

# INFORMATION FOR THOSE WHO TAKE OFFENSE AT CERTAIN PLACES OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURE

## Part I

Dearly beloved, the great use and profit that Christian men and women may take, if they will, by hearing and reading the holy Scriptures no heart can sufficiently conceive, much less is any tongue able to express with words. Therefore Satan, our old enemy, seeing the Scriptures to be the very means and the right way to bring people to the true knowledge of God, and seeing that Christian religion is greatly furthered by diligent hearing and reading of them, and also perceiving what a hindrance and barrier they are to him and his kingdom, does whatever he can to drive the reading of them out of God's Church. To achieve that end, he has always stirred up, in one place or other, cruel tyrants, sharp persecutors, and extreme enemies unto God and his infallible truth to pull the holy Bibles out of the people's hands violently. They have most spitefully destroyed and consumed the same to ashes in the fire, pretending most untruly that frequent hearing and reading of God's word is an occasion of heresy, carnal liberty, and the overthrow of all good order in all well-ordered commonwealths.

If to know God properly is an occasion of evil, then we must grant that the hearing and reading of the holy Scriptures is the cause of heresy, carnal liberty, and the subversion of all good order. But the knowledge of God and of ourselves is so far from being an occasion of evil that it is the readiest—indeed, the only—means to restrain carnal liberty and to kill all our fleshly affections. And the ordinary way to attain this knowledge is to hear and read the holy Scriptures diligently. For *all Scripture*, says St. Paul,<sup>1</sup> *is given by inspiration of God*, and shall we Christian men think to learn the knowledge of God and of ourselves in any earthly man's work or writing sooner or better than in the holy Scriptures written by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost?<sup>2</sup> As St. Peter witnesses, *The Scriptures were not brought unto us by the will of man; but holy men of God, spake as they were moved by the holy Spirit of God*. The Holy Ghost is the Schoolmaster of truth who leads his scholars into all truth, as our Savior Christ says of him.<sup>3</sup> And whoever is not led and taught by this Schoolmaster cannot keep from falling into deep error, however good his claim, whatever knowledge and learning he has of all other works and writings, or however fair an appearance or face of truth he has in the estimation and judgment of the world.

If one would ask for a true pattern and a perfect description of an upright life approved in the sight of God, do you think can we find any better or even equal to Christ Jesus and his doctrine? The Scripture so clearly paints his virtuous behavior and godly life and sets him forth before our eyes that we, beholding that pattern, might shape and frame our lives as closely as possible to the perfection of the same. *Be ye followers of me*, says St. Paul<sup>4</sup>, *as*

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16

<sup>2</sup> 2 Peter 1:21

<sup>3</sup> John 16:13

<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:1

*I also am of Christ.* And St. John says in his first epistle,<sup>5</sup> *Whoso abideth in Christ must walk even so as he walked before him.* And where except the Scriptures shall we learn the order of Christ's life?

Another would have a medicine to heal all diseases and maladies of the mind. Can this be found or obtained anywhere other than out of God's own book, his sacred Scriptures? Christ taught as much when he said to the obstinate Jews, *Search the Scriptures, for in them you think to have eternal life.*<sup>6</sup> If the Scriptures contain in them everlasting life, it necessarily follows that they also have an immediate remedy against all that is a hinderance and impediment unto eternal life.

If we desire the knowledge of heavenly wisdom, why would we rather learn it from man than of God himself, who, as St. James says<sup>7</sup>, is the Giver of wisdom? Indeed, why will we not learn it at Christ's own mouth, who, promising<sup>8</sup> to be present with his Church until the world's end, performs his promise, in that he is not only with us by his grace and tender pity, but also in this, that he speaks to us now in the holy Scriptures, to the great and endless comfort of all those who have any feeling for God at all in them? Yes, he speaks now in the Scriptures more profitably to us than he did by word of mouth to the carnal Jews when he lived with them here upon earth. For the Jews could neither hear nor see those things which we may now both hear and see, if we will bring with us those ears and eyes with which Christ is heard and seen, that is, diligence to hear and read his holy Scriptures, as well as true faith to believe his most comforting promises.

If one could only show Christ's footprint, I think many people would fall down and worship it, but alas, we give little or no reverence to the holy Scriptures, where we may daily see not only the print of his feet, but the whole shape and lively image of him. If anyone could let us see Christ's coat, some of us would go through great difficulty to come near to gaze upon it and even kiss it too. Yet all the clothes that he ever wore cannot express him to us so truly or so lively as the Scriptures do. Some men would take Christ's image made of wood, stone, or metal and garnish and beautify it with pearl, gold, and precious stone, but should we not instead, good brethren, embrace and revere God's holy books, the sacred Bible, which represent Christ to us more truly than any image can? The image can only express the form or shape of his body, if that, but the Scripture sets forth Christ that we may see him both God and man. We may see him, I say, speaking unto us, healing our infirmities, dying for our sins, rising from death for our justification. In short, we may so perfectly see in the Scriptures the fullness of Christ with the eye of faith, as we, lacking faith, could not see him with these bodily eyes even if he stood now present here before us.

Let every man, woman, and child therefore with all their heart thirst for and desire God's holy Scriptures, love them, embrace them, have their delight and pleasure in hearing and reading them so that at length we may be transformed and changed into them. For the

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<sup>5</sup> 1 John 2:6

<sup>6</sup> John 5:39

<sup>7</sup> James 1:5

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 28:20

Holy Scriptures are God's treasure house wherein are found all things that we need to see, hear, learn, and believe to attain eternal life.

This much has been said only to give you a taste of some of the benefits which you may take by hearing and reading the holy Scriptures; for as I said in the beginning, no tongue is able to declare and utter all. It is clearer than noonday that to be ignorant of the Scriptures is the cause of error, as Christ says to the Sadducees,<sup>9</sup> *Ye err, not knowing the Scriptures*; and that error holds back and plucks men away from the knowledge of God; and, as St. Jerome says, "not to know the Scriptures is to be ignorant of Christ." Nevertheless, there are some who think it unsuitable for all sorts of men to read the Scriptures because they think that various passages contain stumbling blocks to the unlearned—first, because a passage is so homely, unsophisticated, and plain that it offends the fine and delicate sensibilities of some courtiers; furthermore, because certain Scriptures also report that even some who are considered to be the children of God took certain actions that are contrary to the law of nature, some repugnant to the law written, and others seem to fight manifestly against public decency. All these things, they say, are an occasion of great offense to the simple, and they cause many to think evil of the Scriptures and to discredit their authority. Some are offended at the hearing and reading of the numerous rites and ceremonies of the sacrifices and oblations of the Law. And some worldly-minded men think it a great decay to the quiet and prudent governing of their commonwealths to take heed to the simple and plain rules and precepts of our Savior Christ in his Gospel. For example, they would be offended to hear that a man should be ready to turn his right ear<sup>10</sup> to him that struck him on the left, or that he should offer his cloak to the one who would take away his coat, along with similar teachings of perfection in Christ's meaning. They respond this way because carnal reason, always being an enemy to God and not perceiving the things of God's Spirit, abhors such precepts, which if rightly understood infringe no judicial policies nor Christian men's governments. And there are some who, hearing that the Scriptures bid us to live without worry<sup>11</sup>, without study or forecasting, deride the simplicity of them. Therefore, to remove and put away occasions of offense as much as possible, I will answer these objections in an orderly manner.

First, I shall review some of those passages that men are offended at for the homeliness and grossness of speech and will explain their meaning.

In the book of Deuteronomy<sup>12</sup> it is written that Almighty God made a law that if a man died without children, his brother or nearest kinsman should marry his widow, and their firstborn child should be considered the child of the man who died so that the dead man's name might not be expunged from Israel. Further, if the brother or nearest kinsman would not marry the widow, then she should pull off his shoe in front of the city magistrates and spit in his face, saying, *So be it done to that man that will not build his brother's house*. Here, dearly beloved, the acts of pulling off his shoe and spitting in his face were ceremonies to signify to all the people of that city that it was not the woman's fault God's

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew 22:29

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 5:39–40

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 6:25–34

<sup>12</sup> Deuteronomy 25:5–10

law had been broken in that point, but the whole shame and blame fell on the man who openly before the magistrates refused to marry her, and it was not a reproach to him alone but to all his posterity also; for they were called ever after, *The house of him whose shoe is pulled off*.

Another place in the Psalms<sup>13</sup> David says, *I will break the horns of the ungodly, and the horns of the righteous shall be exalted*. The word “horn” in the Scripture means power, might, strength, and sometimes rule of government. So the Prophet saying, *I will break the horns of the ungodly*, meant that all the power, strength, and might of God’s enemies shall not only be weakened and made feeble, but shall eventually be completely broken and destroyed; though for a time, for the better trial of his people, God allows the enemies to prevail and have the upper hand. In Psalm 132 it is written, *I will make David’s horn to flourish*.<sup>14</sup> Here *David’s horn* signifies his kingdom. Therefore, by this manner of speaking Almighty God promises to give David victory over all his enemies, and to establish him in his kingdom despite all his enemies.

And in Psalm 60:8 it is written, *Moab is my washpot; over Edom will I cast out my shoe*.... In this verse the Prophet shows how graciously God has dealt with his people, the children of Israel, by giving them great victories over their enemies on every side. For although the Moabites and Edomites were two great nations, proud people, stout and mighty, God subdued them and made them servants to the Israelites—servants, I say, to stoop down to pull off their shoes and wash their feet. Then saying *Moab is my washpot, and over Edom will I cast out my shoe* is as if he had said, The Moabites and the Edomites, for all their strength against us in the wilderness, are now made our subjects, our servants, indeed, underlings to pull off our shoes and wash our feet. Now I ask you, what unseemly manner of speech is this phrase, so commonly used among the Hebrews? It is a shame that Christian men should be so thoughtless as to jest like ruffians about such passages, uttered in good grave signification by the Holy Ghost. It would be more reasonable for a vain man to learn and revere the form of God’s words than to sport at them to his damnation.

Some are offended to hear that the godly patriarchs had many wives and concubines, although in the Scripture “concubine” is an honest name, for every concubine is a lawful wife, but not every wife is a concubine. And that you may better understand this to be true, you shall note that it was permitted to the fathers of the Old Testament to have more than one wife at one time, the purpose for which will be explained. Some of these wives were freeborn women; some were bondwomen and servants. She who was freeborn took precedence over those who were servants and bondwomen. The freeborn woman was by marriage made the ruler of the house under her husband, and is called the mother of the household, the mistress or the dame of the house after our manner of speaking, and by her marriage she had an interest, a right, and an ownership in her husband’s goods. As was the manner then for the most part, other servants and bondwomen were given by their owners to their daughters on their wedding day to be their handmaidens. In a similar way, Pharaoh king of Egypt gave Hagar the Egyptian to Abraham’s wife Sarah to be her maid.

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<sup>13</sup> Psalm 75:10

<sup>14</sup> Psalm 132:17

Laban gave<sup>15</sup> to his daughter Leah on her wedding day Zilpah to be her handmaid; and to his other daughter Rachel he gave another bondmaid, named Bilhah. And the wives, who were the owners of their handmaids, gave them in marriage to their husbands upon numerous occasions. Sarah gave her maid Hagar in marriage to Abraham.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Leah gave her maid Zilpah to her husband Jacob.<sup>17</sup> And Rachel, his other wife, gave him Bilhah her maid, saying to him, *Go in unto her, and she shall bear upon my knees*,<sup>18</sup> which is as if she had said, Take her to wife, and the children that she bears I will take upon my lap and make of them as if they were mine own. Although these handmaidens or bondwomen by marriage were made wives, they did not have the prerogative to rule in the house but were still underlings and in subjection to their mistress, and they were never called mothers of the household, mistresses or dames of the house, but are sometimes called wives, sometimes concubines. The plurality of wives was allowed to the fathers of the Old Testament by a special prerogative, not for satisfying their carnal and fleshly lusts, but to have many children; because every one of them hoped—and often begged of God in their prayers—that the blessed Seed which God promised should come into the world to break the serpent’s head might come and be born of his lineage and kindred.

Now we turn to those who take occasion for carnality and evil life by hearing and reading in God’s book what God permitted even in those men whose commendation is praised in the Scripture. For example, Noah, whom St. Peter<sup>19</sup> calls the eighth preacher of righteousness, was so drunk with wine that in his sleep he uncovered his own private parts.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, the just man Lot was drunk and, in his drunkenness, lay with his own daughters,<sup>21</sup> contrary to the law of nature. Abraham, whose faith was so great that for it he deserved to be called of God’s own mouth *a father of many nations, the father of all believers*,<sup>22</sup> besides with Sarah his wife also had sexual relations with Hagar, Sarah’s handmaid.<sup>23</sup> The Patriarch Jacob had two sisters at one time as his wives.<sup>24</sup> The Prophet David and King Solomon his son had many wives and concubines.<sup>25</sup> These things are plainly forbidden to us by the law of God and are now repugnant to all decency. Good people, these and other such accounts in God’s book are not written that we should or may behave in such a way, following their examples, or that we ought to think that God allowed all of these things in those men. Rather we ought to believe and to judge that Noah in his drunkenness offended God highly, and Lot lying with his daughters committed horrible incest. We ought then to learn this profitable lesson, that if such godly men, who otherwise felt inwardly God’s Holy Spirit inflaming their hearts with the fear and love of God, could not by their own strength keep themselves from committing

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<sup>15</sup> Genesis 29:24, 29

<sup>16</sup> Genesis 16:3

<sup>17</sup> Genesis 30:9

<sup>18</sup> Genesis 30:3–4

<sup>19</sup> 2 Peter 2:5

<sup>20</sup> Genesis 9:21

<sup>21</sup> Genesis 19:30–36

<sup>22</sup> Genesis 17:4–5; Romans 4:11–18

<sup>23</sup> Genesis 16:4

<sup>24</sup> Genesis 29:23–30

<sup>25</sup> 2 Samuel 3:2–5, 5:13; 1 Kings 11:1–3

horrible sin, but so grievously fell that without God's great mercy they would have perished everlastingly, how much more ought we then, miserable wretches, who have no feeling of God within us at all, continually to fear not only that we may fall as they did, but also be overcome and drowned in sin, which they were not. And so, by considering their fall, we ought to take the opportunity to acknowledge our own infirmity and weakness, and therefore more earnestly call unto Almighty God with hearty prayer incessantly for his grace to strengthen us and to defend us from all evil. And though through infirmity we happen at any time to fall, yet we may by hearty repentance and true faith speedily rise again, and not sleep and continue in sin as the wicked do.

Thus, good people, should we understand such matters expressed in the divine Scriptures that this holy *table* <sup>26</sup>of God's word not be turned for us into *a snare, a trap, and a stumblingstone*, to be injured by the abuse of our understanding. Rather, let us esteem them in such reverent humility that we may find our necessary food therein, to strengthen us, to comfort us, to instruct us, as God of his great mercy has appointed them, in all necessary works so that we may be perfect before him in the whole course of our life. This may he grant us who has redeemed us, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost be all honor and glory for evermore. Amen.

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<sup>26</sup> Psalm 69:22

## Part II

In the previous homily you heard the great value of holy Scriptures. You also heard how ignorant men who lack godly understanding seek quarrels to discredit them, and you have heard some of their reasons answered. Now we will proceed to speak of such shrewd wise men who are offended because Christ's precepts would seem to destroy all order in governance. They allege this, for example, of the following. *If any man strike thee on the right cheek, turn the other unto him also. If any will contend to take thy coat from thee, let him have cloak and all.*<sup>27</sup> *Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth.*<sup>28</sup> *If thine eye, thine hand, thy foot offend thee, pull out thine eye, cut off thy hand, thy foot, and cast it from thee.*<sup>29</sup> *If thine enemy, says St. Paul,*<sup>30</sup> *be hungered, give him meat; if he thirst, give him drink: so doing, thou shalt heap hot burning coals upon his head.* To a normal man, good people, these passages seem to be mere absurdities, contrary to all reason. *For a natural man, as St. Paul says,*<sup>31</sup> *understandeth not the things that belong to God, neither can he* so long as the old Adam lives in him. Christ therefore means that he would have his faithful servants so far from vengeance and resisting wrong that he would rather have them ready to suffer another wrong than by resisting to break charity and to be out of patience. He would have our good deeds so far from carnal respects that he would not have our closest friends know of our well doing, to win a vain glory.

And although our friends and family might be as dear to us as our right eyes and our right hands, if they would pluck us from God, then we ought to renounce them and forsake them. Thus if you will be profitable hearers and readers of the holy Scriptures, you must first deny yourselves and keep in check your carnal senses, which are taken by the outward words, and search the inward meaning. Reason must give place to God's Holy Spirit. You must submit your worldly wisdom and judgment to his divine wisdom and judgment. Consider that the Scripture, regardless of how strange some passages may seem, is the word of the living God. Let that always come to your remembrance which is so often repeated of the Prophet Isaiah: *The mouth of the Lord has spoken it.*<sup>32</sup> The almighty and everlasting *God who with his only word created heaven and earth,*<sup>33</sup> has decreed it. *The Lord of hosts, whose ways are in the seas, whose paths are in the deep waters,*<sup>34</sup> that Lord and God by whose word all things in heaven and in earth are created, governed, and preserved, has so provided it. *The God of gods and Lord of all lords,*<sup>35</sup> yea, God that is *God alone,*<sup>36</sup> incomprehensible, almighty, and everlasting, he has spoken it; it is his word. That which proceeds from the God of all truth cannot therefore be anything but truth. What Almighty God has devised can only be wisely and prudently commanded,

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<sup>27</sup> Matthew 5:39–40

<sup>28</sup> Matthew 6:3

<sup>29</sup> Matthew 18:8–9

<sup>30</sup> Romans 12:20

<sup>31</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:14

<sup>32</sup> Isaiah 1:20, 40:5, 48:14

<sup>33</sup> Isaiah 42:5, 44:24, 45:18

<sup>34</sup> Psalm 77:19; Isaiah 43:16, 51:15, 54:5; 2 Peter 3:5, 7

<sup>35</sup> Deuteronomy 10:17

<sup>36</sup> Psalm 86:10

however vainly, through want of grace, we miserable wretches imagine and judge his most holy word.

The Prophet David, describing a happy man, says, *Blessed is the man that has not walked after the counsel of the ungodly, nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of the scornful.*<sup>37</sup> There are three sorts of people whose company the Prophet would have him who shall be a happy man and partaker of God's blessing to flee and avoid. First, he may not walk after the counsel of the ungodly. Secondly, he may not stand in the way of sinners. Thirdly, he must not sit in the seat of the scornful. By these three sorts of people—ungodly men, sinners, and scorners—all impiety is signified and fully expressed. By the ungodly he means those who have no regard for Almighty God, being devoid of all faith, whose hearts and minds are so set upon the world that they study only how to accomplish their worldly practices, their carnal imaginations, their filthy lust and desire, without any fear of God. The second sort he calls sinners, but not those who fall through ignorance or out of weakness, for then who should be found free? What man ever lived upon earth who has not sinned, except Christ? *The just man falls seven times and rises again.*<sup>38</sup> Although the godly fall, they do not deliberately walk on in sin; they do not stand still to continue and tarry in sin; they do not sit down like careless men, without all fear of God's just punishment for sin; but defying sin, through God's great grace and infinite mercy, they rise again, and fight against sin. The Prophet then calls them sinners whose hearts are completely turned from God and whose whole conversation of life is nothing but sin. They delight so much in sin that they choose continually to abide and dwell in it. The third sort he calls scorners, that is, a sort of men whose hearts are so filled with malice that they are not contented to dwell in sin and to lead their lives in all kind of wickedness but also despise and scorn in others all godliness, true religion, all honesty and virtue.

Of the two first sorts of men, I would say that they may repent and be converted unto God. Of the third sort, I think I may say without danger of God's judgment that none have ever converted unto God by repentance but have continued in their abominable wickedness, heaping up to themselves damnation against the day of God's inevitable judgment. We read of examples of such scorners in the second book of Chronicles.<sup>39</sup> When good king Hezekiah in the beginning of his reign had destroyed idolatry, purged the temple, and reformed religion in his realm, he sent messengers into every city to gather the people unto Jerusalem to solemnize the feast of Easter in the way that God had appointed. *The posts went from city to city through the land of Ephraim and Manasseh even unto Zebulun.*<sup>40</sup> And what do you think the people did? Did they laud and praise the name of the Lord, who had given them so good a king, so zealous a prince to abolish idolatry, and to restore God's true religion? No, no. The Scripture says that the people *laughed them to scorn, and mocked the king's messengers.*<sup>41</sup> And in the last chapter of the same book it is written that *Almighty God, having compassion upon his people, sent his messengers the Prophets unto them, to call them from their abominable idolatry and*

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<sup>37</sup> Psalm 1:1

<sup>38</sup> Proverbs 24:16

<sup>39</sup> 2 Chronicles 30:1–10

<sup>40</sup> 2 Chronicles 30:10

<sup>41</sup> 2 Chronicles 36:15–20



wicked kind of living. *But they mocked his messengers, they despised his words, and misused his Prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, and till there was no remedy*, for he gave them up into the hands of their enemies, even unto Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, who spoiled them of their goods, burned their city, and led them, their wives, and their children, captives unto Babylon. The wicked people in the days of Noah mocked the word of God when Noah told them that God would take vengeance upon them for their sins.<sup>42</sup> The flood therefore came suddenly upon them and drowned them, with the whole world. Lot preached to the Sodomites that unless they repented, both they and their city would be destroyed.<sup>43</sup> They thought his sayings impossible to be true. They mocked and scorned his admonition and considered him an old doting fool. But when God by his holy angels had taken Lot, his wife, and two daughters from among them, he rained down fire and brimstone from heaven and burned up those scorers and mockers of his holy word. And how well did the Scribes and Pharisees esteem Christ's doctrine? What reward had he among them? The Gospel reports thus: *The Pharisees, which were covetous, did scorn him in his doctrine.*<sup>44</sup> O then you see that worldly rich men scorn the doctrine of their salvation. Worldly-wise men scorn the doctrine of Christ as foolishness<sup>45</sup> to their understanding. These scorers have ever been and ever shall be until the world's end. For St. Peter prophesied<sup>46</sup> that such scorers should be in the world before the last days. Take heed therefore, my brethren, take heed. Do not be scorers of God's most holy word. Do not provoke him to pour out his wrath upon you as he did upon those jesters and mockers. Do not be willful murderers of your own souls. Turn to God while there is yet time for mercy; otherwise, you shall else repent it in the world to come when it is too late, for then there shall be *judgement without mercy.*<sup>47</sup>

This might sufficiently admonish us and cause us henceforth to reverence God's holy Scriptures, but *all men have not faith.*<sup>48</sup> This therefore shall not satisfy and content all men's minds, but because some are carnal, they will continue to abuse the Scripture carnally to their greater damnation. *The unlearned and unstable*, says St. Peter,<sup>49</sup> *pervert the holy Scriptures to their own destruction.* Jesus Christ, as St. Paul says,<sup>50</sup> *is to the Jews an offence, to the Gentiles foolishness; but to God's children, as well of the Jews as of the Gentiles, he is the power and wisdom of God.* The holy man Simeon says<sup>51</sup> that Christ is set forth for the fall and rising again of many in Israel. As Christ Jesus is a fall to the reprobate, though they perish through their own fault, so is his word—indeed, the whole book of God—a cause of damnation to them through their unbelief. And as he is a rising up only to those who are God's children by adoption, so is his word—indeed, the whole

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<sup>42</sup> Genesis 6, 7; Luke 17:27

<sup>43</sup> Genesis 19; Luke 17:28–29

<sup>44</sup> Luke 16:14

<sup>45</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:18–23; 2:14

<sup>46</sup> 2 Peter 3:3–4

<sup>47</sup> James 2:13

<sup>48</sup> 2 Thessalonians 3:2

<sup>49</sup> 2 Peter 3:16

<sup>50</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:23–24

<sup>51</sup> Luke 2:34

Scripture—the power of God to salvation to them only that do believe it.<sup>52</sup> Christ himself, the Prophets before him, the Apostles after him, all the true ministers of God’s holy word, yea, every word in God’s book, is unto the reprobate *the savor of death unto death*.<sup>53</sup> Christ Jesus, the Prophets, the Apostles, and all the true ministers of his word, indeed, every jot and tittle in the holy Scripture, have been, are, and shall be for evermore the savor of life unto eternal life unto all those whose hearts God has purified by true faith. Let us earnestly take heed that we do not make the books of holy Scriptures a source of ridicule. The more obscure and dark the sayings are to our understanding, the further let us think ourselves to be from God and his Holy Spirit, who was the Author of them. Let us more reverently endeavor to search out the wisdom hidden in the outward bark of the Scripture. If we cannot understand the sense and the reason of the saying, let us not be scorers, jesters, and deriders; for that is the uttermost evidence of a reprobate, of an obvious enemy of God and his wisdom. God’s solemn pronouncements are not idle fables to jest at; therefore, let us esteem them as serious matters.

And though several Scripture passages describe numerous rites and ceremonies, oblations and sacrifices, let us not think they are strange, but put them in context of the times and people for whom they served, yet to educated men they are not unprofitable to be considered, but are to be expounded as figures and shadows of things and persons afterward openly revealed in the New Testament. Though the rehearsal of the genealogies and pedigrees of the fathers is not edifying to plain uneducated people, there is nothing so impertinently uttered in the entire Bible that it may not serve to spiritual purpose in some respect to all those who will work to search out the meanings. These passages may not be condemned because they do not serve our understanding nor because they do not edify us. But let us turn our labor to understand and take to heart such sentences and stories as are more useful for our capacity and instruction.

We read in numerous Psalms how David wished to God’s adversaries sometimes shame, rebuke, and confusion, sometimes the decay of their offspring and issue, sometimes that they might perish and come suddenly to destruction, (as he wished to the captains of the Philistines, *Cast forth, says he<sup>54</sup>, thy lightning, and tear them; shoot out thine arrows, and consume them;*) with similar imprecations; yet we ought not to be offended at such prayers of David, being a Prophet as he was, singularly beloved of God, and rapt in spirit, with an ardent zeal for God’s glory. He spoke these things not out of a private hatred and in a temper against God. He was of the same mind as St. Paul was when he delivered Hymenaeus and Alexander with the notorious fornicator to Satan to their temporal confusion, *that their spirit might be saved against the day of the Lord*.<sup>55</sup> Further, David professed in some places that he hated the wicked, and in other places in the Psalms he professes that he hated them *with a perfect hate*,<sup>56</sup> not with a malicious hate to the hurt of the soul. Because this perfection of spirit cannot be performed in us who are so corrupted in affections, we ought not to use such words in our private causes, for we cannot fulfill the sense of such words. So that we may the more reverently judge such sayings, let us

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<sup>52</sup> Romans 1:16

<sup>53</sup> 2 Corinthians 2:26

<sup>54</sup> Psalm 144:6

<sup>55</sup> 1 Timothy 1:20

<sup>56</sup> Psalm 139:22

therefore not be offended by them, for though they are strange to our carnal understanding, to those who are spiritually minded they are judged to be uttered zealously and righteously.

God therefore, for his mercy's sake, vouchsafe to purify our minds through faith in his Son Jesus Christ and to instill the heavenly drops of his grace into our hard stony hearts to soften the same so that we not become scorners and deriders of his infallible word, but that with all humility and Christian reverence we may endeavor to hear and to read his sacred Scriptures, and inwardly so to digest them, as shall be to the comfort of our souls and sanctification of his holy Name. To whom with the Son and the Holy Ghost, three Persons and one living God, be all laud, honor, and praise for ever and ever. Amen.