

CHAPTER 12.

Necessity of contemplating the judgment-seat of God, in order to be seriously convinced of the doctrine of gratuitous justification.

The divisions of this chapter are,—

1. A consideration of the righteousness of God overturns the righteousness of works, as is plain from passages of Scripture, and the confession and example of the saints, sec. 1-3.
2. The same effect produced by a serious examination of the conscience, and a constant citation to the divine tribunal, sec. 4 and 5.
3. Hence arises, in the hearts of the godly, not hypocrisy, or a vain opinion of merit, but true humility. This illustrated by the authority of Scripture and the example of the Publican, sec. 6, 7.
4. Conclusion—arrogance and security must be discarded, every man throwing an impediment in the way of the divine goodness in proportion as he trusts to himself.

Sections.

1. Source of error on the subject of Justification. Sophists speak as if the question were to be discussed before some human tribunal. It relates to the majesty and justice of God. Hence nothing accepted without absolute perfection. Passages confirming this doctrine. If we descend to the righteousness of the Law, the curse immediately appears.
2. Source of hypocritical confidence. Illustrated by a simile. Exhortation. Testimony of Job, David, and Paul.
3. Confession of Augustine and Bernard.
4. Another engine overthrowing the righteousness of works—viz. A serious examination of the conscience, and a comparison between the perfection of God and the imperfection of man.
5. How it is that we so indulge this imaginary opinion of our own works. The proper remedy to be found in a consideration of the majesty of God and our own misery. A description of this misery.
6. Christian humility consists in laying aside the imaginary idea of our own righteousness, and trusting entirely to the mercy of God, apprehended by faith in Christ. This humility described. Proved by passages of Scripture.
7. The parable of the Publican explained.
8. Arrogance, security, and self-confidence, must be renounced. General rule, or summary of the above doctrine.

1. Although the perfect truth of the above doctrine is proved by clear passages of Scripture, yet we cannot clearly see how necessary it is, before we bring distinctly into view the foundations on which

the whole discussion ought to rest. First, then, let us remember that the righteousness which we are considering is not that of a human, but of a heavenly tribunal; and so beware of employing our own little standard to measure the perfection which is to satisfy the justice of God. It is strange with what rashness and presumption this is commonly defined. Nay, we see that none talk more confidently, or, so to speak, more blusteringly, of the righteousness of works than those whose diseases are most palpable, and blemishes most apparent. This they do because they reflect not on the righteousness of Christ, which, if they had the slightest perception of it, they would never treat with so much insult. It is certainly undervalued, if not recognized to be so perfect that nothing can be accepted that is not in every respect entire and absolute, and tainted by no impurity; such indeed as never has been, and never will be, found in man. It is easy for any man, within the precincts of the schools, to talk of the sufficiency of works for justification; but when we come into the presence of God there must be a truce to such talk. The matter is there discussed in earnest, and is no longer a theatrical logomachy. Hither must we turn our minds if we would inquire to any purpose concerning true righteousness; the question must be: How shall we answer the heavenly Judge when he calls us to account? Let us contemplate that Judge, not as our own unaided intellect conceives of him, but as he is portrayed to us in Scripture (see especially the Book of Job), with a brightness which obscures the stars, a strength which melts the mountains, an anger which shakes the earth, a wisdom which takes the wise in their own craftiness, a purity before which all things become impure, a righteousness to which not even angels are equal (so far is it from making the guilty innocent), a vengeance which once kindled burns to the lowest hell (Exod. 34:7; Nahum 1:3; Deut. 32:22). Let Him, I say, sit in judgment on the actions of men, and who will feel secure in sitting himself before his throne? “Who among us,” says the prophets “shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly,” etc. (Isaiah 33:14, 15). Let whoso will come forth. Nay, the answer shows that no man can. For, on the other hand, we hear the dreadful voice: “If thou, Lord, shouldst mark our iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?” (Ps. 130:3). All must immediately perish, as Job declares, “Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his Maker? Behold, he put no trust in his servants; and his angels he charged with folly: How much less in them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, which are crushed before the moth? They are destroyed from morning to evening,” (Job 4:17-20). Again, “Behold, he putteth no trust in his saints; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight. How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water?” (Job 15:15, 16). I confess, indeed, that in the Book of Job reference is made to a righteousness of a more exalted description than the observance of the Law. It is of importance to attend to this distinction; for even could a man satisfy the Law, he could not stand the scrutiny of that righteousness which transcends all our thoughts. Hence, although Job was not conscious of offending, he is still dumb with astonishment, because he sees that God could not be appeased even by the sanctity of angels, were their works weighed in that supreme balance. But to advert no farther to this righteousness, which is incomprehensible, I only say, that if our life is brought to the standard of the written law, we are lethargic indeed if we are not filled with dread at the many maledictions which God has employed for the purpose of arousing us, and among others, the following general one: “Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them,” (Deut. 27:26). In short, the whole discussion of this subject will be insipid and

frivolous, unless we sist ourselves before the heavenly Judge, and anxious for our acquittal, voluntarily humble ourselves, confessing our nothingness.

2. Thus then must we raise our eyes that we may learn to tremble instead of vainly exulting. It is easy, indeed, when the comparison is made among men, for every one to plume himself on some quality which others ought not to despise; but when we rise to God, that confidence instantly falls and dies away. The case of the soul with regard to God is very analogous to that of the body in regard to the visible firmament. The bodily eye, while employed in surveying adjacent objects, is pleased with its own perspicacity; but when directed to the sun, being dazzled and overwhelmed by the refulgence, it becomes no less convinced of its weakness than it formerly was of its power in viewing inferior objects. Therefore, lest we deceive ourselves by vain confidence, let us recollect that even though we deem ourselves equal or superior to other men, this is nothing to God, by whose judgment the decision must be given. But if our presumption cannot be tamed by these considerations, he will answer us as he did the Pharisees, "Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God," (Luke 16:15). Go now and make a proud boast of your righteousness among men, while God in heaven abhors it. But what are the feelings of the servants of God, of those who are truly taught by his Spirit? "Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified," (Ps. 143:2). Another, though in a sense somewhat different, says, "How should man be just with God? If he will contend with him he cannot answer him one of a thousand," (Job 9:2, 3). Here we are plainly told what the righteousness of God is, namely, a righteousness which no human works can satisfy which charges us with a thousand sins, while not one sin can be excused. Of this righteousness Paul, that chosen vessel of God, had formed a just idea, when he declared, "I know nothing by myself, yet am I not hereby justified," (1 Cor. 4:4).

3. Such examples exist not in the sacred volume only; all pious writers show that their sentiment was the same. Thus Augustine says, "Of all pious men groaning under this burden of corruptible flesh, and the infirmities of this life, the only hope is, that we have one Mediator Jesus Christ the righteous, and that he intercedes for our sins," (August. ad Bonif. lib. 3, c. 5). What do we hear? If this is their only hope, where is their confidence in works? When he says only, he leaves no other. Bernard says, "And, indeed, where have the infirm firm security and safe rest, but in the wounds of the Savior? Hold it then the more securely, the more powerful he is to save. The world frowns, the body presses, the devil lays snares: I fall not, because I am founded on a firm rock. I have sinned a grievous sin: conscience is troubled, but it shall not be overwhelmed, for I will remember the wounds of the Lord." He afterwards concludes, "My merit, therefore, is the compassion of the Lord; plainly I am not devoid of merit so long as he is not devoid of commiseration. But if the mercies of the Lord are many, equally many are my merits. Shall I sing of my own righteousness? O Lord, I will make mention of thy righteousness alone. That righteousness is mine also, being made mine by God," (Bernard, Sermon. 61, in Cantic). Again, in another passage, "Man's whole merit is to place his whole hope in him who makes the whole man safe," (in Psal. Qui Habitat. Sermon. 15). In like manner, reserving peace to himself, he leaves the glory to God: "Let thy glory remain unimpaired: it is well with me if I have

peace; I altogether abjure boasting, lest if I should usurp what is not mine, I lose also what is offered," (Sermon. 13, in Cantic). He says still more plainly in another place: "Why is the Church solicitous about merits? God purposely supplies her with a firmer and more secure ground of boasting. There is no reason for asking by what merits may we hope for blessings, especially when you hear in the prophet, 'Thus saith the Lord God, I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake,' (Ezek. 36:22, 32). It is sufficient for merit to know that merits suffice not; but as it is sufficient for merit not to presume on merit, so to be without merits is sufficient for condemnation," (Bernard, Sermon. 68). The free use of the term merits for good works must be pardoned to custom. Bernard's purpose was to alarm hypocrites, who turned the grace of God into licentiousness, as he shortly after explains: "Happy the church which neither wants merit without presumption, nor presumption without merit. It has ground to presume, but not merit. It has merit, merit to deserve, not presume. Is not the absence of presumption itself a merit? He, therefore, to whom the many mercies of the Lord furnish ample grounds of boasting, presumes the more securely that he presumes not," (Bernard, Sermon. 68).

4. Thus, indeed, it is. Aroused consciences, when they have to do with God, feel this to be the only asylum in which they can breathe safely. For if the stars which shine most brightly by night lose their brightness on the appearance of the sun, what think we will be the case with the highest purity of man when contrasted with the purity of God? For the scrutiny will be most strict, penetrating to the most hidden thoughts of the heart. As Paul says, it "will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and will make manifest the counsels of the heart," (1 Cor. 4:5); will compel the reluctant and dissembling conscience to bring forward every thing, even things which have now escaped our memory. The devil, aware of all the iniquities which he has induced us to perpetrate, will appear as accuser; the external show of good works, the only thing now considered, will then be of no avail; the only thing demanded will be the true intent of the will. Hence hypocrisy, not only that by which a man, though consciously guilty before God, affects to make an ostentatious display before man, but that by which each imposes upon himself before God (so prone are we to soothe and flatter ourselves), will fall confounded, how much soever it may now swell with pride and presumption. Those who do not turn their thoughts to this scene may be able for the moment calmly and complacently to rear up a righteousness for themselves; but this the judgment of God will immediately overthrow, just as great wealth amassed in a dream vanishes the moment we awake. Those who, as in the presence of God, inquire seriously into the true standard of righteousness, will certainly find that all the works of men, if estimated by their own worth, are nothing but vileness and pollution, that what is commonly deemed justice is with God mere iniquity; what is deemed integrity is pollution; what deemed glory is ignominy.

5. Let us not decline to descend from this contemplation of the divine perfection, to look into ourselves without flattery or blind self-love. It is not strange that we are so deluded in this matter, seeing none of us can avoid that pestilential self-indulgence, which, as Scripture proclaims, is naturally inherent in all: "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes," says Solomon (Prov. 21:2). And again, "All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes," (Prov. 16:2). What then? does this hallucination excuse him? No, indeed, as Solomon

immediately adds, "The Lord weigheth the spirits;" that is, while man flatters himself by wearing an external mask of righteousness, the Lord weighs the hidden impurity of the heart in his balance. Seeing, therefore, that nothing is gained by such flattery, let us not voluntarily delude ourselves to our own destruction. To examine ourselves properly, our conscience must be called to the judgment-seat of God. His light is necessary to disclose the secret recesses of wickedness which otherwise lie too deeply hid. Then only shall we clearly perceive what the value of our works is; that man, so far from being just before God, is but rotteness and a worm, abominable and vain, drinking in "iniquity like water." For "who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one," (Job 14:5). Then we shall experience the truth of what Job said of himself: "If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: if I say I am perfect, it shall prove me perverse," (Job 9:20). Nor does the complaint which the prophet made concerning Israel apply to one age only. It is true of every age, that "all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way," (Isaiah 53:6). Indeed, he there comprehends all to whom the gift of redemption was to come. And the strictness of the examination ought to be continued until it have completely alarmed us, and in that way prepared us for receiving the grace of Christ. For he is deceived who thinks himself capable of enjoying it, until he have laid aside all loftiness of mind. There is a well-known declaration, "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble," (1 Pet. 5:5).

6. But what means is there of humbling us if we do not make way for the mercy of God by our utter indigence and destitution? For I call it not humility, so long as we think there is any good remaining in us. Those who have joined together the two things, to think humbly of ourselves before God and yet hold our own righteousness in some estimation, have hitherto taught a pernicious hypocrisy. For if we confess to God contrary to what we feel, we wickedly lie to him; but we cannot feel as we ought without seeing that every thing like a ground of boasting is completely crushed. Therefore, when you hear from the prophets "thou wilt save the afflicted people; but wilt bring down high looks" (Ps. 18:27), consider, first, that there is no access to salvation unless all pride is laid aside and true humility embraced; secondly, that that humility is not a kind of moderation by which you yield to God some article of your right (thus men are called humble in regard to each other when they neither conduct themselves haughtily nor insult over other, though they may still entertain some consciousness of their own excellence), but that it is the unfeigned submission of a mind overwhelmed by a serious conviction of its want and misery. Such is the description every where given by the word of God. When in Zephaniah the Lord speaks thus, "I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride, and thou shalt no more be haughty because of my holy mountain. I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord," (Zeph. 3:11, 12), does he not plainly show who are the humble—viz. those who lie afflicted by a knowledge of their poverty? On the contrary, he describes the proud as rejoicing (exultantes), such being the mode in which men usually express their delight in prosperity. To the humble, whom he designs to save, he leaves nothing but hope in the Lord. Thus, also, in Isaiah, "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word," (Isaiah 66:2). again, "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive

the heart of the contrite ones," (Isaiah 57:15). By the term contrition which you so often hear, understand a wounded heart, which, humbling the individual to the earth, allows him not to rise. With such contrition must your heart be wounded, if you would, according to the declaration of God, be exalted with the humble. If this is not your case, you shall be humbled by the mighty hand of God to your shame and disgrace.

7. Our divine Master, not confining himself to words, has by a parable set before us, as in a picture, a representation of true humility. He brings forward a publican, who standing afar off, and not daring to lift up his eyes to heaven, smites upon his breast, laments aloud, and exclaims, "God be merciful to me a sinner," (Luke 18:13). Let us not suppose that he gives the signs of a fictitious modesty when he dares not come near or lift up his eyes to heaven, but, smiting upon his breast, confesses himself a sinner; let us know that these are the evidences of his internal feeling. With him our Lord contrasts the Pharisee, who thanks God "I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess." In this public confession he admits that the righteousness which he possesses is the gift of God; but because of his confidence that he is righteous, he departs from the presence of God unaccepted and abominated. The publican acknowledging his iniquity is justified. Hence we may see how highly our humility is valued by the Lord: our breast cannot receive his mercy until deprived completely of all opinion of its own worth. When such an opinion is entertained, the door of mercy is shut. That there might be no doubt on this matter, the mission on which Christ was sent into the world by his Father was "to preach good tidings to the meek," "to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness," (Isa. 61:1-3). In fulfillment of that mission, the only persons whom he invites to share in his beneficence are the "weary and heavy laden." In another passage he says, "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance," (Mt. 11:28; 9:13).

8. Therefore if we would make way for the call of Christ, we must put far from us all arrogance and confidence. The former is produced by a foolish persuasion of self-righteousness, when a man thinks that he has something in himself which deservedly recommends him to God; the latter may exist without any confidence in works.¹ For many sinners, intoxicated with the pleasures of vice, think not of the judgment of God. Lying stupefied, as it were, by a kind of lethargy, they aspire not to the offered mercy. It is not less necessary to shake off torpor of this description than every kind of confidence in ourselves, in order that we may haste to Christ unencumbered, and while hungry and empty be filled with his blessings. Never shall we have sufficient confidence in him unless utterly

¹ French, "Par arrogance j'enten l'orgueil qui s'engendre d'une fole persuasion de justice, quand l'homme pense avoir quelque chose, dont il merite d'estre agreable à Dieu; par presumption j'enten une nonchalance charnelle, qui peut estre sans aucune fiance des oeuvres;"—by arrogance I mean the pride which is engendered by a foolish persuasion of righteousness, when man thinks he has something for which he deserves to be agreeable to God. By presumption I understand a carnal indifference, which may exist without any confidence in works.

distrustful of ourselves; never shall we take courage in him until we first despond of ourselves; never shall we have full consolation in him until we cease to have any in ourselves. When we have entirely discarded all self-confidence, and trust solely in the certainty of his goodness, we are fit to apprehend and obtain the grace of God. "When," (as Augustine says), "forgetting our own merits, we embrace the gifts of Christ, because if he should seek for merits in us we should not obtain his gifts," (August. de Verb. Apost. 8). With this Bernard admirably accords, comparing the proud who presume in the least on their merits, to unfaithful servants, who wickedly take the merit of a favor merely passing through them, just as if a wall were to boast of producing the ray which it receives through the window (Bernard, Sermon 13, in Cant). Not to dwell longer here, let us lay down this short but sure and general rule, That he is prepared to reap the fruits of the divine mercy who has thoroughly emptied himself, I say not of righteousness (he has none), but of a vain and blustering show of righteousness; for to whatever extent any man rests in himself, to the same extent he impedes the beneficence of God.

CHAPTER 13.

Two things to be observed in gratuitous justification.

The divisions of this chapter are,—

1. The glory of God, and peace of conscience, both secured by gratuitous justification. An insult to the glory of God to glory in ourselves and seek justification out of Christ, whose righteousness, apprehended by faith, is imputed to all the elect for reconciliation and eternal salvation, sec. 1, 2.
2. Peace of conscience cannot be obtained in any other way than by gratuitous justification. This fully proved, sec. 3-5.

Sections.

1. The glory of God remains untarnished, when he alone is acknowledged to be just. This proved from Scripture.
2. Those who glory in themselves glory against God. Objection. Answer, confirmed by the authority of Paul and Peter.
3. Peace of conscience obtained by free justification only. Testimony of Solomon, of conscience itself, and the Apostle Paul, who contends that faith is made vain if righteousness come by the law.
4. The promise confirmed by faith in the mercy of Christ. This is confirmed by Augustine and Bernard, is in accordance with what has been above stated, and is illustrated by clear predictions of the prophets.
5. Farther demonstration by an Apostle. Refutation of a sophism.

1. Here two ends must be kept specially in view, namely, that the glory of God be maintained unimpaired, and that our consciences, in the view of his tribunal, be secured in peaceful rest and calm tranquillity. When the question relates to righteousness, we see how often and how anxiously Scripture exhorts us to give the whole praise of it to God. Accordingly, the Apostle testifies that the purpose of the Lord in conferring righteousness upon us in Christ, was to demonstrate his own righteousness. The nature of this demonstration he immediately subjoins—viz. "that he might

be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus," (Rom. 3:25). Observe, that the righteousness of God is not sufficiently displayed, unless He alone is held to be righteous, and freely communicates righteousness to the undeserving. For this reason it is his will, that "every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God," (Rom. 3:19). For so long as a man has any thing, however small, to say in his own defense, so long he deducts somewhat from the glory of God. Thus we are taught in Ezekiel how much we glorify his name by acknowledging our iniquity: "Then shall ye remember your ways and all your doings, wherein ye have been defiled; and ye shall loathe yourselves in your own sight, for all your evils that ye have committed. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have wrought with you for my name's sake, not according to your wicked ways, nor according to your corrupt doings," (Ezek. 20:43, 44). If part of the true knowledge of God consists in being oppressed by a consciousness of our own iniquity, and in recognizing him as doing good to those who are unworthy of it, why do we attempt, to our great injury, to steal from the Lord even one particle of the praise of unmerited kindness? In like manner, when Jeremiah exclaims, "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory" in the Lord (Jer. 9:23, 24), does he not intimate, that the glory of the Lord is infringed when man glories in himself? To this purpose, indeed, Paul accommodates the words when he says, that all the parts of our salvation are treasured up with Christ, that we may glory only in the Lord (1 Cor. 1:29). For he intimates, that whosoever imagines he has any thing of his own, rebels against God, and obscures his glory.

2. Thus, indeed, it is: we never truly glory in him until we have utterly discarded our own glory. It must, therefore, be regarded as an universal proposition, that whoso glories in himself glories against God. Paul indeed considers, that the whole world is not made subject to God until every ground of glorying has been withdrawn from men (Rom. 3:19). Accordingly, Isaiah, when he declares that "in the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified" adds, "and shall glory" (Isa. 45:25), as if he had said that the elect are justified by the Lord, in order that they may glory in him, and in none else. The way in which we are to glory in the Lord he had explained in the preceding verse, "Unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear;" "Surely, shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength, even to him shall men come." Observe, that the thing required is not simple confession, but confession confirmed by an oath, that it might not be imagined that any kind of fictitious humility might suffice. And let no man here allege that he does not glory, when without arrogance he recognizes his own righteousness; such a recognition cannot take place without generating confidence, nor such confidence without begetting boasting. Let us remember, therefore, that in the whole discussion concerning justification the great thing to be attended to is, that God's glory be maintained entire and unimpaired; since as the Apostle declares, it was in demonstration of his own righteousness that he shed his favor upon us; it was "that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus," (Rom. 3:26). Hence, in another passage, having said that the Lord conferred salvation upon us, in order that he might show forth the glory of his name (Eph. 1:6), he afterwards, as if repeating the same thing, adds, "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast," (Eph. 2:8). And Peter, when he reminds us that we are called to the hope of salvation, "that ye

should show forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light," (1 Pet. 2:9), doubtless intends thus to proclaim in the ears of believers only the praises of God, that they may bury in profound silence all arrogance of the flesh. The sum is, that man cannot claim a single particle of righteousness to himself, without at the same time detracting from the glory of the divine righteousness.

3. If we now inquire in what way the conscience can be quieted as in the view of God, we shall find that the only way is by having righteousness bestowed upon us freely by the gift of God. Let us always remember the words of Solomon, "Who can say I have made my heart clean, I am free from my sin?" (Prov. 20:9). Undoubtedly there is not one man who is not covered with infinite pollutions. Let the most perfect man descend into his own conscience, and bring his actions to account, and what will the result be? Will he feel calm and quiescent, as if all matters were well arranged between himself and God; or will he not rather be stung with dire torment, when he sees that the ground of condemnation is within him if he be estimated by his works? Conscience, when it beholds God, must either have sure peace with his justice, or be beset by the terrors of hell. We gain nothing, therefore, by discoursing of righteousness, unless we hold it to be a righteousness stable enough to support our souls before the tribunal of God. When the soul is able to appear intrepidly in the presence of God, and receive his sentence without dismay, then only let us know that we have found a righteousness that is not fictitious. It is not, therefore, without cause, that the Apostle insists on this matter. I prefer giving it in his words rather than my own: "If they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of no effect," (Rom. 4:14). He first infers that faith is made void if the promise of righteousness has respect to the merit of our works, or depends on the observance of the law. Never could any one rest securely in it, for never could he feel fully assured that he had fully satisfied the law; and it is certain that no man ever fully satisfied it by works. Not to go far for proof of this, every one who will use his eyes aright may be his own witness. Hence it appears how deep and dark the abyss is into which hypocrisy plunges the minds of men, when they indulge so securely as, without hesitations to oppose their flattery to the judgment of God, as if they were relieving him from his office as judge. Very different is the anxiety which fills the breasts of believers, who sincerely examine themselves.¹ Every mind, therefore, would first begin to hesitate, and at length to despair, while each determined for itself with how great a load of debt it was still oppressed, and how far it was from coming up to the enjoined condition. Thus, then, faith would be oppressed and extinguished. To have faith is not to fluctuate, to vary, to be carried up and down, to hesitate, remain in suspense, vacillate, in fine, to despair; it is to possess sure certainty and complete security of mind, to have whereon to rest and fix your foot.

4. Paul, moreover, adds, that the promise itself would be rendered null and void. For if its fulfillment depends on our merits when pray, will we be able to come the length of meriting the favor of God? Nay, the second clause is a consequence of the former, since the promise will not be fulfilled unless to those who put faith in it. Faith therefore failing, no power will remain in the promise. "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace, to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed," (Rom. 4:16). It was abundantly

confirmed when made to rest on the mercy of God alone, for mercy and truth are united by an indissoluble tie; that is, whatever God has mercifully promised he faithfully performs. Thus David, before he asks salvation according to the word of God, first places the source of it in his mercy. "Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to thy word unto thy servant," (Ps. 119:76). And justly, for nothing but mere mercy induces God to promise. Here, then, we must place, and, as it were, firmly fix our whole hope, paying no respect to our works, and asking no assistance from them. And lest you should suppose that there is any thing novel in what I say, Augustine also enjoins us so to act. "Christ," says he, "will reign forever among his servants. This God has promised, God has spoken; if this is not enough, God has sworn. Therefore, as the promise stands firm, not in respect of our merits, but in respect of his mercy, no one ought to tremble in announcing that of which he cannot doubt," (August. in Ps. 88, Tract. 50). Thus Bernard also, "Who can be saved? ask the disciples of Christ. He replies, With men it is impossible, but not with God. This is our whole confidence, this our only consolation; this the whole ground of our hope: but being assured of the possibility, what are we to say as to his willingness? Who knows whether he is deserving of love or hatred? (Eccles. 9:1). 'Who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?' (1 Cor. 2:16). Here it is plain, faith must come to our aid: here we must have the assistance of truth, in order that the secret purpose of the Father respecting us may be revealed by the Spirit, and the Spirit testifying may persuade our hearts that we are the sons of God. But let him persuade by calling and justifying freely by faith: in these there is a kind of transition from eternal predestination to future glory," (Bert. in Dedic. Templi, Serm. 5). Let us thus briefly conclude: Scripture indicates that the promises of God are not surer unless they are apprehended with full assurance of conscience; it declares that wherever there is doubt or uncertainty, the promises are made void; on the other hand, that they can only waver and fluctuate if they depend on our works. Therefore, either our righteousness must perish, or without any consideration of our works, place must be given to faith alone, whose nature it is to prick up the ear, and shut the eye; that is, to be intent on the promise only, to give up all idea of any dignity or merit in man. Thus is fulfilled the celebrated prophecy of Zechariah: "I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbor under the vine, and under the fig-tree," (Zech. 3:9, 10). Here the prophet intimates that the only way in which believers can enjoy true peace, is by obtaining the remission of their sins. For we must attend to this peculiarity in the prophets, that when they discourse of the kingdom of Christ, they set forth the external mercies of God as types of spiritual blessings. Hence Christ is called the Prince of Peace, and our peace, Isaiah 9:6; Eph. 2:14), because he calms all the agitations of conscience. If the method is asked, we must come to the sacrifice by which God was appeased, for no man will ever cease to tremble, until he hold that God is propitiated solely by that expiation in which Christ endured his anger. In short, peace must be sought nowhere but in the agonies of Christ our Redeemer.

5. But why employ a more obscure testimony? Paul uniformly declares that the conscience can have no peace or quiet joy until it is held for certain that we are justified by faith. And he at the same time declares whence this certainty is derived—viz. when "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost," (Rom. 5:5); as if he had said that our Souls cannot have peace until

¹ The two previous sentences are omitted in the French.

we are fully assured that we are pleasing to God. Hence he elsewhere exclaims in the person of believers in general, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (Rom. 8:35). Until we have reached that haven, the slightest breeze will make us tremble, but so long as the Lord is our Shepherd, we shall walk without fear in the valley of the shadow of death (Ps. 23). Thus those who pretend that justification by faith consists in being regenerated and made just, by living spiritually, have never tasted the sweetness of grace in trusting that God will be propitious. Hence also, they know no more of praying aright than do the Turks or any other heathen people. For, as Paul declares, faith is not true, unless it suggest and dictate the delightful name of Father; nay, unless it open our mouths and enable us freely to cry, *Abba, Father*. This he expresses more clearly in another passage, “In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him,” (Eph. 3:12). This, certainly, is not obtained by the gift of regeneration, which, as it is always defective in the present state, contains within it many grounds of doubt. Wherefore, we must have recourse to this remedy; we must hold that the only hope which believers have of the heavenly inheritance is, that being in grafted into the body of Christ, they are justified freely. For, in regard to justification, faith is merely passive bringing nothing of our own to procure the favor of God, but receiving from Christ every thing that we want.

CHAPTER 14.

The beginning of justification. In what sense progressive.

To illustrate what has been already said, and show what kind of righteousness man can have during the whole course of his life, mankind are divided into four classes.

1. First class considered, sec. 1-6.
2. Second and third classes considered together, sec. 7, 8.
3. Fourth class considered, sec. 9 to end.

Sections.

1. Men either idolatrous, profane, hypocritical, or regenerate.
 - a. Idolaters void of righteousness, full of unrighteousness, and hence in the sight of God altogether wretched and undone.
2. Still a great difference in the characters of men. This difference manifested.
 - a. In the gifts of God.
 - b. In the distinction between honorable and base.
 - c. In the blessings of the present life.
3. All human virtue, how praiseworthy soever it may appear, is corrupted.
 - a. By impurity of heart.
 - b. By the absence of a proper nature.
4. By the want of Christ, without whom there is no life.
5. Natural condition of man as described by Scripture. All men dead in sins before regeneration.

6. Passages of Scripture to this effect. Vulgar error confounding the righteousness of works with the redemption purchased by Christ.
7. The second and third classes of men, comprehending hypocrites and Christians in name only. Every action of theirs deserves condemnation. Passage from Haggai. Objection. Answer.
8. Other passages. Quotations from Augustine and Gregory.
9. The fourth class—viz. the regenerate. Though guided by the Spirit, corruption adheres to all they do, especially when brought to the bar of God.
10. One fault sufficient to efface all former righteousness. Hence they cannot possibly be justified by works.
11. In addition to the two former arguments, a third adduced against the Sophists, to show that whatever be the works of the regenerate, they are justified solely by faith and the free imputation of Christ’s righteousness.
12. Sophism of the Schoolmen in opposition to the above doctrine. Answer.
13. Answer explained. Refutation of the fiction of partial righteousness, and compensation by works of supererogation. This fiction necessarily falls with that of satisfaction.
14. Statement of our Savior—viz. that after we have done all, we are still unprofitable servants.
15. Objection founded on Paul’s boasting. Answer, showing the Apostle’s meaning. Other answers, stating the general doctrine out of Chrysostom. Third answer, showing that supererogation is the merest vanity.
16. Fourth answer, showing how Scripture dissuades us from all confidence in works. Fifth answer, showing that we have no ground of boasting.
17. Sixth answer, showing, in regard to four different classes, that works have no part in procuring our salvation.
 - a. The efficient cause is the free love of the Father.
 - b. The material cause is Christ acquiring righteousness for us.
 - c. The instrumental cause is faith.
 - d. The final cause the display of the divine justice and praise of the divine goodness.
18. A second objection, founded on the glorying of saints. An answer, explaining these modes of expression. How the saints feel in regard to the certainty of salvation. The opinion they have of their own works as in the sight of God.
19. Another answer—viz. that the elect, by this kind of glorying, refer only to their adoption by the Father as proved by the fruits of their calling. The order of this glorying. Its foundation, structure, and parts.
20. Conclusion. The saints neither attribute anything to the merits of works, nor derogate in any degree from the righteousness which they obtain in Christ. Confirmation from a passage of Augustine, in which he gives two reasons why no believer will presume to boast before God of his works.
21. A third objection—viz. that the good works of believers are the causes of divine blessings. Answer.

There are inferior causes, but these depend on free justification, which is the only true cause why God blesses us. These modes of expression designate the order of sequence rather than the cause.

1. In farther illustration of the subject, let us consider what kind of righteousness man can have, during the whole course of his life, and for this purpose let us make a fourfold division. Mankind, either endued with no knowledge of God, are sunk in idolatry; or, initiated in the sacraments, but by the impurity of their lives denying him whom they confess with their mouths, are Christians in name only; or they are hypocrites, who with empty glosses hide the iniquity of the heart; or they are regenerated by the Spirit of God, and aspire to true holiness. In the first place, when men are judged by their natural endowments, not a iota of good will be found from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot, unless we are to charge Scripture with falsehood, when it describes all the sons of Adam by such terms as these: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” “The imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth.” “The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man that they are vanity.” “They are all gone aside: they are altogether become filthy; there is none that does good, no, not one.” In short, that they are flesh, under which name are comprehended all those works which are enumerated by Paul; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness idolatry witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulation, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and all kinds of pollution and abomination which it is possible to imagine.¹ Such, then, is the worth on which men are to plume themselves. But if any among them possess an integrity of manners which presents some semblance of sanctity among men, yet because we know that God regards not the outward appearance, we must penetrate to the very source of action, if we would see how far works avail for righteousness. We must, I say, look within, and see from what affection of the heart these works proceed. This is a very wide field of discussion, but as the matter may be explained in few words, I will use as much brevity as I can.

2. First, then, I deny not, that whatever excellent endowments appear in unbelievers² are divine gifts. Nor do I set myself so much in opposition to common sense, as to contend that there was no difference between the justice, moderation, and equity of Titus and Trojan, and the rage, intemperance, and cruelty of Caligula, Nero, and Domitian; between the continence of Vespasian, and the obscene lusts of Tiberius; and (not to dwell on single virtues and vices) between the observance of law and justice, and the contempt of them. So great is the difference between justice and injustice, that it may be seen even where the former is only a lifeless image. For what order would remain in the world if we were to confound them? Hence this distinction between honorable and base actions God has not only engraven on the minds of each, but also often confirms in the administration of his providence. For we see how he visits those who cultivate virtue with many temporal blessings. Not that that external image of virtue in the least degree merits his favor, but he is pleased thus to show how much he delights in true righteousness, since he does not leave even the outward semblance of it to go unrewarded. Hence it follows, as we lately observed, that those virtues, or rather images of virtues, of

whatever kind, are divine gifts, since there is nothing in any degree praiseworthy which proceeds not from him.

3. Still the observation of Augustine is true, that all who are strangers to the true God, however excellent they may be deemed on account of their virtues are more deserving of punishment than of reward, because, by the pollution of their heart, they contaminate the pure gifts of God (August. contra Julia. Lib. 4). For though they are instruments of God to preserve human society by justice, continence, friendship, temperance, fortitude, and prudence, yet they execute these good works of God in the worst manner, because they are kept from acting ill, not by a sincere love of goodness, but merely by ambition or self-love, or some other sinister affection. Seeing then that these actions are polluted as in their very source, by impurity of heart, they have no better title to be classed among virtues than vices, which impose upon us by their affinity or resemblance to virtue. In short, when we remember that the object at which righteousness always aims is the service of God, whatever is of a different tendency deservedly forfeits the name. Hence, as they have no regard to the end which the divine wisdom prescribes, although from the performance the act seems good, yet from the perverse motive it is sin. Augustine, therefore, concludes that all the Fabriciuses, the Scipios, and Catos,³ in their illustrious deeds, sinned in this, that, wanting the light of faith, they did not refer them to the proper end, and that, therefore, there was no true righteousness in them, because duties are estimated not by acts but by motives.

4. Besides, if it is true, as John says, that there is no life without the Son of God (1 John 5:12), those who have no part in Christ, whoever they be, whatever they do or devise, are hastening on, during their whole career, to destruction and the judgment of eternal death. For this reason, Augustine says, “Our religion distinguishes the righteous from the wicked, by the law, not of works but of faith, without which works which seem good are converted into sins,” (August. ad Bonif. Lib. 3, c. 5). He finely expresses the same idea in another passage, when he compares the zeal of such men to those who in a race mistake the course (August. Praef in Ps. 31). He who is off the course, the more swiftly he runs is the more distant from the goal and, therefore, the more unhappy. It is better to limp in the way than run out of the way. Lastly, as there is no sanctification without union with Christ, it is evident that they are bad trees which are beautiful and fair to look upon, and may even produce fruit, sweet to the taste, but are still very far from good. Hence we easily perceive that every thing which man thinks, designs, and performs, before he is reconciled to God by faith, is cursed, and not only of no avail for justification, but merits certain damnation. And why do we talk of this as if it were doubtful, when it has already been proved by the testimony of an apostle, that “without faith it is impossible to please God?” (Heb. 11:6).

5. But the proof will be still clearer if divine grace is set in opposition to the natural condition of man. For Scripture everywhere proclaims that God finds nothing in man to induce him to show kindness, but that he prevents him by free liberality. What can a dead man do to obtain life? But when he enlightens us with the

1 Jer. 17:9; Gen. 7:21; Ps. 94:11; 36:2; 14:2, 3; Gen. 6:3; Gal. 5:19

2 Latin, “in incredulis.” French, “en la vie des infideles et idolatres;”—in the life of infidels and idolaters.

3 Latin, “omnes Fabricios, Scipiones, Catones.” French, “tous ceux qui ont este priez entre les Pagans;”—all those who have been prized among the Heathen.

knowledge of himself, he is said to raise us from the dead, and make us new creatures (John 5:25). On this ground we see that the kindness of God toward us is often commended, especially by the apostle: "God," says he, "who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, has quickened us together with Christ," (Eph. 2:4). In another passage, when treating of the general call of believers under the type of Abraham, he says, "God quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were," (Rom. 4:17). If we are nothing, what pray, can we do? Wherefore, in the Book of Job the Lord sternly represses all arrogance in these words, "Who has prevented me, that I should repay him? whatsoever is under the whole heaven is mine," (Job 41:11). Paul explaining this sentence applies it in this way,— Let us not imagine that we bring to the Lord any thing but the mere disgrace of want and destitution (Rom. 11:35). Wherefore, in the passage above quoted, to prove that we attain to the hope of salvation, not by works but only by grace, he affirms that "we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them," (Eph. 2:10); as if he had said, Who of us can boast of having challenged God by his righteousness, seeing our first power to act aright is derived from regeneration? For, as we are formed by nature, sooner shall oil be extracted from stone than good works from us. It is truly strange how man, convicted of such ignominy, dares still to claim any thing as his own. Let us acknowledge, therefore, with that chosen vessel, that God "has called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace;" and "that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward men appeared not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us;" that being justified by his grace, we might become the heirs of everlasting life (2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 3:4, 5). By this confession we strip man of every particle of righteousness, until by mere mercy he is regenerated unto the hope of eternal life, since it is not true to say we are justified by grace, if works contribute in any degree to our justification. The apostle undoubtedly had not forgotten himself in declaring that justification is gratuitous, seeing he argues in another place, that if works are of any avail, "grace is no more grace," (Rom. 11:6). And what else does our Lord mean, when he declares, "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance?" (Mt. 9:13). If sinners alone are admitted, why do we seek admission by means of fictitious righteousness?

6. The thought is ever and anon recurring to me, that I am in danger of insulting the mercy of God by laboring with so much anxiety to maintain it, as if it were doubtful or obscure. Such, however, is our malignity in refusing to concede to God what belongs to him until most strongly urged that I am obliged to insist at greater length. But as Scripture is clear enough on this subject, I shall contend in its words rather than my own. Isaiah, after describing the universal destruction of the human race, finely subjoins the method of restitution. "The Lord saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment. And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him" (Isaiah 59:15, 16). Where is our righteousness, if the prophet says truly, that no man in recovering salvation gives any assistance to the Lord? Thus another prophet, introducing the Lord as treating concerning the reconciliation of sinners, says, "I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies." "I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy," (Hosea 2:19, 23). If

a covenant of this kind, evidently forming our first union with God, depends on mercy, there is no foundation left for our righteousness. And, indeed, I would fain know, from those who pretend that man meets God with some righteousness of works, whether they imagine there is any kind of righteousness save that which is acceptable to Him. If it were insane to think so, can any thing agreeable to God proceed from his enemies, whom he abominates with all their deeds? Truth declares that we are all the avowed and inveterate enemies of God until we are justified and admitted to his friendship (Rom. 5:6; Col. 1:21). If justification is the beginning of love, how can the righteousness of works precede it? Hence John, to put down the arrogant idea, carefully reminds us that God first loved us (1 John 4:10). The Lord had formerly taught the same thing by his Prophet: "I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him," (Hosea 14:4). Assuredly he is not influenced by works if his love turns to us spontaneously. But the rude and vulgar idea entertained is, that we did not merit the interposition of Christ for our redemption, but that we are aided by our works in obtaining possession of it. On the contrary, though we may be redeemed by Christ, still, until we are ingrafted into union with him by the calling of the Father, we are darkness, the heirs of death, and the enemies of God. For Paul declares that we are not purged and washed from our impurities by the blood of Christ until the Spirit accomplishes that cleansing in us (1 Cor. 6:11). Peter, intending to say the same thing, declares that the sanctification of the Spirit avails "unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ," (1 Pet. 1:2). If the sprinkling of the blood of Christ by the Spirit gives us purification, let us not think that, previous to this sprinkling, we are anything but sinners without Christ. Let us, therefore, hold it as certain, that the beginning of our salvation is as it were a resurrection from death unto life, because, when it is given us on behalf of Christ to believe on him (Phil. 1:29), then only do we begin to pass from death unto life.

7. Under this head the second and third class of men noted in the above division is comprehended. Impurity of conscience proves that as yet neither of these classes is regenerated by the Spirit of God. And, again, their not being regenerated proves their want of faith. Whence it is clear that they are not yet reconciled, not yet justified, since it is only by faith that these blessings are obtained. What can sinners, alienated from God, produce save that which is abominable in his sight? Such, however, is the stupid confidence entertained by all the wicked, and especially by hypocrites, that however conscious that their whole heart teems with impurity, they yet deem any spurious works which they may perform as worthy of the approbation of God. Hence the pernicious consequence, that though convicted of a wicked and impious minds they cannot be induced to confess that they are devoid of righteousness. Even acknowledging themselves to be unrighteous, because they cannot deny it, they yet arrogate to themselves some degree of righteousness. This vanity the Lord admirably refutes by the prophet: "Ask now the priests concerning the law, saying, If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or potage, or wine, or oil, or any meat, shall it be holy? And the priests answered and said, No. Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean. Then answered Haggai, and said, So is this people, and so is this nation before me, saith the Lord; and so is every work of their hands; and that which they offer there is unclean," (Haggai 2:11-14). I wish these sentiments could obtain full credit with us, and be deeply fixed on our memo-

ries. For there is no man, however flagitious the whole tenor of his life may be, who will allow himself to be convinced of what the Lord here so clearly declares. As soon as any person, even the most wicked, has performed some one duty of the law, he hesitates not to impute it to himself for righteousness; but the Lord declares that no degree of holiness is thereby acquired, unless the heart has previously been made pure. And not contented with this, he declares that all the works performed by sinners are contaminated by impurity of heart. Let us cease then to give the name of righteousness to works which the mouth of the Lord condemns as polluted. How well is this shown by that elegant similitude? It might be objected, that what the Lord has commanded is inviolably holy. But he, on the contrary, replies, that it is not strange that those things which are sanctified in the law are contaminated by the impurity of the wicked, the unclean hand profaning that which is sacred by handling it.

8. The same argument is admirably followed out by Isaiah: "Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my foul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes;" (Isaiah 1:13-16, compared with ch. 58) What is meant by the Lord thus nauseating the observance of his law? Nay, indeed, he does not repudiate any thing relating to the genuine observance of the law, the beginning of which is as he uniformly declares the sincere fear of his name. When this is wanting, all the services which are offered to him are not only nugatory but vile and abominable. Let hypocrites now go, and while keeping depravity wrapt up in their heart, study to lay God under obligation by their works. In this way they will only offend him more and more. "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord; but the prayer of the upright is his delight;" (Prov. 15:8.) We hold it, therefore, as indubitable, indeed it should be notorious to all tolerably verdant with Scriptures that the most splendid works performed by men, who are not yet truly sanctified, are so far from being righteousness in the sight of the Lord, that he regards them as sins. And, therefore it is taught with perfect truth, that no man procures favor with God by means of works, but that, on the contrary, works are not pleasing to God unless the person has previously found favor in his sight.¹ Here we should carefully observe the order which scripture sets before us. Moses says that "the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering;" (Gen. 4:4). Observe how he says that the Lord was propitious (had respect) to Abel, before he had respect to his works. Wherefore, purification of heart ought to precede, in order that the works performed by us may be graciously accepted by God: for the saying of Jeremiah is always true, "O Lord, are not thine eyes upon the truth?" (Jer. 5:3). Moreover the Holy Spirit declared by the mouth of Peter, that it is by faith alone the heart is purified (Acts 15:9). Hence it is evident, that the primary foundation is in true and living faith.

9. Let us now see what kind of righteousness belongs to those persons whom we have placed in the fourth class. We admits that

¹ See August. *Lib. de Poenit.*, and Gregory, whose words are quoted, *Sent. Lib. 3 Quaest. 7.*

when God reconciles us to himself by the intervention of the righteousness of Christ, and bestowing upon us the free pardon of sins regards us as righteous, his goodness is at the same time conjoined with mercy, so that he dwells in us by means of his Holy Spirit, by whose agency the lusts of our flesh are every day more and more mortified while that we ourselves are sanctified; that is consecrated to the Lord for true purity of life, our hearts being trained to the obedience of the law. It thus becomes our leading desire to obey his will, and in all things advance his glory only. Still, however while we walk in the ways of the Lord, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, lest we should become unduly elated, and forget ourselves, we have still remains of imperfection which serve to keep us humble: "There is no man that sinneth not," saith Scripture (1 Kings 8:46). What righteousness then can men obtain by their works? First, I say, that the best thing which can be produced by them is always tainted and corrupted by the impurity of the flesh, and has, as it were, some mixture of dross in it. Let the holy servant of God, I say, select from the whole course of his life the action which he deems most excellent, and let him ponder it in all its parts; he will doubtless find in it something that savors of the rottenness of the flesh, since our alacrity in well-doing is never what it ought to be, but our course is always retarded by much weakness. Although we see theft the stains by which the works of the righteous are blemished, are by no means unapparent, still, granting that they are the minutest possible, will they give no offense to the eye of God, before which even the stars are not clean? We thus see, that even saints cannot perform one work which, if judged on its own merits, is not deserving of condemnation.

10. Even were it possible for us to perform works absolutely pure, yet one sin is sufficient to efface and extinguish all remembrance of former righteousness, as the prophet says (Ezek. 18:24). With this James agrees, "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, is guilty of all," (James 2:10). And since this mortal life is never entirely free from the taint of sin, whatever righteousness we could acquire would ever and anon be corrupted, overwhelmed, and destroyed, by subsequent sins, so that it could not stand the scrutiny of God, or be imputed to us for righteousness. In short, whenever we treat of the righteousness of works, we must look not to the legal work but to the command. Therefore, when righteousness is sought by the Law, it is in vain to produce one or two single works; we must show an uninterrupted obedience. God does not (as many foolishly imagine) impute that forgiveness of sins once for all, as righteousness; so that having obtained the pardon of our past life we may afterwards seek righteousness in the Law. This were only to mock and delude us by the entertainment of false hopes. For since perfection is altogether unattainable by us, so long as we are clothed with flesh, and the Law denounces death and judgment against all who have not yielded a perfect righteousness, there will always be ground to accuse and convict us unless the mercy of God interpose, and ever and anon absolve us by the constant remission of sins. Wherefore the statement which we set out is always true, If we are estimated by our own worthiness, in every thing that we think or devise, with all our studies and endeavors we deserve death and destruction.

11. We must strongly insist on these two things: That no believer ever performed one work which, if tested by the strict judgment of God, could escape condemnation; and, moreover, that were this granted to be possible (though it is not), yet the act being

vitiated and polluted by the sins of which it is certain that the author of it is guilty, it is deprived of its merit. This is the cardinal point of the present discussion. There is no controversy between us and the sounder Schoolmen as to the beginning of justification.¹ They admit that the sinner, freely delivered from condemnation, obtains justification, and that by forgiveness of sins; but under the term justification they comprehend the renovation by which the Spirit forms us anew to the obedience of the Law; and in describing the righteousness of the regenerate man, maintain that being once reconciled to God by means of Christ, he is afterwards deemed righteous by his good works, and is accepted in consideration of them. The Lord, on the contrary, declares, that he imputed Abraham's faith for righteousness (Rom. 4:3), not at the time when he was still a worshipper of idols, but after he had been many years distinguished for holiness. Abraham had long served God with a pure heart, and performed that obedience of the Law which a mortal man is able to perform: yet his righteousness still consisted in faith. Hence we infer, according to the reasoning of Paul, that it was not of works. In like manners when the prophet says, "The just shall live by his faith," (Hab. 2:4), he is not speaking of the wicked and profane, whom the Lord justifies by converting them to the faith: his discourse is directed to believers, and life is promised to them by faith. Paul also removes every doubt, when in confirmation of this sentiment he quotes the words of David, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered," (Ps. 32:1). It is certain that David is not speaking of the ungodly but of believers such as he himself was, because he was giving utterance to the feelings of his own mind. Therefore we must have this blessedness not once only, but must hold it fast during our whole lives. Moreover, the message of free reconciliation with God is not promulgated for one or two days, but is declared to be perpetual in the Church (2 Cor. 5:18, 19). Hence believers have not even to the end of life any other righteousness than that which is there described. Christ ever remains a Mediator to reconcile the Father to us, and there is a perpetual efficacy in his death—viz. ablution, satisfaction, expiation; in short, perfect obedience, by which all our iniquities are covered. In the Epistle to the Ephesians, Paul says not that the beginning of salvation is of grace, but "by grace are ye saved," "not of works, lest any man should boast," (Eph. 2:8, 9).

12. The subterfuges by which the Schoolmen here endeavor to escape will not disentangle them. They say that good works are not of such intrinsic worth as to be sufficient to procure justification, but it is owing to accepting grace that they have this effect. Then because they are forced to confess that here the righteousness of works is always imperfect, they grant that so long as we are in this life we stand in need of the forgiveness of sin in order to supply the deficiency of works, but that the faults which are committed are compensated by works of supererogation. I answer, that the grace which they call accepting, is nothing else than the free goodness with which the Father embraces us in Christ when he clothes us with the innocence of Christ, and accepts it as ours, so that in consideration of it he regards us as holy, pure, and innocent.

¹ The following sentence is added in the French:—"Il est bien vray que le poure monde a este seduict jusques la, de penser que l'homme se preparast de soy-mesme pour estre justifie de Dieu: et que ce blaspheme a regne communement tant en predications qu'aux escoles; comme encore aujourd'hui il est soustenue de ceux qui veulent maintenir toutes les abominations de la Papaute."—It is very true that the poor world has been seduced hitherto, to think that man could of himself perpare to be justified by God, and that this blasphemy has commonly reigned both in sermons and schools, as it is still in the present day asserted by those who would maintain all the abominations of the Papacy.

For the righteousness of Christ (as it alone is perfect, so it alone can stand the scrutiny of God) must be sisted for us, and as a surety represent us judicially. Provided with this righteousness, we constantly obtain the remission of sins through faith. Our imperfection and impurity, covered with this purity, are not imputed but are as it were buried, so as not to come under judgment until the hour arrive when the old man being destroyed, and plainly extinguished in us, the divine goodness shall receive us into beatific peace with the new Adam, there to await the day of the Lord, on which, being clothed with incorruptible bodies, we shall be translated to the glory of the heavenly kingdom.

13. If these things are so, it is certain that our works cannot in themselves make us agreeable and acceptable to God, and even cannot please God, except in so far as being covered with the righteousness of Christ we thereby please him and obtain forgiveness of sins. God has not promised life as the reward of certain works, but only declares, "which if a man do, he shall live in them," (Lev. 18:5), denouncing the well-known curse against all who do not continue in all things that are written in the book of the Law to do them. In this way is completely refuted the fiction of a partial righteousness, the only righteousness acknowledged in heaven being the perfect observance of the Law. There is nothing more solid in their dogma of compensation by means of works of supererogation. For must they not always return to the proposition which has already been disproved—viz. that he who observes the Law in part is so far justified by works? This, which no man of sound judgment will concede to them, they are not ashamed to take for granted. The Lord having so often declared that he recognizes no justification by works unless they be works by which the Law is perfectly fulfilled,—how perverse is it, while we are devoid of such works, to endeavor to secure some ground of glorying to ourselves; that is not to yield it entirely to God, by boasting of some kind of fragments of works, and trying to supply the deficiency by other satisfactions? Satisfactions have already been so completely disposed of, that we ought never again even to dream of them. Here all I say is, that those who thus trifle with sin do not at all consider how execrable it is in the sight of God; if they did, they would assuredly understand, that all the righteousness of men collected into one heap would be inadequate to compensate for a single sin. For we see that by one sin man was so cast off and forsaken by God, that he at the same time lost all power of recovering salvation. He was, therefore, deprived of the power of giving satisfaction. Those who flatter themselves with this idea will never satisfy God, who cannot possibly accept or be pleased with anything that proceeds from his enemies. But all to whom he imputes sin are enemies, and, therefore, our sins must be covered and forgiven before the Lord has respect to any of our works. From this it follows, that the forgiveness of sins is gratuitous, and this forgiveness is wickedly insulted by those who introduce the idea of satisfaction. Let us, therefore, after the example of the Apostle, "forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before," "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Jesus Christ," (Phil. 3:13, 14).

14. How can boasting in works of supererogation agree with the command given to us: "When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do?" (Luke 17:10). To say or speak in the presence of God is not to feign or lie, but to declare

what we hold as certain. Our Lord, therefore, enjoins us sincerely to feel and consider with ourselves that we do not perform gratuitous duties, but pay him service which is due. And truly. For the obligations of service under which we lie are so numerous that we cannot discharge them though all our thoughts and members were devoted to the observance of the Law; and, therefore, when he says “When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you,” it is just as if he had said that all the righteousness of men would not amount to one of these things. Seeing, then, that every one is very far distant from that goal, how can we presume to boast of having accumulated more than is due? It cannot be objected that a person, though failing in some measure in what is necessary, may yet in intention go beyond what is necessary. For it must ever be held that in whatever pertains to the worship of God, or to charity, nothing can ever be thought of that is not comprehended under the Law. But if it is part of the Law, let us not boast of voluntary liberality in matters of necessary obligation.

15. On this subject, they ceaselessly allege the boast of Paul, that among the Corinthians he spontaneously renounced a right which, if he had otherwise chosen, he might have exercised (1 Cor. 9:15); thus not only paying what he owed them in duty, but gratuitously bestowing upon them more than duty required. They ought to have attended to the reason there expressed, that his object was to avoid giving offense to the weak. For wicked and deceitful workmen employed this pretence of kindness that they might procure favor to their pernicious dogmas, and excite hatred against the Gospel, so that it was necessary for Paul either to peril the doctrine of Christ, or to thwart their schemes. Now, if it is a matter of indifference to a Christian man whether or not he cause a scandal when it is in his power to avoid it, then I admit that the Apostle performed a work of supererogation to his Master; but if the thing which he did was justly required in a prudent minister of the Gospel, then I say he did what he was bound to do. In short, even when no such reason appears, yet the saying of Chrysostom is always true, that everything which we have is held on the same condition as the private property of slaves; it is always due to our Master. Christ does not disguise this in the parable, for he asks in regard to the master who, on return from his labour, requires his servant to gird himself and serve him, “Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not,” (Luke 17:9). But possibly the servant was more industrious than the master would have ventured to exact. Be it so: still he did nothing to which his condition as a servant did not bind him, because his utmost ability is his master’s. I say nothing as to the kind of supererogations on which these men would plume themselves before God. They are frivolities which he never commanded, which he approves not, and will not accept when they come to give in their account. The only sense in which we admit works of supererogation is that expressed by the prophet, when he says, “Who has required this at your hand?” (Isaiah 1:12). But let them remember what is elsewhere said of them: “Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?” (Isaiah 55:2). It is, indeed, an easy matter for these indolent Rabbis to carry on such discussions sitting in their soft chairs under the shade, but when the Supreme Judge shall sit on his tribunal, all these blustering dogmas will behave to disappear.¹ This, this I say, was the true question: not what we can fable and talk in schools

and corners, but what ground of defense we can produce at his judgment-seat.

16. In this matter the minds of men must be specially guarded against two pestiferous dogmas—viz. against putting any confidence in the righteousness of works, or ascribing any glory to them. From all such confidence the Scriptures uniformly dissuade us when they declare that our righteousness is offensive in the sight of God unless it derives a sweet odour from the purity of Christ: that it can have no other effect than to excite the divine vengeance unless sustained by his indulgent mercy. Accordingly, the only thing they leave to us is to deprecate our Judge with that confession of David: “Enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no living be justified,” (Psalm 143:2). And when Job says, “If I be wicked, woe unto me: and if I be righteous, yet will I not lift up my head,” (Job 10:15). Although he refers to that spotless righteousness of God, before which even angels are not clean, he however shows, that when brought to the bar of Gods all that mortals can do is to stand dumb. He does not merely mean that he chooses rather to give way spontaneously than to risk a contest with the divine severity, but that he was not conscious of possessing any righteousness that would not fall the very first moment it was brought into the presence of God. Confidence being banished, all glorying must necessarily cease. For who can attribute any merit of righteousness to works, which instead of giving confidence, only make us tremble in the presence of God? We must, therefore, come to what Isaiah invites us: “In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory,” (Isaiah 45:25); for it is most true, as he elsewhere says, that we are “the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified,” (Isaiah 61:3). Our soul, therefore, will not be duly purified until it ceases to have any confidence, or feel any exultation in works. Foolish men are puffed up to this false and lying confidence by the erroneous idea that the cause of their salvation is in works.

17. But if we attend to the four kinds of causes which philosophers bring under our view in regard to effects, we shall find that not one of them is applicable to works as a cause of salvation. The efficient cause of our eternal salvation the Scripture uniformly proclaims to be the mercy and free love of the heavenly Father towards us; the material cause to be Christ, with the obedience by which he purchased righteousness for us; and what can the formal or instrumental cause be but faith? John includes the three in one sentence when he says, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life,” (John 3:16). The Apostle, moreover, declares that the final cause is the demonstration of the divine righteousness and the praise of his goodness. There also he distinctly mentions the other three causes; for he thus speaks to the Romans: “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by his grace,” (Rom. 3:23, 24). You have here the head and primary source—God has embraced us with free mercy. The next words are, “through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus;” this is as it were the material cause by which righteousness is procured for us. “Whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith.” Faith is thus the instrumental cause by which righteousness is applied to us. He lastly subjoins the final cause when he says, “To declare at this time his righteousness; that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.” And to show by the way that this righteousness consists in reconciliation, he says that

¹ French, “Tout ce qu'ils auront determine ne profitera gueres, ains s'évanouira comme fumee;”—All their decisions will scarcely avail them, but will vanish like the smoke.

Christ was “set forth to be a propitiation.” Thus also, in the Epistle to the Ephesians, he tells us that we are received into the favor of God by mere mercy; that this is done by the intervention of Christ; that it is apprehended by faith; the end of all being that the glory of the divine goodness may be fully displayed. When we see that all the parts of our salvation thus exist without us, what ground can we have for glorying or confiding in our works? Neither as to the efficient nor the final cause can the most sworn enemies of divine grace raise any controversy with us unless they would abjure the whole of Scripture. In regard to the material or formal cause they make a gloss, as if they held that our works divide the merit with faith and the righteousness of Christ. But here also Scripture reclaims, simply affirming that Christ is both righteousness and life, and that the blessing of justification is possessed by faith alone.

18. When the saints repeatedly confirm and console themselves with the remembrance of their innocence and integrity, and sometimes even abstain not from proclaiming them, it is done in two ways: either because by comparing their good cause with the bad cause of the ungodly, they thence feel secure of victory, not so much from commendation of their own righteousness, as from the just and merited condemnation of their adversaries; or because, reviewing themselves before God, even without any comparison with others the purity of their conscience gives them some comfort and security. The former reason will afterwards be considered (chap. 17, sec. 14, and chap. 20, sec. 10); let us now briefly show, in regard to the latter, how it accords with what we have above said, that we can have no confidence in works before the bar of God, that we cannot glory in any opinion of their worth. The accordance lies here, that when the point considered is the constitution and foundation of salvation, believers, without paying any respect to works, direct their eyes to the goodness of God alone. Nor do they turn to it only in the first instance, as to the commencement of blessedness, but rest in it as the completion. Conscience being thus founded, built up, and established is farther established by the consideration of works, inasmuch as they are proofs of God dwelling and reigning in us. Since, then, this confidence in works has no place unless you have previously fixed your whole confidence on the mercy of God, it should not seem contrary to that on which it depends. Wherefore, when we exclude confidence in works, we merely mean, that the Christian mind must not turn back to the merit of works as an aid to salvation, but must dwell entirely on the free promise of justification. But we forbid no believer to confirm and support this faith by the signs of the divine favor towards him. For if when we call to mind the gifts which God has bestowed upon us, they are like rays of the divine countenance, by which we are enabled to behold the highest light of his goodness; much more is this the case with the gift of good works, which shows that we have received the Spirit of adoption.

19. When believers therefore feel their faith strengthened by a consciousness of integrity, and entertain sentiments of exultation, it is just because the fruits of their calling convince them that the Lord has admitted them to a place among his children. Accordingly, when Solomon says, “In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence,” (Prov. 14:26), and when the saints sometimes beseech the Lord to hear them, because they walked before his face in simplicity and integrity (Gen. 24:10; 2 Kings 20:3), these expressions apply not to laying the foundation of a firm conscience, but are of force only

when taken a posteriori.¹ For there is no where such a fear of God as can give full security, and the saints are always conscious that any integrity which they may possess is mingled with many remains of the flesh. But as the fruits of regeneration furnish them with a proof of the Holy Spirit dwelling in them, experiencing God to be a Father in a matter of so much moment, they are strengthened in no slight degree to wait for his assistance in all their necessities. Even this they could not do, had they not previously perceived that the goodness of God is sealed to them by nothing but the certainty of the promise. Should they begin to estimate it by their good works, nothing will be weaker or more uncertain; works, when estimated by themselves, no less proving the divine displeasure by their imperfection, than his good-will by their incipient purity. In short, while proclaiming the mercies of the Lord, they never lose sight of his free favor, with all its “breadth and length, and depth and height,” testified by Paul (Eph. 3:18); as if he had said, Whithersoever the believer turns, however loftily he climbs, however far and wide his thoughts extend, he must not go farther than the love of Christ, but must be wholly occupied in meditating upon it, as including in itself all dimensions. Accordingly, he declares that it “passeth knowledge,” that “to know the love of Christ” is to “be filled with all the fulness of God,” (Eph. 3:19). In another passage, where he glories that believers are victorious in every contest, he adds the reason, “through him that loved us,” (Rom. 8:37).

20. We now see that believers have no such confidence in works as to attribute any merit to them (since they regard them only as divine gifts, in which they recognize his goodness, and signs of calling, in which they discern their election); nor such confidence as to derogate in any respect from the free righteousness of Christ; since on this it depends, and without this cannot subsist. The same thing is briefly but elegantly expressed by Augustine when he says, “I do not say to the Lord, Despise not the works of my hands; I have sought the Lord with my hands, and have not been deceived. But I commend not the works of my hands, for I fear that when thou examinest them thou wilt find more faults than merits. This only I say, this asks this desire, Despise not the works of thy hands. See in me thy work, not mine. If thou sees mine, thou condemnest; if thou sees thine own, thou crownest. Whatever good works I have are of thee,” (August. in Ps. 137). He gives two reasons for not venturing to boast of his works before God: first, that if he has any good works, he does not see in them any thing of his own; and, secondly, that these works are overwhelmed by a multitude of sins. Whence it is, that the conscience derives from them more fear and alarm than security. Therefore, the only way in which he desires God to look at any work which he may have done aright is, that he may therein see the grace of his calling, and perfect the work which he has begun.

21. Moreover, when Scripture intimates that the good works of believers are causes why the Lord does them good, we must still understand the meaning so as to hold unshaken what has previously been said—viz. that the efficient cause of our salvation is placed in the love of God the Father; the material cause in the obedience of the Son; the instrumental cause in the illumination of the Spirit, that is, in faith; and the final cause in the praise of the divine goodness. In this, however, there is nothing to prevent the Lord from embracing works as inferior causes. But how so? In this way: Those

¹ Latin, “a posteriori;” French, “comme enseigne de la vocation de Dieu;”—as a sign of the calling of God.

whom in mercy he has destined for the inheritance of eternal life, he, in his ordinary administration, introduces to the possession of it by means of good works. What precedes in the order of administration is called the cause of what follows. For this reason, he sometimes makes eternal life a consequent of works; not because it is to be ascribed to them, but because those whom he has elected he justifies, that he may at length glorify (Rom. 8:30); he makes the prior grace to be a kind of cause, because it is a kind of step to that which follows. But whenever the true cause is to be assigned, he enjoins us not to take refuge in works, but to keep our thoughts entirely fixed on the mercy of God; “The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life,” (Rom. 6:23). Why, as he contrasts life with death, does he not also contrast righteousness with sin? Why, when setting down sin as the cause of death, does he not also set down righteousness as the cause of life? The antithesis which would otherwise be complete is somewhat marred by this variation; but the Apostle employed the comparison to express the fact, that death is due to the deserts of men, but that life was treasured up solely in the mercy of God. In short, by these expressions, the order rather than the cause is noted.¹ The Lord adding grace to grace, takes occasion from a former to add a subsequent, so that he may omit no means of enriching his servants. Still, in following out his liberality, he would have us always look to free election as its source and beginning. For although he loves the gifts which he daily bestows upon us, inasmuch as they proceed from that fountain, still our duty is to hold fast by that gratuitous acceptance, which alone can support our souls; and so to connect the gifts of the Spirit, which he afterwards bestows, with their primary cause, as in no degree to detract from it.

¹ French, “Brief, en toutes ces facons de parler, ou il est fait mention de bonnes oeuvres, il n’est pas question de la cause pourquoy Dieu fait bien aux siens, mais seulement de l’ordre qu’il y tient;”—In short, in all those forms of expression in which mention is made of good works, there is no question as to the cause why God does good to his people, but only to the order which he observes in it.