

PATHWAY

INTO THE



SCRIPTURES

WILLIAM TYNDALE

(1494-1536)

PATHWAY INTO THE SCRIPTURES

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The majority of *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture* was first prepared as the Prologue to Tyndale's early translation of the New Testament (Cologne, 1525). The Prologue was subsequently modified and published as a separate tract about 1530. In this piece, Tyndale draws upon the *Vorrhede* [Preface] to Martin Luther's 1522 New Testament, yet he enlarges upon the German Reformer's work: "What in Luther's Bible is barely seven pages was expanded by Tyndale into a full fourteen." (David Daniell, *William Tyndale: a Biography* [New Haven: Yale, 1994], p. 119-120).

The *Pathway* was published in a blackletter edition in 1536; it was reprinted in 1573, and it was included in the collected edition of Tyndale's works, vol. 1, published by the Parker Society in the volume titled *Doctrinal Treatises and Introductions to Different Portions of the Holy Scriptures* (edited by Henry Walter; Cambridge, 1848). The present edition primarily follows the text of 1536 edition; it has been edited to reflect greater conformity to contemporary spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar.

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Editor's Introduction

About 1522, William Tyndale encountered a “learned man” who contended, “We were better without God’s law than the pope’s.” Tyndale famously replied, “I defy the pope and all his laws,” and further, “if God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plow shall know more of the Scripture than thou dost.”¹

For Tyndale, an English translation of the Bible was no mere academic exercise. Rather, for readers (including plowboys) to *know* the Scripture means much more than simply possessing a copy of the Bible or having a familiarity with the narratives contained in it. Tyndale’s deepest desire was for his countrymen to have the Word of God in their native tongue, in order to obtain a saving knowledge of Christ through the gospel.

In his exposition on 1 John, Tyndale wrote:

To bring unto the fellowship of God and Christ, and of them that believe in Christ, is the final intent of all the Scripture, why it was given of God unto man, and the only thing which all true preachers seek, and whereby you shall ever know and discern the true Word of God from all false and counterfeited doctrine of vain traditions, and the true preacher from the wily hypocrite.²

Tyndale observed that false doctrine and vain traditions are common obstacles to the right use of Scripture. The Roman clerics “gloss” the scriptures with faulty interpretations and philosophical presuppositions that cloud the understanding of the Word. Tyndale warned, “When God’s Word is altered with false glosses, it is no more God’s word.”³ Therefore, he believed it was essential to expose the “jugglings” of the popish clerics,⁴ so that readers may discern the correct meaning of the Scriptures.

As a translator and expositor of the Word, Tyndale held to the sufficiency of Scripture: “Whatever we ought to believe or do, the same is written expressly, or drawn out of that which is written.”⁵ Thus, he

¹ J. F. Mozley, *William Tyndale* (London: SPCK, 1937), pages 33-34.

² *Exposition of the First Epistle of Saint John* (Antwerp, 1531) on verses 1:3, 4; text modernized. Cf. Tyndale’s *Works*, vol 2, *Expositions of Sundry Portions of the Holy Scriptures, etc.* (Henry Walter, ed.; Cambridge: Parker Society, 1849), p. 147.

³ From Tyndale’s exposition of Matt. 5:20; *Works*, vol. 2, p. 41.

⁴ **popish clerics** – Roman Catholic clergy.

⁵ Tyndale, *Works*, vol. 3, *An Answer to Sir Thomas More’s Dialogue, etc.* (Henry Walter, ed.; Cambridge, 1850) p. 26.

dismissed the claims of papists, who sought to supplement the Scripture with ecclesiastical decrees and ceremonies, extrabiblical revelations, or ideas derived from human imagination. “God is but His word: as Christ says: ‘I am that I say unto you’ (see Joh 8:25): that is to say, That which I preach am I. My words are spirit and life. God is that only which He testifies of Himself, and to imagine any other thing of God than that is damnable idolatry.”⁶

As God’s revelation, Scripture is sufficiently plain in itself and self-interpreting. Its meaning is clear regarding all matters essential to the health of a man’s soul. “One scripture will help to declare another. And the circumstances—that is to say, the places that go before and after—will give light unto the middle text. And the open and manifest scriptures will ever improve [*correct*] the false and wrong exposition of the darker sentences.”⁷

There is another essential factor regarding the understanding of Scripture: whereas it is essential to purge manmade glosses from the Word and to follow Scripture as it interprets itself (by context and the analogy of faith), these elements alone will not lead to saving faith, apart from the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit, Who illuminates and regenerates the elect of God.

The Scripture speaks many things as the world speaketh. But they may not be worldly understood, but ghostly and spiritually: yea, the Spirit of God only [*alone*] understands them: and where He is not, there is not the understanding of the Scripture, but unfruitful disputing and brawling about words...

Read the second chapter of Paul to the Corinthians: *The natural man understandeth not the things of God, but the Spirit of God only and we, says he, have received the Spirit which is of God, to understand the things which are given us of God* (1Co 2:12). For without the Spirit it is impossible to understand them.⁸

⁶ *The Obedience of a Christian Man* (1528), fo. xx, verso, text modernized; in *Works*, vol. 1, p. 160. Also available in modern spelling edition, edited by David Daniell (London: Penguin, 2000), page 24.

⁷ *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, fo. lxxxvii, recto; in *Works*, vol. 1, p. 250; Daniell edition, pages 105-106.

⁸ *Parable of the Wicked Mammon* (1528), fo. xxxiii, r., xxxv, v., text modernized; in *Works*, vol. 1, page 88. Later he cites John 3:6: “*That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit*: as who should say, He

Because the Scriptures are the Word of God, the Bible should be understood as a unified whole; and the gospel of Jesus Christ is the theme that unifies the whole.

The Scripture is that wherewith God draws us unto Him and not wherewith we should be led from Him. The Scriptures spring out of God, and flow unto Christ, and were given to lead us to Christ. You must therefore go along by the Scripture as by a line, until you come at Christ, which is the way's end and resting place. If any man therefore uses the Scripture to draw you from Christ, and to nuzzle you in anything save in Christ, the same is a false prophet.⁹

Given this Christological focus of the Bible, Tyndale frequently speaks of the office of Moses (or of the law) as a schoolmaster leading sinners to repentance and faith in Christ.

But as he who feels not his disease can long for no health, even so it is impossible for any man to believe in Christ's blood, except Moses have had him first in cure, and with his law have robbed him of his righteousness, and condemned him unto everlasting death, and have shown him under what damnation he is in by birth in Adam, and how all his deeds (appear they never so holy) are yet but damnable sin.¹⁰

Given man's guilty and dead condition, justification is received by faith alone. Moreover, that saving faith is not a meritorious act of the sinner, but the gift of God.

Right faith springs not of man's fantasy, neither is it in any man's power to obtain it; but it is altogether the pure gift of God poured into us freely, without all manner doing of us, without deserving and merits, yea, and without seeking for of us; and is (as says Paul in the second [chapter] to the Ephesians) even God's gift and grace, purchased through Christ...

that hath the Spirit through faith, and is born again and made anew in Christ, understands the things of the Spirit, and what he that is spiritual means. But he that is flesh, and as Paul says, a natural man (1Co 2), and led of his blind reason only, can never ascend to the capacity of the Spirit" (fo. li, r.; in *Works*, vol. 1, p. 111.)

⁹ *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, fo. cxlii, recto; in *Works*, vol. 1, pages 317-318; Daniell edition, pages 169, 170.

¹⁰ *Exposition of the First Epistle of Saint John*, on vs. 1:1; cf. Tyndale's *Works*, vol 1, p. 146. On the purpose of the law, see page 11ff, below.

The Spirit of God accompanies faith, and brings with her light, wherewith a man beholds himself in the law of God, and sees his miserable bondage and captivity, and humbles himself, and abhors himself: she [*faith*] brings God's promises of all good things in Christ. God works with His Word, and in His Word: and when His Word is preached, faith roots herself in the hearts of the elect; and as faith enters, and the Word of God is believed, the power of God looses the heart from the captivity and bondage under sin, and knits and couples him to God and to the will of God; alters him, changes him clean, fashions, and forges him anew; gives him power to love, and to do that which before was impossible for him either to love or do; and turns him unto a new nature, so that he loves that which he before hated, and hates that which he before loved; and is clean altered, and changed, and contrary disposed; and is knit and coupled fast to God's will, and naturally brings forth good works: that is to say, that which God commands to do, and not things of his own imagination.¹¹

The sacraments reinforce the principal truths of Scripture, serving as signs and seals of Christ's atonement and God's grace shown to His people. Thus, a correct understanding of the sacraments provides a key to understanding Scripture. For example, as baptism "betokens on the one part that Christ has washed our souls with His blood, even so on the other part it signifies that we have promised to quench and slay the lusts of the flesh."¹² Those who truly understand these basic concepts have the key to unlock the whole of Scripture.

Tyndale's *Pathway* is one of his earliest works. It is both a gospel tract and a primer on hermeneutics: a statement of the first principles of the Protestant faith—a testimony which the author sealed with his life. May this small work direct our paths to a greater knowledge of Scripture, and thereby to know Christ, the Word of God incarnate.

¹¹ *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon*, in *Works*, vol. 1, pages 53-55. On grace and faith, see page 16ff, below.

¹² *Exposition of the First Epistle of Saint John*, on vs. 2:2; text modernized. Cf. Tyndale's *Works*, vol 1, p. 161. This is a common theme in Tyndale: for us to know the meaning of our baptism as a sign of the cleansing blood of Christ, and the obligation of believers to mortify sin in their lives. He references it again in the conclusion to this booklet.

PATHWAY INTO THE SCRIPTURES

I do marvel greatly, dearly beloved in Christ, that ever any man should repugn¹ or speak against the Scripture to be had in every language, and that of every man. For I thought that no man had been so blind to ask why light should be shown to them that walk in darkness, where they cannot but stumble, and where to stumble is the danger of eternal damnation. [He is] either so despiteful² that he would envy any man (I speak not his brother) so necessary a thing, or so Bedlam³ mad to affirm that good is the natural cause of evil, and darkness to proceed out of light, and that lying should be grounded in truth and verity, and not rather clean contrary, that light destroys darkness, and verity reproves all manner [of] lying.

Nevertheless, seeing that it has pleased God to send unto our Englishmen, even to as many as unfeignedly desire it, the Scripture in their mother tongue—considering that there be in every place false teachers and blind leaders, that you should be deceived of no man—I supposed it very necessary to prepare this pathway into the scripture for you, that you might walk surely and ever know the true from the false. And above all to put you in remembrance of certain points, which are, that you well understand what these words mean: the *Old Testament*, the *New Testament*, the *law*, the *gospel*, *Moses*, *Christ*, *nature*, *grace*, *working* and *believing*, *deeds* and *faith*; lest we ascribe to the one that which belongs to the other, and make of Christ, Moses; of the gospel, the law; despise grace and rob faith; and fall from meek learning into idle disputations, brawling, and scolding about words.

Old and New Testaments

The *Old Testament* is a book wherein is written the laws of God and the deeds of those who fulfill them, and of those also who fulfill them not. The *New Testament* is a book wherein are contained the promises of God and the deeds of those which believe them or believe them not.

¹ **repugn** – oppose; resist.

² **despiteful** – full of hate.

³ Bedlam was the name of a lunatic asylum in London.

The Gospel

Evangelion (that we call *the gospel*) is a Greek word and signifies good, merry, glad, and joyful tidings, that make a man's heart glad, and make him sing, dance, and leap for joy. As when David had killed Goliath the giant came glad tidings unto the Jews that their fearful and cruel enemy was slain, and they delivered out of all danger. For gladness thereof they sang, danced, and were joyful. In like manner is the *evangelion* of God (which we call gospel and the New Testament) joyful tidings, and, as some say, a good hearing published by the apostles throughout all the world, of Christ the right⁴ David, how that He has fought with sin, with death, and the devil, and overcome them. Whereby all men that were in bondage to sin, wounded with death, [and] overcome of the devil, are without their own merits or deservings, loosed, justified, restored to life, and saved, brought to liberty and reconciled unto the favor of God, and set at one with Him again. As many as believe [these] tidings laud, praise, and thank God; are glad, sing, [and] dance for joy.

This *evangelion* or gospel (that is to say, such joyful tidings) is called the New Testament, because that, as a man, when he shall die, appoints his goods to be dealt and distributed after his death among them which he names to be his heirs, even so Christ before His death commanded and appointed that such *evangelion*, gospel or tidings, should be declared throughout all the world, and therewith to give unto all that repent and believe all His goods. That is to say, His life, wherewith He swallowed and devoured up death; His righteousness, wherewith He banished sin; His salvation, wherewith He overcame eternal damnation. Now can the wretched man (that knows himself to be wrapped in sin, and in danger of death and hell) hear any more joyous a thing than such glad and comfortable tidings of Christ? So that he cannot but be glad and laugh from the low bottom of his heart, if he believes that the tidings are true.

To strengthen such faith withal [*further*], God promised this His *evangelion* in the Old Testament by the prophets, as Paul says (in the first chapter unto the Romans), how that he was chosen out to preach God's *evangelion* which He before had promised by the prophets in the

⁴ **right** – true; ultimate.

holy Scriptures that treat of His Son, Who was born of the seed of David. In Genesis 3:15, God says to the serpent: "I will put hatred between thee and the woman, between thy seed and her seed: that same seed shall tread thy head underfoot." Christ is the woman's seed. He it is that has trodden underfoot the devil's head: that is to say, sin, death, hell, and all his power. For without this seed can no man avoid sin, death, hell, and everlasting damnation.

Again, [in] Genesis 22:18, God promised Abraham, saying, "In thy seed shall all the generations of the earth be blessed." Christ is that seed of Abraham, says St. Paul in Galatians 3:16. He has blessed all the world through the gospel. For where Christ is not, there remains the curse that fell on Adam, as soon as he had sinned, so that they are in bondage under damnation of sin, death, and hell. Against this curse blesses now the gospel all the world, inasmuch as it cries openly unto all that acknowledge their sins and repent, saying: Whosoever believes on the seed of Abraham shall be blessed: that is, he shall be delivered from sin, death, and hell, and shall henceforth continue righteous and saved forever, as Christ Himself says in John 11:26, "He that believeth on me shall never more die."

The Law

"The *law*," says John, "was given by Moses, but grace and verity by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). The law (whose minister is Moses) was given to bring us unto the knowledge of ourselves, that we might thereby feel and perceive what we are [by] nature. The law condemns us and all our deeds and is called of Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:7 "the ministration of death." For it kills our consciences and drives us to desperation, inasmuch as it requires of us that which is impossible for our nature to do. It requires of us the deeds of a whole man. It requires perfect love from the low bottom and ground of the heart, as well in all things which we suffer, as in the things which we do. But, says John, in the same place, "Grace and verity are given us by Christ" (Joh 1:17): so that, when the law has passed upon us, and condemned us to death (which is its nature to do), then in Christ we have grace. [This grace is] favor, promises of life, of mercy, of pardon, freely by the merits of Christ. And in Christ we have verity and truth, in that God for His sake fulfills all His promises to them that believe. Therefore is the gospel the ministration of

life. Paul calls it, in the fore-rehearsed⁵ place of 2 Corinthians 3, the ministration of the Spirit and of righteousness (vv. 8-9). In the gospel, when we believe the promises, we receive the Spirit of life and are justified in the blood of Christ from all things whereof the law condemns us. And we receive love unto the law, and power to fulfill it and grow therein daily. Of Christ it is written, in the fore-rehearsed first chapter of John, this is He of Whose “abundance” or “fulness all we have received grace for grace,” or “favor for favor” (Joh 1:16). That is to say, for the favor that God has to His Son Christ, He gives unto us His favor and goodwill, and all gifts of His grace, as a father to his sons. As affirms Paul, saying, “Which loved us in His beloved before the creation of the world” (see Eph 1:4, 6). So that Christ, and not our own holy works, brings the love of God unto us. Christ is made Lord over all and is called in Scripture God’s mercy-stool.⁶ Whosoever therefore flies to Christ can neither hear nor receive of God any other thing save⁷ mercy.

In the Old Testament are many promises, which are nothing else but this *evangelion* or gospel, to save those that believed them from the vengeance of the law. And in the New Testament is oft made mention of the law to condemn those who believe not the promises. Moreover, the law and the gospel may never be separate: for the gospel and promises serve but for troubled consciences which are brought to desperation, and feel the pains of hell and death under the law, and are in captivity and bondage under the law. In all my deeds I must have the law before me to condemn mine imperfection. For all that I do (be I never so perfect) is yet damnable sin, when it is compared to the law, which requires the ground and bottom of my heart. Therefore I must always have the law in my sight, that I may be meek in the Spirit, and give God all the laud and praise, ascribing to Him all righteousness, and to myself all unrighteousness and sin. I must also have the promises before mine eyes that I despair not: in which promises I see the mercy, favor, and goodwill of God upon me in the blood of His Son Christ, Who has made satisfaction for mine imperfection and fulfilled for me that which I could not do.

⁵ **fore-rehearsed** – previously mentioned.

⁶ **mercy-stool** – Mercy Seat. The Authorized Version rendering *propitiation* in Romans 3:25 translates the Greek word *hilasterion* which is also used to represent the Mercy Seat of the Tabernacle (as in Hebrews 9:5).

⁷ **save** – except.

Here you may perceive that two manner of people are sore deceived. First, they who justify themselves with outward deeds, in that they abstain outwardly from that which the law forbids, and do outwardly that which the law commands. They compare themselves to open sinners, and in respect of them justify themselves, condemning the open sinners. They set a veil on Moses' face, and see not how the law requires love from the bottom of the heart, and that love only is the fulfilling of the law. If they did, they would not condemn their neighbors. "Love hides the multitude of sins," says St. Peter in his first epistle (1Pe 4:8). For whom I love from the deep bottom and ground of my heart, him condemn I not, neither reckon his sins, but suffer his weakness and infirmity, as a mother the weakness of her son until he grows up into a perfect man.

Those also are deceived who, without all fear of God, give themselves unto all manner vices with full consent, and full delectation,⁸ having no respect to the law of God (under Whose vengeance they are locked up in captivity), but say, "God is merciful," and, "Christ died for us," supposing that such dreaming and imagination is that faith which is so greatly commended in holy Scripture. Nay, that is not faith, but rather a foolish blind opinion, springing of their own corrupt nature, and is not given them of the Spirit of God, but rather of the spirit of the devil, whose faith nowadays the popish⁹ compare and make equal unto the best trust, confidence, and belief that a repenting soul can have in the blood of our Savior Jesus, unto their own confusion, shame, and uttering what they are within. But true faith is (as says the apostle Paul) "the gift of God" (Eph 2:9), and is given to sinners after the law has passed upon them, and has brought their consciences unto the brim of desperation and sorrows of hell.

They that have this right faith consent to the law that it is righteous and good, and justify God Who made the law, and have delectation¹⁰ in the law (notwithstanding that they cannot fulfill it as they would, for their weakness); and they abhor whatsoever the law forbids, though they cannot always avoid it. And their great sorrow is because they cannot fulfill the will of God in the law, and the Spirit that is in them cries

⁸ **delectation** – delight.

⁹ **popish** – followers of the Pope; Roman Catholic adherents.

¹⁰ **delectation** – delight.

to God night and day for strength and help, with tears (as says Paul) that cannot be expressed with tongue (Rom 8:26). Of [these] things the belief of our popish, or of their father, whom they so magnify for his strong faith, have no experience at all.

The first, that is to say, he who justifies himself with his outward deeds, consents not to the law inwardly, neither has delectation therein. Yea, he would rather that no such law were. So he justifies not God, but hates Him as a tyrant; neither cares he for the promises, but will with his own strength be savior of himself. He no wise glorifies God, though he seem outwardly to do.

The second, that is to say, the sensual person, as a voluptuous¹¹ swine, neither fears God in His law, neither is thankful to Him for His promises and mercy, which are set forth in Christ to all them that believe.

The right Christian man consents to the law that it is righteous and justifies God in the law, for he affirms that God is righteous and just, Who is author of the law. He believes the promises of God and justifies God, judging Him true and believing that He will fulfill His promises. With the law he condemns himself and all his deeds and gives all the praise to God. He believes the promises and ascribes all truth to God. Thus, everywhere he justifies God and praises God.

Our State by Nature

By nature, through the fall of Adam, are we the children of wrath, heirs of the vengeance of God by birth, yea, and from our conception. And we have our fellowship with the damned devils, under the power of darkness and rule of Satan, while we are yet in our mother's wombs. And though we show not forth the fruits of sin as soon as we are born, yet are we full of the natural poison, whereof all sinful deeds spring, and cannot but sin outwardly (be we never so young), as soon as we be able to work, if occasion be given. For our nature is to do sin, as is the nature of a serpent to sting. And as a serpent, yet young, or yet unbrought forth, is full of poison, and cannot afterward (when the time is come, and occasion given) but bring forth the fruits thereof; and as an adder, a toad, or a snake, is hated of man (not for the evil that it has

¹¹ **voluptuous** – indulgent; given to pleasure.

done, but for the poison that is in it, and hurt which it cannot but do)—so are we hated of God for that natural poison which is conceived and born with us, before we do any outward evil. And as the evil which a venomous snake does is not what makes it a serpent, but it does evil and poisons because it is a venomous snake; and as the fruit makes not the tree evil, but because it is an evil tree therefore it brings forth evil fruit, when the season of the fruit is—even so our evil deeds do not make us first evil (though ignorance and blindness, through evil working, harden us in evil and make us worse and worse), but because that by nature we are evil, therefore we both think and do evil, and are under vengeance, under the law convicted to eternal damnation by the law, and are contrary to the will of God in all our will, and in all things consent to the will of the fiend.¹²

Grace

By *grace* (that is to say, by favor) we are plucked out of Adam, the ground of all evil, and grafted in Christ, the root of all goodness. In Christ God loved us, His elect and chosen, before the world began, and reserved us unto the knowledge of His Son and of His holy gospel. And, when the gospel is preached to us, [He] opens our hearts, and gives us grace to believe, and puts the Spirit of Christ in us. And we know Him as our most merciful Father, and consent to the law, and love it inwardly in our heart, and desire to fulfill it, and sorrow because we cannot: which will (no matter how much we sin through weakness) is sufficient, till more strength be given us. The blood of Christ has made satisfaction for the rest; the blood of Christ has obtained all things for us of God. Christ is our satisfaction, redeemer, deliverer, savior from vengeance and wrath. Observe and mark in Paul's, Peter's, and John's epistles, and in the gospel, what Christ is unto us.

Faith

By *faith* are we saved only in believing the promises. And though faith be never without love and good works, yet is our saving imputed neither to love nor unto good works, but unto faith only. For love and works are under the law, which requires perfection, and the ground

¹² **fiend** – God's enemy Satan.

and fountain of the heart,¹³ and damns all imperfection. Now faith is under the promises, which damn not but give pardon, grace, mercy, favor, and whatsoever is contained in the promises.

Righteousness

Righteousness is diverse, for blind reason imagines many manners of righteousness.

There is the righteousness of *works* (as I said before), when the heart is away, and feels not how the law is spiritual and cannot be fulfilled, but from the bottom of the heart: as the just ministration of all manner of laws, and the observing of them, for a worldly purpose and for our own profit, and not of love unto our neighbor, without all other respect and moral virtues, wherein philosophers put their felicity and blessedness, which all are nothing in the sight of God in respect of the life to come.

There is in like manner the justifying of *ceremonies*, which some imagine¹⁴ themselves, some counterfeit¹⁵ others, saying in their blind reason, “Such holy persons did thus and thus, and they were holy men; therefore, if I do so likewise, I shall please God.” But they have no answer of God, that it pleases [Him]. The Jews seek righteousness in their ceremonies, which God gave unto them not for to justify, but to describe and paint Christ unto them. Paul testifies of the Jews, saying how that they have affection to God, but not after knowledge, for they go about to establish their own justice, and are not obedient to the justice or righteousness that comes of God, which is the forgiveness of sin in Christ’s blood, unto all that repent and believe. The cause is verily that, except a man cast away his own imagination and reason, he cannot perceive God and understand the virtue and power of the blood of Christ.

There is a *full* righteousness, when the law is fulfilled from the ground of the heart. This had not Peter nor Paul in this life perfectly,

¹³ **ground and fountain** – The law requires that the pure heart be the source and foundational principle of our obedience.

¹⁴ **imagine** – invent.

¹⁵ **counterfeit** – imitate. In resorting to ceremonies for justification, it is irrelevant whether a man invents his own ceremonies or imitates the practices of other men regarded as holy. No ceremonies can obtain God’s favor.

unto the uttermost, that they could not be more perfect, but sighed after it. They were so far forth blessed in Christ, that they hungered and thirsted after it. Paul had this thirst. He consented to the law of God that it ought so to be, but he found another lust in his members contrary to the lust and desire of his mind, that letted¹⁶ him, and therefore cried out, saying, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death? thanks be to God through Jesus Christ” (Rom 7:24-25).

The righteousness that is of value before God is to *believe* the promises of God, after the law has confounded the conscience. As when the temporal¹⁷ law oftentimes condemns the thief or murderer and brings him to execution, so that he sees nothing before him but present death; and then come good tidings, a charter from the king, and deliver him. Likewise, when God’s law has brought the sinner into knowledge of himself and has confounded his conscience and opened unto him the wrath and vengeance of God, then comes good tidings. The *evangelion* shows unto him the promises of God in Christ, and how that Christ has purchased pardon for him, has satisfied the law for him, and appeased the wrath of God. And the poor sinner believes, lauds, and thanks God through Christ, and breaks out into exceeding inward joy and gladness, for that he has escaped so great wrath, so heavy vengeance, so fearful and so everlasting a death. And he henceforth is an hungered and athirst after more righteousness, that he might fulfill the law, and mourns continually, commending his weakness unto God in the blood of our Savior Christ Jesus.

Here shall you see compendiously¹⁸ and plainly set out the order and practice of everything afore rehearsed.

The Fall of Adam

The fall of Adam has made us heirs of the vengeance and wrath of God, and heirs of eternal damnation, and has brought us into captivity and bondage under the devil. And the devil is our lord and our ruler, our head, our governor, our prince, yea, and our god. And our will is locked and knit faster unto the will of the devil than could an hundred

¹⁶ **letted** – hindered.

¹⁷ **temporal** – secular; pertaining to this life or world only.

¹⁸ **compendiously** – concisely; summarily.

thousand chains bind a man unto a post. Unto the devil's will we consent with all our hearts, with all our minds, with all our might, power, strength, will, and lusts: so that the law and will of the devil is written as well in our hearts as in our members, and we run headlong after the devil with full zeal, and the whole swing of all the power we have, as a stone cast up into the air comes down naturally of its own self, with all the violence and swing of its own weight. With what deadly poison and venomous hate hates a man his enemies! With how great malice of mind inwardly do we slay and murder? With what violence and rage, yea, and with how fervent lust we commit adultery, fornication, and such like uncleanness? With what pleasure and delectation inwardly serves a glutton his belly? With what diligence deceive we? How busily we seek the things of this world? Whatsoever we do, think, or imagine is abominable in the sight of God. For we can refer nothing unto the honor of God; neither is His law or will written in our members or in our hearts. Neither is there any more power in us to follow the will of God than in a stone to ascend upward of its own self. And beside that we are, as it were, asleep in so deep blindness that we can neither see nor feel what misery, thralldom, and wretchedness we are in, till Moses come and wake us, and publish the law. When we hear the law truly preached, how that we ought to love and honor God with all our strength and might from the low bottom of the heart, because He has created us, and both heaven and earth for our sakes, and made us lord thereof; and our neighbors (yea, our enemies) as ourselves, inwardly, from the ground of the heart, because God has made them after the likeness of His own image, and they are His sons as well as we, and Christ has bought them with His blood, and made them heirs of everlasting life as well as us; and how we ought to do whatsoever God bids, and abstain from whatsoever God forbids, with all love and meekness, with a fervent and a burning lust¹⁹ from the center of the heart—then begins the conscience to rage against the law and against God. No sea, be it ever so great a tempest, is so unquiet. For it is not possible for a natural man to consent to the law, that it should be good, or that God should be righteous, Who makes the law. It is contrary unto his nature and damns him and all that he can do, and neither shows him where to fetch help, nor preaches any mercy, but only sets man at variance

¹⁹ **lust** – strong desire for good.

with God (as witnesses Paul [in] Romans 6), and provokes him and stirs him to rail on God, and to blaspheme Him as a cruel tyrant. For it is not possible for a man, till he be born again, to think that God is righteous to make him of so poison a nature, either for His own pleasure or for the sin of another man,²⁰ and to give him a law that is impossible for him to do, or to consent to—his wit, reason, and will being so fast glued, yea, nailed and chained, unto the will of the devil. Neither can any creature loose the bonds, save the blood of Christ only.

The Person and Work of Christ

This is the captivity and bondage whence Christ delivered us, redeemed and loosed us. His blood, His death, His patience in suffering rebukes and wrongs, His prayers and fastings, His meekness and fulfilling of the uttermost point of the law appeased the wrath of God, brought the favor of God to us again, obtained that God should love us first and be our Father, and that a merciful Father, that will consider our infirmities and weakness, and will give us His Spirit again (which was taken away in the Fall of Adam) to rule, govern, and strengthen us, and to break the bonds of Satan, wherein we were so straitly²¹ bound. When Christ is thuswise preached, and the promises rehearsed which are contained in the prophets, in the Psalms, and in diverse places of the five books of Moses, which preaching is called the gospel or glad tidings, then the hearts of those who are elect and chosen begin to wear soft and to melt at the bounteous mercy of God and kindness shown of Christ. For when the *evangelion* is preached, the Spirit of God enters into those whom God has ordained and appointed unto eternal life, and opens their inward eyes, and works such belief in them. When the woe-ful consciences feel and taste how sweet a thing the bitter death of Christ is, and how merciful and loving God is through Christ's purchasing and merits, they begin to love again, and to consent to the law of God, how that it is good and ought so to be, and that God is righteous Who made it, and desire to fulfill the law (even as a sick man desires to be whole), and are an hungered and thirst after more righteousness,

²⁰ It pleased God that all men should be represented by the first man Adam when he fell into sin, and thus inherit by nature the guilt and pollution of his sin (Rom 5).

²¹ **straitly** – narrowly; closely.

and after more strength to fulfill the law more perfectly. And in all that they do, or omit and leave undone, they seek God's honor and His will with meekness, ever condemning the imperfection of their deeds by the law.

Now Christ stands us in double stead, and serves us in two ways. First, He is our redeemer, deliverer, reconciler, mediator, intercessor, advocate or attorney, solicitor, our hope, comfort, shield, protection, defender, strength, health, satisfaction, and salvation. His blood, His death, all that He ever did, is ours. And Christ Himself, with all that He is or can do, is ours. His blood-shedding, and all that He did, does me as good service as though I myself had done it. And God (as great as He is) is mine, with all that He has, as an husband is His wife's, through Christ and His purchasing.

Following Christ

Secondarily, after that we be overcome with love and kindness, and now seek to do the will of God (which is a Christian man's nature), then have we Christ an example to counterfeit,²² as says Christ Himself in John: "I have given you an example" (Joh 13:15). And in another evangelist, He says, "He that will be great among you, shall be your servant and minister, as the Son of Man came to minister and not to be ministered unto" (Mat 20:26-28). And Paul says, "Counterfeit Christ." And Peter says, "Christ died for you, and left you an example to follow his steps" (1Pe 2:21). Whatsoever therefore faith has received of God through Christ's blood and deserving, that same must love shed out every whit and bestow it on our neighbors unto their profit, yea, and that though they be our enemies. By faith we receive of God, and by love we shed out again. And that must we do freely, after the example of Christ, without any other respect, save our neighbor's wealth²³ only: and neither look for reward in the earth, nor yet in heaven, for the deserving and merits of our deeds (as friars preach), though we know that good deeds are rewarded, both in this life and in the life to come. But of pure love must we bestow ourselves, all that we have, and all

²² **counterfeit** – follow; imitate. In his 1525 translation, Tyndale rendered Ephesians 5:1, "Be ye counterfeiters of God." A later edition reads, "Be ye followers of God."

²³ **wealth** – welfare.

that we are able to do, even on our enemies, to bring them to God, considering nothing but their wealth, as Christ did ours. Christ did not His deeds to obtain heaven thereby (that had been a madness). Heaven was His already, He was heir thereof, it was His by inheritance; but [He] did them freely for our sakes, considering nothing but our wealth, and to bring the favor of God to us again, and us to God. As no natural son that is his father's heir does his father's will because he would be heir. He already is that by birth. His father gave him that ere²⁴ he was born, and is loather that he should go without it than he himself has wit to be; but of pure love does he what he does. And ask him why he does anything that he does, he answers, "My father bade; it is my father's will, it pleases my father." Bondservants work for hire, children for love; for their father, with all he has, is theirs already. So does a Christian man freely all that he does, considering nothing but the will of God and his neighbor's wealth only. If I live chaste, I do it not to obtain heaven thereby, for then should I do wrong to the blood of Christ. Christ's blood has obtained me that. Christ's merits have made me heir thereof. He is both door and way thitherwards. Neither that I look for an higher room in heaven than they shall have which live in wedlock, or than a whore of the stews (if she repent); for that were the pride of Lucifer. But [I do it] freely to wait on the *evangelion*, and to avoid the trouble of the world, and occasions that might pluck me therefrom, and to serve my brother withal—even as one hand helps another, or one member another, because one feels another's grief, and the pain of the one is the pain of the other. Whatsoever is done to the least of us (whether it be good or bad), it is done to Christ. And whatsoever is done to my brother (if I be a Christian man), that same is done to me. Neither does my brother's pain grieve me less than mine own; neither rejoyce I less at his wealth than at mine own, if I love him as well and as much as myself, as the law commands me. If it were not so, how says Paul, "Let him that rejoiceth, rejoyce in the Lord" (2Co 10:17)? That is to say, Christ, Who is Lord over all creatures. If my merits obtained me heaven, or a higher place there, then had I wherein I might rejoyce besides the Lord.

²⁴ **ere** – before.

Law and Gospel

Here see you the nature of the law and the nature of the *evangelion*: how the law is the key that binds and damns all men, and the *evangelion* is the key that looses them again. The law goes before and the *evangelion* follows. When a preacher preaches the law, he binds all consciences; and when he preaches the gospel, he looses them again. God and His preacher use these two salves (I mean the law and the gospel) to heal and cure sinners withal. The law drives out the disease, and makes it appear, and is a sharp salve, and a fretting corosy,²⁵ and kills the dead flesh, and looses and draws the sores out by the roots, and all corruption. It pulls from a man the trust and confidence that he has in himself and in his own works, merits, deservings, and ceremonies, and robs him of all his righteousness and makes him poor. It kills him, sends him down to hell, and brings him to utter desperation, and prepares the way of the Lord, as it is written of John the Baptist. For it is not possible that Christ should come to a man, as long as he trusts in himself, or in any worldly thing, or has any righteousness of his own, or riches of holy works. Then comes the *evangelion*, a more gentle pastor, which supples and assuages²⁶ the wounds of the conscience and brings health. It brings the Spirit of God, Who looses the bonds of Satan, and couples us to God and His will through strong faith and fervent love, with bonds too strong for the devil, the world, or any creature to loose them. And the poor and wretched sinner feels so great mercy, love, and kindness in God, that he is sure in himself how that it is not possible that God should forsake him or withdraw His mercy and love from him, and boldly cries out with Paul, saying, “Who shall separate us from the love that God loveth us withal?” (Rom 8:4ff). That is to say, What shall make me believe that God loves me not? Shall tribulation, anguish, persecution? Shall hunger, nakedness? Shall sword? Nay, “I am sure that neither death, nor life, neither angel, neither rule nor power, neither present things nor things to come, neither high nor low, neither any creature is able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” In all such tribulations, a Christian

²⁵ **corosy** – corrosive; painful medicine for dissolving infected tissue.

²⁶ **supples and assuages** – softens and soothes.

man perceives that God is his Father, and loves him, even as He loved Christ when He shed His blood on the cross.

Finally, as before, when I was bond to the devil and his will, I wrought all manner evil and wickedness, not for hell's sake, which is the reward of sin; but I did evil because by birth I was heir of hell and bondage to the devil. For I could do no otherwise do; to do sin was my nature. Even so now, since I am coupled to God by Christ's blood, do I well, not for heaven's sake, which is yet the reward of well doing. But because I am heir of heaven by grace and Christ's purchasing, and have the Spirit of God, I do good freely, for so is my nature, as a good tree brings forth good fruit, and an evil tree evil fruit. By the fruits shall you know what the tree is. A man's deeds declare what he is within, but make him neither good nor bad, though, after we be created anew by the Spirit and doctrine of Christ, we wax more perfect always with working according to the doctrine, and not with blind works of our own imagining. We must be first evil ere we do evil, as a serpent is first poisoned ere he poison. We must also be good ere we do good, as the fire must be first hot, ere it heat another thing. Take an example. As those blind and deaf which are cured in the gospel could not see nor hear till Christ had given them sight and hearing, and those sick could not do the deeds of an whole man till Christ had given them health, so can no man do good in his soul till Christ have loosed him out of the bonds of Satan, and have given him wherewith to do good, yea, and first have poured into him that self²⁷ good thing which he sheds forth afterward on others. Whatsoever is our own is sin. Whatsoever is above that is Christ's gift, purchase, doing, and working. He bought it of His Father dearly,²⁸ with His blood, yea, with His most bitter death, and gave His life for it. Whatsoever good thing is in us, that is given us freely without our deserving or merits for Christ's blood's sake. That we desire to follow the will of God, it is the gift of Christ's blood. That we now hate the devil's will (whereunto we were so fast locked, and could not but love it) is also the gift of Christ's blood, unto Whom belongs the praise and honor of our good deeds, and not unto us.

²⁷ **self** – same.

²⁸ **dearly** – at great cost.

Our good works

Our deeds do us three manner [of] service. First, they certify²⁹ us that we are heirs of everlasting life, and that the Spirit of God, Who is the earnest thereof, is in us, in that our hearts consent unto the law of God, and we have power in our members to do it, though imperfectly. And secondarily, we tame the flesh therewith, and kill the sin that remains yet in us, and wax daily perfecter and perfecter in the Spirit therewith, and keep that the lusts choke not the Word of God that is sown in us, nor quench the gifts and working of the Spirit, and that we lose not the Spirit again. And thirdly, we do our duty unto our neighbors therewith, and help their necessity unto our own comfort also, and draw all men unto the honoring and praising of God.

And whosoever excels in the gifts of grace, let the same think that they be given him as much to do his brother service as for himself, and as much for the love which God has to the weak, as unto him unto whom God gives such gifts. And he that withdraws aught that he has from his neighbor's need, robs his neighbor and is a thief. And he that is proud of the gifts of God and thinks himself by the reason of them better than his feeble neighbor, and not rather (as the truth is) acknowledges himself a servant unto his poor neighbor by the reason of them: the same has Lucifer's spirit in him, and not Christ's.

These things to know: first, the law, how that it is natural right and equity; that we have but one God to put our hope and trust in, and Him to love with all the heart, all the soul, and all our might and power; and neither to move heart nor hand but at His commandment, because He has first created us of naught,³⁰ and heaven and earth for our sakes. And afterward, when we had marred ourselves through sin, He forgave us and created us again, in the blood of His beloved Son.

And that we have the name of our one God in fear and reverence, and that we dishonor it not in swearing thereby about light trifles or vanity, or call it to record for the confirming of wickedness or falsehood, or aught that is to the dishonor of God, which is the breaking of His laws, or unto the hurt of our neighbor.

²⁹ **certify** – assure.

³⁰ **naught** – nothing.

And inasmuch as He is our Lord and God, and we His double possession, by creation and redemption, and therefore ought (as I said) neither to move heart or hand without His commandment, it is right that we have needful holy days³¹ to come together and learn His will, both the law which He will have us ruled by, and also the promises of mercy which He will have us trust unto; and to give God thanks together for His mercy, and to commit our infirmities to Him through our Savior Jesus, and to reconcile ourselves unto Him, and each to others, if aught be between brother and brother that requires it. And for this purpose and such like, as to visit the sick and needy, and redress peace and unity, were the holy days ordained only: and so far forth are they to be kept holy from all manner works that may be conveniently spared for the time, till this be done, and no further, but then lawfully to work.

And that it is right that we obey father and mother, master, lord, prince and king, and all the ordinances of the world, bodily and ghostly,³² by which God rules us, and ministers freely His benefits unto us all. And that we love them for the benefits that we receive by them, and fear them for the power they have over us to punish us, if we trespass the law and good order. So far yet are the worldly powers or rulers to be obeyed only, as their commandments repugn not against the commandment of God: and then, ho.³³ Wherefore we must have God's commandment ever in our hearts, and by the higher law interpret the inferior, that we obey nothing against the belief of our God, or against the faith, hope, and trust that is in Him only, or against the love of God whereby we do or leave undone all things for His sake. And that we do nothing, for any man's commandment, against the reverence of the name of God, to make it despised and the less feared and set by. And that we obey nothing to the hindrance of the knowledge of the blessed doctrine of God, Whose servant the holy day is.

³¹ The Roman Catholic calendar established many holy days and saints' days (besides the Lord's Day) that inhibited productivity and fostered superstitions, while providing little genuine instruction. Hence, Tyndale calls for renewed instruction, worship, and charitable service on days of rest. Otherwise, the holy days serve no purpose, and people should return to productive labor.

³² **ghostly** – spiritual.

³³ **ho** – halt; stop.

Notwithstanding, though the rulers which God has set over us command us against God, or do us open wrong, and oppress us with cruel tyranny, yet because they are in God's room, we may not avenge ourselves, but by the process and order of God's law, and laws of man made by the authority of God's law, which is also God's law, ever by an higher power, and remitting the vengeance unto God, and in the mean season³⁴ suffer until the hour be come.

And on the other side, to know that a man ought to love his neighbor equally and fully as well as himself, because his neighbor (be he never so simple) is equally created of God, and as fully redeemed by the blood of our Savior Jesus Christ. Out of which commandment of love spring these: Kill not your neighbor. Defile not his wife. Bear no false witness against him. And finally, not only do not these things in deed, but covet not in your heart his house, his wife, his manservant, maidservant, ox, ass, or whatsoever is his. So that these laws pertaining unto our neighbor are not fulfilled in the sight of God save with love. He that loves not his neighbor keeps not this commandment, "Defile not thy neighbor's wife," though he never touch her, or never see her, or think upon her. For the commandment is, though your neighbor's wife be never so fair, and you have never so great opportunity given you, and she consent, or haply³⁵ provoke you (as Potiphar's wife did Joseph), yet see you love your neighbor so well that for very love you cannot find in your heart to do that wickedness. And even so, he that trusts in anything, save in God only and in His Son Jesus Christ, keeps no commandment at all in the sight of God.

For he that has trust in any creature, whether in heaven or in earth, save in God and His Son Jesus, can see no cause to love God with all His heart, etc., neither to abstain from dishonoring His name, nor to keep the holy day for the love of His doctrine, nor to obey lovingly the rulers of this world, nor any cause to love his neighbor as himself, and to abstain from hurting him, where he may get profit by him, and save himself harmless. And in likewise, against this law, "Love thy neighbour as thyself," I may obey no worldly power, to do aught at any man's commandment unto the hurt of my neighbor that has not deserved it, though he be a Turk.

³⁴ **mean season** – meanwhile.

³⁵ **haply** – perhaps.

And to know how contrary this law is unto our nature, and how it is damnation not to have this law written in our hearts, though we never commit the deeds; and how there is none other means to be saved from the damnation than through repentance toward the law and faith in Christ's blood, which are the very inward baptism of our souls, and the washing and the dipping of our bodies in the water is the outward sign.³⁶ The plunging of the body under the water signifies that we repent and profess to fight against sin and lusts, and to kill them every day more and more, with the help of God and our diligence in following the doctrine of Christ and the leading of His Spirit, and that we believe to be washed from our natural damnation in which we are born, and from all the wrath of the law, and from all the infirmities and weaknesses that remain in us, after we have given our consent unto the law, and yielded ourselves to be scholars thereof, and from all the imperfections of all our deeds done with cold love, and from all actual sin which shall chance on us while we enforce the contrary and ever fight thereagainst, and hope to sin no more. And thus, repentance and faith begin at our baptism and first professing the laws of God, and continue unto our lives' end, and grow as we grow in the Spirit. For the more perfect we be, the greater is our repentance and the stronger our faith. And thus, as the Spirit and doctrine on God's part, and repentance and faith on our part, beget us anew in Christ, even so they make us grow and wax perfect, and save us unto the end, and never leave us until all sin be put off and we clean purified and fully formed and fashioned after the similitude and likeness of the perfection of our Savior Jesus, Whose gift all is.

And finally, to know that whatsoever good thing is in us, that same is the gift of grace, and therefore not of deserving, though many things be given of God, through our diligence in working His laws and chastising our bodies and in praying for them and believing His promises, which else should not be given us, yet our working deserves not the gifts, no more than the diligence of a merchant in seeking a good ship

³⁶ The common practice of the English church at the time of Tyndale was to baptize infants by immersion. Here Tyndale reflects upon the meaning of baptism, which he frequently ties to the cleansing power of the blood of Christ. Further, he laments in the Conclusion that "we be never taught the profession of our baptism, we remain always unlearned"—a sad commentary upon the spiritual condition of pre-Reformation England.

brings the goods safely to land, though such diligence does now and then help therein. But when we believe in God, and then do all that is in our might, and not tempt Him, then is God true to abide by His promise, and to help us, and perform alone when our strength is past.

Conclusion

These things, I say, to know, is to have all the Scripture unlocked and opened before you, so that if you will go in and read, you cannot but understand. And in these things to be ignorant is to have all the Scripture locked up, so that the more you read it, the blinder you are, and the more contrariety you find in it, and the more tangled are you therein, and can nowhere [get] through: for if you had a gloss³⁷ in one place, in another it will not serve. And therefore, because we be never taught the profession of our baptism, we remain always unlearned, as well the spirituality,³⁸ for all their great clergy and high schools (as we say), as the lay people. And now, because the lay and unlearned people are taught these first principles of our profession, therefore they read the Scripture and understand and delight therein. And our great pillars of holy church, which have nailed a veil of false glosses on Moses's face, to corrupt the true understanding of his law, cannot come in. And therefore they bark, and say the scripture makes heretics, and it is not possible for them to understand it in the English, because they themselves do not in Latin. And of pure malice, that they cannot have their will, they slay their brethren for their faith they have in our Savior, and therewith utter their bloody wolfish tyranny, and what they be within, and whose disciples. Herewith, reader, be committed unto the grace of our Savior Jesus, unto Whom, and God our Father through Him, be praise forever and forever. Amen.



³⁷ **gloss** – explanatory comment, often in the margin.

³⁸ **spirituality** – church officials: priests, monks, and prelates.