

[VICTORIOUS FAITH; A FINE SERMON ON TRUE FAITH: ITS FRUITS, EVIDENCE, SOURCE, AND CERTAINTY. THERE IS ALSO AN EXCELLENT SECTION ON BAPTISM.]

Sermon for the Sunday after Easter; 1 John 5:4-12

A Sermon by Martin Luther; taken from his Church Postil.

VICTORIOUS FAITH.

1. This epistle selection was primarily arranged for this particular Sunday because it treats of baptism and of the new birth of the believing Christian. It was in former time customary in the Church to baptize immediately after Easter those who had accepted the Christian faith and had been instructed in its precepts. This day is also called "Dominicam in albis," and by us Germans "Weiszer Sonntag" (White Sunday), because the candidates for baptism were clad in white linen as indicative of their cleansing and new birth; just as today children to be baptized are arrayed in a white christening-robe.

THE NEW BIRTH.

2. While this lesson does not treat of the resurrection of Christ, it has reference to its fruits: faith, the very essence of Christianity, here expressed as being born of God; and the evidence of the Holy Spirit, received through baptism, which assures us we are children of God and have, through Christ, eternal life and all blessings.

3. Though John's language is, as usual, plain and simple, yet, in the ears of men generally, it is unusual and unintelligible. The world estimates it as similar to the prattle of children or fools. What, according to the world's construction, is implied by the statement, "Whatsoever is begotten [born] of God overcometh the world?" Overcoming the world, the unconverted would understand to mean bringing into subjection to oneself every earthly thing and assuming the position of sovereign of the world. Yet more absurd in the ears of this class is the saying that we must be born of God. "Did one ever hear of such a thing," they might exclaim, "as children born of God? It would be less ridiculous to say we must be born of stones, after the idea of the heathen poets." To the world there is no birth but physical birth. Hence such doctrine as our lesson sets forth will ever be strange, unintelligible, and incomprehensible, to all but Christians. But the latter speak with new tongues, as Christ in the last chapter of Mark (verse 17) says they shall, for they are taught and enlightened by the Holy Spirit.

4. Clearly, then, when the Scriptures speak of being born of God, it is not in a human sense; the reference is not to the conditions of our temporal lives, but to those exalted ones of a future existence. To say we must be born of God is equivalent to saying that if man is to be redeemed from sin and eternal death, to enter into the kingdom of God and into happiness, his physical birth will not suffice; all which nature, reason, free-will and human endeavour may afford is inadequate. Physical birth, it is true, answers for every thing in the way of temporal possession and achievement, everything great, powerful, noble, rich, wise, learned; in short, every exalted and desirable thing of earth. But all such possession and achievement serves only the physical existence; it is swept away by death, to which event it is ever subject.

Hence becomes necessary a new and different birth, a birth more significant than that of the natural man even in the case of emperors, kings, or the wisest and most influential of earth. For as Isaiah says (ch. 40, 6): "All flesh is grass, and all the godliness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth."

The demand is for a divine birth, a birth in which parentage is wholly of God; a birth signifying the operation of God's divine power in man, a power achieving something beyond the attainment of his natural capacities and effecting in him new understanding and a new heart.

5. The process is this: When the individual hears the Gospel message of Christa message revealed and proclaimed not by the wisdom and will of man, but through the Holy Spirit--and sincerely believes it, he is justly recognized as conceived and born of God. John in his gospel (ch. 1, 12) says: "As many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name." And in the first verse of the chapter including our text, he tells us: "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God." Through that faith, for the sake of his Son, God accepts us as his children, pleasing to him and heirs of eternal life; and the Holy Spirit will be sent into our hearts, as is explained later.

6. This doctrine condemns those arrogant teachers who presumptuously expect to be justified before God by their own merits and works. They imagine that their wisdom, learning, good judgment, intelligence, fair reputation and morality entitle them, because of the good they are thus enabled to do, to the favour of God and to reception up into heaven. But the Scriptures clearly teach the very reverse, that all these things are nothing in the eyes of God. It is sheer human effort; it is not being born of God. However wise and powerful you might be, if even the noblest, most beautiful, fruit human nature can produce, you could not see the kingdom of God unless you became a wholly different person, unless you were born anew, according to Christ's words in John 3, 3. And this is something impossible to your natural powers. You certainly cannot make yourself of other parentage than you are. God must begin the work in you, communicating his seed--his Word--by virtue of which the Holy Spirit operates in you, enabling you, by faith, to cling to the promise, as said before.

7. Now, he who is thus born of God, John declares, overcomes the world. Verily, this is a significant and forcible assertion the Holy Spirit makes; it represents a tremendous power, a great work. The child of God must, indeed, attempt and accomplish great things. The birth effected through the Word and faith makes men true sovereigns, above all earthly rulers; it gives them power even to overcome the world, something impossible to any Roman or Turkish potentate. They effect not their victory by physical force or temporal power, but by the spiritual birth, through faith. As John says immediately after the clause we are discussing, "This is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith." Here is his own explanation of what he means by being born of God.

THE TWO KINGDOMS.

8. Now, in order to understand the nature of the spiritual victory and how it is effected, we must know just what John means by the term "world." The reference is not to dominion over territory, to property or money. He implies the existence of two kingdoms. In one, the kingdom of God, the heavenly kingdom of Christ, is included, first, the angels in heaven, who are the chief lords, the inner circle of counsellors; second, the entire Christian Church on earth, under one head, Christ the Lord and King. In the other kingdom, the hellish kingdom, the devil is prince, and his mighty counsellors and servants are the angels who with him fell from heaven; it also includes the world, those on earth who teach, believe and live contrary to Christ, who represent the heathen, the Jews, the Turks and false Christians.

By the heavenly kingdom of God we must understand, not only spiritual life and godly people, but the lord and regent of that kingdom--Christ with his angels, and his saints both living and dead. Thus, too, the kingdom of the world represents not only the earthly life with its worldly interests, but particularly its lord and regent--the devil and his angels, and all unchristian, godless, wicked people on earth. So, when John says, "Whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world," he means by "world" the devil and his whole earthly dominion.

9. Now, the workings of these two kingdoms are plainly evident, though the leaders--Christ the Lord, and the devil--are not visible to mortal eyes. Christ rules direct and effectually, in his own power, through the Word and through the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers, maintaining them in the faith and in the knowledge of

his Word, and protecting from the devil's wrath and subtlety; further, he rules through his angels, who guard his followers; again, he rules through his people themselves, who exercise authority one over another in loving service, each teaching, instructing, comforting and admonishing a noble little band of godly, obedient, patient, chaste, kind, tractable, benevolent souls.

The nature of the devil's kingdom, the manner of life the world leads, is easily apparent. This kingdom is simply a huge booth filled with faithless, shameless, wicked individuals, impelled by their god to every sort of disobedience, ingratitude and contempt of God and his Word; to idolatry, false doctrine, persecution of Christians and the practice of all wantonness, mischief, wickedness and vice.

10. These two kingdoms are opposed. They continually contend for the crown; they war with each other for supremacy. Christians are brought into the conflict to hold the field against God's enemy, whose rule of the world is one of falsehood and murder; they must contend with the enemy's servants, his horde of factious spirits and basely wicked individuals, in an effort to restrain evil and promote good. Christians must be equipped for the fray; they must know how to meet and successfully resist the enemy, how to carry the field unto victory, and hold it.

FAITH THE VICTOR.

11. Therefore, when John says, "Whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith," his purpose is to admonish Christians that believers must manifest the power and working of faith in life and deed. In fact, his chief aim in writing this text was to reprove false Christians who are pleased to hear the doctrine that we are saved through Christ alone, our works and merits not earning our salvation; and who imagine the hearing of this doctrine constitutes them Christians and that there is no necessity for any effort or contention on their part. They forget that they must, through faith, become new persons fitted to overcome the world and the devil.

12. Victory over the devil is the sign of the true Christian. Thereby we may know men are born of God, may distinguish them from the false children who enjoy but the semblance of God's Word and never experience its power. Such are mere "mondkinder" (moon-children)--still- born, destitute of real divine life, or divine power. It cannot be said we have been born of God when we continue in our old dead and worldly course, and as before lie and live in sin at the devil's pleasure. No, as children of God we must resist the devil and his entire kingdom. If, then, instead of overcoming the world you allow it to overcome you, then, boast as you may of faith and Christ, your own conduct testifies that you are not a child of God.

To illustrate, beginning with some of the lower and grosser sins: If you boast of being a child of God, but still live in fornication, adultery, and such vices, the devil has already overcome you and wrested you from the kingdom of God. If you are miserly, injuring your neighbour by usury, by overcharging, by false wares and fraudulent business, you have permitted the world and your own flesh to overcome you for a penny. If you entertain envy and hatred toward your neighbour, you are at once thereby a captive servant of the devil. The same principle holds in the case of sins more subtle and refined, where the malicious knavery of the devil must be resisted. For instance, the devil deceives with misleading doctrines, impelling men to idolatry, false faith, presumption, despair, blasphemy, and so on. Now, if you yield to him, suffering yourself to be seduced, what will it profit you to boast of the Gospel faith? for you have not properly grasped God's Word, you have not rightly recognized God in Christ, but continue in error, in false fancies captivated and deceived by the devil.

13. It requires something more than mere human wisdom and skill, more than human power, to withstand and overcome an enemy so formidable as the devil. As said before, the Christian must be fortified with the knowledge of how to guard against his wiles and deceptions and how to withstand him. Hence a Christian is called a person who is born of God. He must be different from an intelligent heathen and a skilful worldling to rightly understand God's Word and apprehend Christ through faith, and must use such knowledge as weapons of offence and defence in the conflict. Thus will he be able to withstand the devil and the world and to gain the

victory. God's Word and faith are the power which will bring him through; he cannot be overcome so long as he adheres to them. In this connection are John's words immediately preceding our text: "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous." Then he goes on, "For whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world," etc. Such is the power represented by genuine new birth, that therein the devil, the world and all evil are overcome. Just as, in physical birth, a normal child fully born into the world may overcome a slight offensive disease, while an abnormal or still-born child perishes of its own weakness.

14. For example, if I have faith and am born of God, I will not pollute myself with unchastity and fornication, I will not bring disgrace upon another's spouse or child. The new birth will indeed teach me not to reject shamefully the treasure I have in Christ, not to lose it willingly, and not to drive from me the indwelling Holy Spirit. Faith, if it truly dwells in me, will not permit me to do aught in violation of my conscience and of the Word and the will of God. Should I be tempted by avarice to deceive and defraud my neighbour, or to close my hand when I should give him aid, if I am a Christian and born anew my faith will protest and turn me from such action. Can I injure my neighbour or permit him to suffer want when I might contribute to his relief, if I am aware that Christ has given his body and shed his blood for me? How can there enter into the heart of the Christian who believes he has received ineffable and eternal treasures through the Son of God, the inclination to permit his neighbour to suffer a trivial want when he can easily extend relief? Much less would it be possible for the Christian to injure or to do injustice to his neighbour for the sake of shamefully gaining some small advantage. Rather he would reflect: "If I am, through Christ, a child of God and an heir of heaven, the sum of this world's goods is far too insignificant to induce me, for the sake of a penny, to deceive or defraud anyone."

Then, too, if the devil tempt you by his tyrannical, factious spirits, or even by your own thoughts, to forsake your pure doctrine for his deceptions, you as a Christian are to resist the temptation, remembering the blessings you have through faith received from Christ in the Gospel; you have been liberated from darkness, blindness and error; have learned rightly to know God; and have obtained the sure consolation of grace and salvation, being aware upon what you must depend in life and death. Why, then, yield to the devil, allowing yourself to be robbed of salvation and eternal life? Why not much rather let go every earthly thing than to deny the Word of God or to permit this blessed consolation to be perverted, falsified and wrested from you?

15. So, then, John says, "This is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith." It is, indeed, saying very much for the Christian faith to attribute to it such power over the devil and the world--a power transcending all human ability. It requires an agency greater and higher than human strength to triumph over the devil, especially in the perplexing conflicts of conscience, when he vexes and tortures the heart with terror of God's wrath in the attempt to drive us to despair. At such times all our works must immediately sink out of sight, leaving no help or victory except the faith that clings to the word of Christ the Lord, believing that, for the sake of his beloved Son, God will be merciful and will not condemn us for our sins and unworthiness if we believe in him. Such faith as this stands fast and gains the victory; neither the devil nor the gates of hell can prevail against it.

16. The same is true in all temptations. Before we can resist and overcome, we must have faith to believe that through Christ we have remission of sins and the favour of God; that God gives us help and strength to enable us to stand in the conflict and successfully resist the devil, the world, the flesh and death; that we obtain the victory by the divine power of the Holy Spirit, lacking whose help we all would be far too weak to win. Without faith, we are under the power of the devil and sin, being subject to them by natural birth. We can be liberated in no other way than through faith in Christ.

17. That John has reference to faith in Christ is plainly evident from his query, "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" The apostle's purpose therein is to make plain just what the true Scriptural faith is and what it implies. For there are other beliefs which the world calls faith. The Jews, the Turks, the Papists, claim they also believe in God who created heaven and earth. That such

belief is not the true faith, however, is proved by the fact of its ineffectiveness. It does not contend and overcome, and it permits the believer to remain as he is, in his natural birth and under the power of the devil and sin. But the faith which believes Jesus is the Son of God is the true, triumphant sort. It is an invincible power wrought in the hearts of Christians by the Holy Spirit. It is a sure knowledge, that does not gaze and vacillate hither and thither according to its own thoughts. It apprehends God in Christ the Son sent from heaven, through whom God reveals his will and his love and transfers us from sin to grace, from death to a new and eternal life; a refuge and trust that relies not upon its own merit or worthiness, but upon Christ the Son of God, and in his might and power battles against the world and the devil. Therefore, the Christian faith is not the cold, ineffective, empty, lifeless conception which Papists and others imagine it to be; no, it is a living, active power, ever followed by victories and other appropriate fruits. Where such fruits are lacking, faith and the new birth are not there.

THE SOURCE OF FAITH.

18. Thus we have the first part of our sermon on the new birth and faith. For the second part, John shows whence and by what means comes the faith productive of victory; he says: "This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three who bear witness [in earth], the Spirit, and the water, and the blood," etc.

19. John speaks of Christ's kingdom, and of the office the Holy Spirit bears outwardly and visibly in the Christian Church, represented in the ministerial office and the sacraments. He says: "There are three who bear witness [in earth]." John, as usual, employs the word "witness" in connection with the thought of preaching; it is a word he frequently uses. For instance, in the beginning of his gospel, where he speaks of John the Baptist, he says (ch. 1, 7): "The same came for a witness, that he might bear witness of the light." So, in his use of the phrase "witness" or "bearing witness," we are to understand simply the public preaching of God's Word. Again, Christ says (John 16, 9-14), that the Holy Spirit shall bear witness of him; that is, he shall publicly fill the ministerial office. This is God's own witness to his Son. And here John tells us we have the victory over the devil and the world, through faith, for the sake of Christ the Son of God.

20. This witness Christ himself ordains shall ever go forth, and remain, in the Church. To this end Christ sent the Holy Spirit; to this end Christ himself called and gave the Holy Spirit to the apostles and their successors, ministers, preachers and teachers, as Paul tells us (Eph 4, 11- 13), who are to exercise the Word, that the Word may resound always and everywhere in the world, reaching to children's children, and on down to future generations. Were the witness not in the Church, the pulpit--in fact, the entire outward administration of the Church--would be useless, for every man could read the Scriptures for himself. But for the sake of the uninstructed masses and the constantly rising young who, as yet in ignorance of the Word, need admonition--for the sake of these, the Spirit must bear public witness or administer the preaching office that they, too, may learn to know the grace of God manifest and given to us through Christ, and that God's wondrous works may be publicly recognized and extolled by us in opposition to the devil and the world.

21. Wherever such witness is borne, there certainly will be some fruit. The witness never fails of effect. Some surely will be reached; some will accept and believe it. Since it is the witness of the Holy Spirit, and the apostle says here, the Spirit beareth witness, he will be effective, producing in us that to which John refers when he says we are children of God, and have the victory and eternal life. So the Word--or the Gospel message accompanied by the witness of the Spirit--and faith are vitally related. In the last analysis they are inseparable. Without faith, preaching will be fruitless; and faith has origin in the Word alone. Therefore, we should gladly hear and handle the Word. Where it is, there is also the Holy Spirit; and where the Spirit is, there must be at least some believers. Even if you have already heard the Word and obtained faith, it will always continue to strengthen you as you hear it. One knows not at what hour God may touch and illumine his or another's heart. It may be in a time when we least look for it, or in the individual of whom we have least expectation. For the Spirit, as Christ says, breathes where he will, and touches hearts when and where he

knows them to be receptive.

22. It is relative to the power and energy wrought by the Holy Spirit that John speaks, indicating the source and means of the power of this witness, when he says of Christ, "This is he that came by water and blood," etc. In this sentence is included all we possess in the kingdom of Christ, and here is extolled the efficacy of our beloved baptism and the blood or sufferings of Christ. Here John unites all the elements in one bundle, so to speak, making a triune witness. They bear joint witness to our faith and confirm it--these three: the water, the blood and the Spirit.

BAPTISM BY WATER AND BLOOD.

23. Christ comes, first, "by water"; that is, by holy baptism. He employs baptism as an outward sign of his work in the new birth of man and in man's sanctification. This water by which Christ comes cannot be a mere, empty sign; for he comes not merely to cleanse or bathe the body with water, but to purify the whole man from all pollution and blemishes inherent in him from Adam. Christ has instituted a cleansing wholly unlike the Mosaic ablutions under the Old Testament dispensation. Moses came with various laws relating to washings and purifications, but they were only cleansing of the body or of the flesh and had daily to be repeated. Now, since these ceremonials contributed nothing to man's purification in God's sight--a thing to be effected by nothing short of a new birth--Christ came with a new order of cleansing, namely, baptism, which is not a mere external ablution from physical impurities, but a washing effective in man's purification from the inward pollution of his old sinful birth and from an evil conscience, and bringing remission of sin and a good conscience toward God, as Peter says. I Pet 3, 21. Paul, also (Tit 3, 5), calls baptism the "washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit."

24. Christ first instituted baptism through John the Baptist. To distinguish it from the Mosaic baptism, the old Jewish rite of washings, Christ styles it "a baptism unto repentance and the remission of sins." He designs that therein man shall perceive his inner impurities and know them to be, in God's sight, beyond the power of outward Mosaic ablutions to reach; shall know also that purification of the conscience and remission of sins must be sought and obtained through the power of Christ the Lord, who instituted baptism.

25. Secondly, that this cleansing of sin may be effected in us through baptism, something more than mere water must be present. Mere water could effect no more than do ordinary washings, and no more than Jewish and Turkish baptisms and washings effect. There must be a power and force accompanying the water effective to work inward purification, the purification of the soul. Therefore, John says, Christ came, not by water alone, but also by blood; not the blood of bulls, or of calves, or of goats, those Old Testament sacrifices, but his own blood, as Paul declares. Heb 9, 12. He comes through the preaching office of the New Testament, which is his rule upon earth, imparts to us the effective power of his shed blood, his sacrifice for our sins, and thus applies to us the treasure wherewith he purchased our redemption.

26. Hence there is now in baptism this efficacy of the blood of Christ. That is the true caustic soap which not only removes the uncleanness of the outer man, but penetrates to the inner nature, consuming its impurities and cleansing them away, that the heart may become pure in God's sight. Thus, the blood of Christ is so effectively mingled with the baptismal water that we must not regard it as mere water, but water beautifully dyed with the precious crimson blood of our dear Saviour, Christ. Baptism, then, cannot rightly be regarded a physical cleansing, like the Mosaic ablutions, or like the cleansing the bathhouse affords; it is a healing baptism, a baptism or washing with blood, instituted by none but Christ, the Son of God, and that through his own death.

27. In the record of Christ's passion, careful note is made of the fact that blood and water flowed immediately from the spear-thrust in Christ's side as he hung upon the cross; it is pointed out as a special miracle. The design there is to teach that Christ's shed blood is not without significance, but stands for a washing or bath whose efficacy is present in the baptism with water; and that from the slain body of Christ issues an unceasing

stream of water and blood, flowing on down through the entire Christian Church, wherein we must all be cleansed from our sins. What makes baptism so precious, so holy and essential is the mingling and union of the water with the blood of Christ; to be baptized into Christ with water is really to be washed and cleansed with the blood of Christ.

THE SPIRIT.

28. To these two John adds a third witness, "the Spirit." The Spirit bears witness with the water and the blood; in fact, through these other two he operates. It is the Holy Spirit himself; not as he is invisible up in heaven in his divine essence, but the Spirit who publicly manifests himself through his external office and permits himself to be heard through his Word. As John here asserts, the Spirit bears witness on earth with both the water and the blood.

29. Neither Moses nor any other teacher in his doctrines of personal effort and external purifications, his washings and his sprinklings of the blood of sheep and goats--no such teacher brings and gives the Spirit. With them is no Spirit, no divine power, no regeneration of man. Any unbelieving, spiritless, wicked knave can exercise human effort and practice physical cleansing. But Christ alone brings with him the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies us through the blood and water issuing from the divine side. The Spirit makes us partakers of its cleansing influence through the external office of preaching and through the sacraments, which are called the office and gifts of the Holy Spirit. Through these the Spirit works in the Christian Church just as he did at first, among the apostles on the Day of Pentecost, and will continue to do in the whole world, unto the last day. Without his ministration we would never obtain, nor know anything about, the saving power of Christ's blood in baptism.

30. Such is the kingdom Christ unceasingly develops through the Christian Church. In him we have eternal purification when to the water is added the Spirit, who through the Word enkindles the heart and purifies it, not with the cleansing qualities of the water alone, but with the healing efficacy of the blood of Christ, whereby sins are exterminated and God's wrath appeased. Although the work of our redemption was wrought once for all in Christ's blood shed upon the cross and is sufficient to cancel the sins of the entire world, yet Christ so instituted it that the same efficacy should remain forever, and be daily distributed and offered to us through the Holy Spirit.

31. This work of the Holy Spirit is neither received nor perceived except through faith in this witness, the preached word of Christ--when with the heart man grasps it and confidently believes it is fulfilled in himself as the Word declares. Thus is the heart really cleansed, the individual born anew, through the Holy Spirit present in the sacred cleansing of water and of the blood of Christ. Peter

(I Pet 1, 2) speaks of the sanctification of Christians as the "sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" upon us by the Holy Spirit through the public preaching of the Gospel. This sprinkling radically differs from the Jewish sprinkling of water, or of the ashes of a red heifer, or of the blood of a dead lamb or goat, round about the altar and upon the applicants for purification. In the sanctification of Christians, the true consecrated water and the sprinkled blood of Christ are combined; that is, the message concerning the shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ is "sprinkled," so to speak, upon the soul, and wherever that Word touches the soul it is effective. The blood in this case is not the ineffective, lifeless blood of a slain animal, but the potent, living blood of the Son of God. Under its application the soul cannot remain impure. Christ's blood purifies and heals from sin and death; it strikes at their very foundation, and entirely releases us from their power and grants us eternal life for soul and body.

32. Note, this text is a grand sermon on the witness Christians have here on earth, which the apostle in concluding explains and extols in beautiful and comforting words. He calls it a witness that God himself bears to his Son and that serves to assure us of being the children of God and possessors of eternal life. For he says: "And the witness is this, that God gave unto us eternal life," etc. This is indeed an excellent witness, which God himself witnesses and declares to you, and the Holy Spirit brings and reveals to you. God cannot lie nor

deceive, he is the eternal, unchangeable truth, as already mentioned. If you believe this witness, you certainly have received and possess it, as John again says: "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in him."

FAITH TO BE IMPLICIT.

33. The true, saving doctrine of the Christian faith is this: There must be witness and confidence of heart so absolute as to leave no room for doubt that, through Christ, we are God's children and have remission of sins and eternal life. By way of showing us how God earnestly enjoins such faith upon us and forbids us to have any doubts on the subject, John says, "He that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he hath not believed in the witness that God hath borne concerning his Son."

34. This passage annihilates the pernicious, damnable, diabolical doctrine of the Papists, who shamelessly claim it is right to doubt and that a Christian should doubt his title to grace. This doctrine is equivalent to teaching the propriety of disbelieving the testimony of God. It is charging God with falsehood, dishonouring and blaspheming the Lord Christ, openly affronting the Holy Spirit, knowingly plunging people into unpardonable sins and blasphemies and consequently sending them to the devil without hope or comfort of salvation.

35. Such is the beautiful fruit of papistical doctrine; such is papistical holiness. This is what they who would be the Christian Church recommend to us. They would have us, with them, openly and fearlessly charge God with falsehood, trample his Word under foot and worship the devil in his stead. Further, they require us to praise and honour them and render them thanks, rejoicing to be offered their stipulated terms of friendship. At the same time they have not in a single instance repented of their abominable idolatry or acknowledged their error; rather they plume themselves on having in their purity taught no wrong. If we will not accede to their demands, we must be persecuted, put to death, exterminated everywhere in the world with fire and sword. But the devil and death may accede in our stead. Let the godly Christian desire and pray that God may hurl such accursed doctrine into the abyss of hell and punish as they deserve the impenitent blasphemers since they will not cease. And let all the people say, Amen, amen.

36. Note particularly the consolation of Paul's concluding words. Here he embraces in one clear word the whole substance of the Gospel when he says: "He that hath the Son hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life." How could he speak plainer and more forcibly? What is the need of further inquiry and investigation or discussion of this theme? Do you wish to have assurance of eternal life? According to this verse, you have it truly if you possess Christ the Son of God; and you have Christ when you believe this witness and preaching as John says, and you should confidently rely upon it in life and in death as the divine, eternal truth. But if you believe not, you have not life; and all effort and suffering on your part, yes, combined with the effort and suffering of the whole world, will profit you nothing. You have not the Son of God if you do not believe God's witness of him but charge God with falsehood.

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