rejoice in having injured no one. And he should not call evil what he knows to be good. At the same time such glorying avails nothing before God; he must judge the heart, though men are satisfied with deeds. Before God, then, something more than a good conscience is necessary. Moses says (Ex 34, 7), "Forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin; and that will by no means clear the guilty." We read (Rom 3, 27), "Where then is the glorying?" And again (I Cor 1, 31), "*He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord*"; that is, in his grace.

"But he that judgeth me is the Lord."

51. *The thought here is, "I will wait for God's judgment and praise."* Paul says also (2 Cor. 10, 18), "For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth." His intent, however, is not to deter them from godly living but rather to incite thereto. Although no man is capable of judging and commending another, yet none shall go unjudged and uncommended. God himself will judge and praise right living. We should be so much the more faithful in doing good because God is to be judge; we are not to be remiss here even though uncertain as to how he judges us.

"Wherefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall each man have praise of God."

52. We may well ask, Are we not to give praise to one another? Paul says (Rom 12, 10), "In love of the brethren be tenderly affectioned one to another." And Christ (Mt 5, 16): "Even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." And the apostle also tells us (2 Cor 6, 8) we must

here upon earth walk "by evil report and good report." But, we reply our faith alone, not our works, is the chief thing to be honored in all cases. Good works are imperative, and we should extol them in others; but no one is to be judged, justified or preferred because of them. The farmer at his plow sometimes may be better in God's sight than the chaste nun.

53. The five foolish virgins (Mt 25, 2), despite their virginity, are condemned. The widow who threw into the treasury two mites (Mk 12, 42) did more than all the others who cast in much greater amounts. The work of the woman who was a sinner (Lk 7, 37) is extolled above any work of the Pharisees. It is impossible for us mortals to discern the relative merits of individuals and the value of their works; we ought to praise all, giving equal honors and not preferring one above another. We should humble ourselves before one another, ever esteeming our neighbor above ourselves. Then we are to leave it to God to judge who ranks first. True, he has declared that whoever humbles himself shall be exalted, yet it is not evident who humbles and who exalts himself; for the heart, by which God judges, is not manifest. One may humble himself when secretly in his heart he is haughty, and again the meekhearted may exalt him.

54. So Paul says: "The Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts." Then it will appear who is really worthier, superior and better, and whose works excel

55. It is most unchristianlike to base our estimation of one upon his outward appearance and visible works; to say, for instance, that the Carthusian leads a life essentially better than the farmer, or than any married man. Indeed, the Carthusian if he does right will esteem his own life inferior to that of the married man. For God judges not according to outward expression, but according to the secrets of darkness and the counsels of the heart, and how can the Carthusian know which is the humbler and holier, his own heart or the farmer's?

56. Applicable here are two instances, in my opinion the best in all the "Lives of the Fathers." One is of St. Anthony, to whom it was revealed that a tanner at Alexandria, a humble, honest mechanic, but one in no wise illustrious, was far superior to the saint because of his humility of heart. The other relates to Paphnutio, who, despite all his austerity of life, was not superior to a fifer nor to either of two married women. It was a special manifestation of grace that God revealed these two incidents at a time when monastic life was most intense, and works prodigious. His purpose was to deter us from judging by outward appearances – by works – and to teach us to value all works alike and to prefer others above ourselves.

57. Now you will say: If all stations are alike and all works of the same value, none to have preference, what advantage is it to us to forsake the world and enter the holiest orders, to become monks, nuns and priests, in the effort to serve God? I reply: Did not

Christ and Paul foretell that false Christs and prophets should arise and deceive many? Had the doctrine of equal service to God under all conditions and in all works continued to stand, certainly no monasteries and cloisters would have been established – or at least they would not have increased so rapidly – to create the illusion that service to God consists only in meeting their requirements. Who would have become a priest, who a monk, yes, who a pope and bishop, had he realized that in such capacity his position and its works are no more meritorious than those of the poorest nurse maid who rocks children and washes swaddling clothes?

It would grievously distress, yes, and shame, the Pope had he to humble himself to a nurse maid, esteeming his works inferior to hers – he whose position and works are so meritorious that kings, and even God's saints, are scarce worthy to kiss his feet. The holy Papists, then, must institute something superior to Paul's teaching here. They are compelled to judge themselves, and to proclaim their position and works supreme, else they cannot sell their merits and procure heaven for poor laymen, married persons and individuals in various stations, implying that these do not in their lives serve God.

58. Now, seeing how impossible it is for the present ecclesiastical order to stand unless it disposes of this passage from Paul and exalts its religious life with distinction above that of other Christians, it is certainly clear enough that popery, with its monasteries and cloisters, is based on mere falsehoods and blasphemies. The Papists style themselves "ecclesiastical" or "spiritual" and others "secular," when God sees none as ecclesiasts or churchmen, but as believers; and believers are found for the most part not among the clergy but among the laity. What greater deception than to call the clerical order spiritual, and to separate it from the class among whom true spiritual life exists? God alone is to judge who is holiest and best. The clerical order assumes the title "spiritual" simply because they have shaved heads and wear long cloaks. What folly – even insanity!

59. You will say: If this be true, it were better for us to leave the cloisters and monasteries. I reply: There are but two things for you. Follow the teaching of this lesson, commending not you. Regard your order and station no better than as if you were not an ecclesiastic, and your chastity not superior to that of an honest, loyal wife and mother; if you are not willing so to humble your ecclesiasticism, then discard caps, bald pates, cloisters and all. Either adopt this course or know that your ecclesiasticism, your spirituality, has its origin, not with a good spirit, but with an evil spirit. You will never overthrow Paul's doctrine here. It is better to be a mother among the common believers in Christ than to remain a virgin in the devil's cause. Paul stands firm on the point that we must not judge ourselves.

60. But you will loudly object: Jerome and many others have highly commended virginity; and Paul, too (1 Cor 7, 38), teaches it is better to be a virgin than to marry. I answer: Let Jerome be here or there, Augustine here or Ambrose there, you have

learned what God here says through Paul, that no one shall judge himself or anyone else to be best. God's command should have more weight than the sayings of many Jeromes, were they as numerous as the sand grains upon the seashore or the leaves of the forest. True, Paul says it is better to be continent than to marry, but he does not say "in God's sight." If he did, it would be a contradiction of his words here. He who lives continently, it is true, is freer to publish the Gospel than the married man; and it was with the thought of Gospel furtherance that Paul applauded virginity, or continence. He says: "He that is unmarried is careful for the things of the Lord." I Cor 7, 32. Christ also applauds the eunuchs (Mt 19, 12), not for the sake of their condition but for the sake of their profit to the kingdom of heaven; that is, for the sake of their furtherance of the Gospel. Now, although none cares less for the Gospel than do these ecclesiasts, they continue to exalt their position above that of others, and to extol continence for the mere sake of the merit in denial, not for the end it serves. To illustrate the advantage of continence: It is better to learn a trade than to be a servant; and why? Not because it is a condition more acceptable to God, but because it offers less hindrances to his service. It is in this light that Paul applauds virginity and continence; but only in those who have a desire for it through the grace of God.

61. At present no one cares whether continence is a help or a hindrance; everyone plunges into it, thinking only of how exalted, worthy and great it makes them. All is done with such pains and danger, unwillingness and impurity, that an adequate cry and protest cannot be raised against the evil. Still they wish to be better than other people. Thus they have brought such reproach upon the marriage state that it is considered an impure and disgraceful life. As a reward God permits their continence to pollute their garments and beds continually. Really there is no greater or more polluted incontinence than theirs, inordinate, imprisoned, restrained and intolerable as it is

"Bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts."

62. Paul gives the reason we should refrain from commending ourselves or any other when he declares that the hidden things of darkness and the counsels of the hearts are not yet brought to light. Since God judges according to the secrets of the heart which we cannot know, we should withhold judgment of the various stations and works of men, and not make distinction. The virgin is not to exalt her state of virginity above the station of the wife. The Pope ought to humble his eminence below the position of the plow-boy. No one should presume to regard his own station, or that of another, as better before God than the occupations of other men.

63. Every person should be free to choose and live in the state that suits him, all being alike until the Lord comes. But, were this principle to be carried out where would the holy fathers and the spiritual lords obtain their daily bread, not being accustomed to labor? They secure their subsistence by making the impression that the common man is in error and by separating from him their states and position. They judge themselves to

be the best people, confident of enjoying the common man's treasures, because his state is nothing. Hence arise so many institutions and gifts flow to the cloisters, chapels and churches for the especial benefit of these idle, beloved gluttons and gormandizers. All this would fall were Paul's teachings introduced.

64. By the "hidden things of darkness" and the "counsels of the hearts" Paul refers to the two powers commonly but not very intelligibly termed "will" and "reason." Man possesses in his inmost being two capacities: he loves, delights, desires, wills; and he understands, perceives, judges, decides. I shall term these capacities "*motive*" and "*thought*."

65. The motives and desires of man are deep and deceitful beyond recognition; no saint, even, can wholly comprehend them. Jeremiah says (ch. 17, 9-10): "The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly corrupt: who can know it? I, Jehovah, search the mind, I try the heart." And David (Ps 32, 2): "*Blessed is the man in whose spirit there is no guile.*" Many pious individuals perform great works from a selfish motive or desire. They seek their own interests, yet never with assurance. They serve God not purely for love of him, but for the sake of personal honor or profit; of, gaining heaven and escaping the tortures of hell. One cannot realize the falseness of his motives until God permits him to endure many severe temptations. So Paul calls such motives "hidden things of darkness," a most appropriate name. Not only are they concealed, but in darkness, in the inmost heart, where they are unperceived by the individual himself and known to God alone.

66. Remembering this deplorable secret motive of the heart, we should be induced to submit ourselves one to another and not to contrast any particular work or station with others. The motive determines the force and judgment of every work, every station, of all conduct, of every life. As Solomon says (Prov 16, 2): "Jehovah weigheth the spirits" – God is the weigh-master of the spirits. Since there may be something of good concealed in the secret heart of the wife and likewise something of evil in the virgin's heart, it is absurd and unchristian to exalt a virgin above a wife because of her continence, a purely external virtue. It is just as unreasonable to measure the two by their external life as to compare the weight of eggs by putting the shells into the balance and leaving out the contents.

67. Now, according to our secret motives so are our thoughts – good or evil. Our motives and desires control our aims, decisions and reasonings. These latter Paul terms "counsels of the heart" – the thoughts we arrive at in consequence of our secret motives and desires.

68. Of these two, Mary hints in her song of praise (Lk. 1, 51): "He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their heart." She calls intent or motive of the heart the "hidden things of darkness" – her desire, while the "counsels" and imaginations are the heart's expression. Moses, referring to man's heart, says (Gen 6, 5): "Every imagination

of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." And Christ (Mt 6, 22-23) earnestly warns us against the same false motive: "The lamp of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is the darkness!" The reference in this whole quotation is to the secret workings of darkness, which are not to be overcome in any way but by despair of our own works, and strong faith in the pure grace of God. Nothing is more conducive to this end than sufferings severe and many, and all manner of misfortunes. Under such influences man may learn, to some extent, to know himself; otherwise all is lost.

Content Page



First Page