

# THE CITY OF GOD AGAINST THE PAGANS

By Saint Aurelius Augustine

[Podcast 46 of 50]

BOOK TWENTY-FIRST.

[continues]

23. Against those who are of opinion that the punishment neither of the devil nor of wicked men shall be eternal. First of all, it behoves us to inquire and to recognise why the Church has not been able to tolerate the idea that promises cleansing or indulgence to the devil even after the most severe and protracted punishment. For so many holy men, imbued with the spirit of the Old and New Testament, did not grudge to angels of any rank or character that they should enjoy the blessedness of the heavenly kingdom after being cleansed by suffering, but rather they perceived that they could not invalidate nor evacuate the divine sentence which the Lord predicted that He would pronounce in the judgment, saying, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." For here it is evident that the devil and his angels shall burn in everlasting fire. And there is also that declaration in the Apocalypse, "The devil their deceiver was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where also are the beast and the false prophet. And they shall be tormented day and night for ever." In the

former passage “everlasting” is used, in the latter “for ever;” and by these words Scripture is wont to mean nothing else than endless duration. And therefore no other reason, no reason more obvious and just, can be found for holding it as the fixed and immovable belief of the truest piety, that the devil and his angels shall never return to the justice and life of the saints, than that Scripture, which deceives no man, says that God spared them not, and that they were condemned beforehand by Him, and cast into prisons of darkness in hell, being reserved to the judgment of the last day, when eternal fire shall receive them, in which they shall be tormented world without end. And if this be so, how can it be believed that all men, or even some, shall be withdrawn from the endurance of punishment after some time has been spent in it? how can this be believed without enervating our faith in the eternal punishment of the devils? For if all or some of those to whom it shall be said, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels,” are not to be always in that fire, then what reason is there for believing that the devil and his angels shall always be there? Or is perhaps the sentence of God, which is to be pronounced on wicked men and angels alike, to be true in the case of the angels, false in that of men? Plainly it will be so if the conjectures of men are to weigh more than the word of God. But because this is absurd, they who desire to be rid of eternal punishment ought to abstain from arguing against God, and rather, while yet there is opportunity, obey the divine commands. Then what a fond fancy is it to suppose that eternal punishment means long-continued punishment, while eternal life means life without end, since Christ in the very same passage spoke of both in similar terms in one and the same sentence, “These shall go away into eternal punishment, but the

righteous into life eternal!" If both destinies are "eternal," then we must either understand both as long-continued but at last terminating, or both as endless. For they are correlative,—on the one hand, punishment eternal, on the other hand, life eternal. And to say in one and the same sense, life eternal shall be endless, punishment eternal shall come to an end, is the height of absurdity. Wherefore, as the eternal life of the saints shall be endless, so too the eternal punishment of those who are doomed to it shall have no end.

24. Against those who fancy that in the judgment of God all the accused will be spared in virtue of the prayers of the saints. And this reasoning is equally conclusive against those who, in their own interest, but under the guise of a greater tenderness of spirit, attempt to invalidate the words of God, and who assert that these words are true, not because men shall suffer those things which are threatened by God, but because they deserve to suffer them. For God, they say, will yield them to the prayers of His saints, who will then the more earnestly pray for their enemies, as they shall be more perfect in holiness, and whose prayers will be the more efficacious and the more worthy of God's ear, because now purged from all sin whatsoever. Why, then, if in that perfected holiness their prayers be so pure and all-availing, will they not use them in behalf of the angels for whom eternal fire is prepared, that God may mitigate His sentence and alter it, and extricate them from that fire? Or will there, perhaps, be some one hardy enough to affirm that even the holy angels will make common cause with holy men (then become the equals of God's angels), and will intercede for the guilty, both men and angels, that mercy may spare them the punishment which truth has pronounced them to deserve? But this has been asserted by no one sound in the faith, nor will be. Otherwise there is no reason

why the Church should not even now pray for the devil and his angels, since God her Master has ordered her to pray for her enemies. The reason, then, which prevents the Church from now praying for the wicked angels, whom she knows to be her enemies, is the identical reason which shall prevent her, however perfected in holiness, from praying at the last judgment for those men who are to be punished in eternal fire. At present she prays for her enemies among men, because they have yet opportunity for fruitful repentance. For what does she especially beg for them but that "God would grant them repentance," as the apostle says, "that they may return to soberness out of the snare of the devil, by whom they are held captive according to his will?" But if the Church were certified who those are, who, though they are still abiding in this life, are yet predestinated to go with the devil into eternal fire, then for them she could no more pray than for him. But since she has this certainty regarding no man, she prays for all her enemies who yet live in this world; and yet she is not heard in behalf of all. But she is heard in the case of those only who, though they oppose the Church, are yet predestinated to become her sons through her intercession. But if any retain an impenitent heart until death, and are not converted from enemies into sons, does the Church continue to pray for them, for the spirits, i.e., of such persons deceased? And why does she cease to pray for them, unless because the man who was not translated into Christ's kingdom while he was in the body, is now judged to be of Satan's following? It is then, I say, the same reason which prevents the Church at any time from praying for the wicked angels, which prevents her from praying hereafter for those men who are to be punished in eternal fire; and this also is the reason why, though she prays even for the wicked so long as

they live, she yet does not even in this world pray for the unbelieving and godless who are dead. For some of the dead, indeed, the prayer of the Church or of pious individuals is heard; but it is for those who, having been regenerated in Christ, did not spend their life so wickedly that they can be judged unworthy of such compassion, nor so well that they can be considered to have no need of it. As also, after the resurrection, there will be some of the dead to whom, after they have endured the pains proper to the spirits of the dead, mercy shall be accorded, and acquittal from the punishment of eternal fire. For were there not some whose sins, though not remitted in this life, shall be remitted in that which is to come, it could not be truly said, "They shall not be forgiven, neither in this world, neither in that which is to come." But when the Judge of quick and dead has said, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world," and to those on the other side, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire, which is prepared for the devil and his angels," and "These shall go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life," it were excessively presumptuous to say that the punishment of any of those whom God has said shall go away into eternal punishment shall not be eternal, and so bring either despair or doubt upon the corresponding promise of life eternal. Let no man then so understand the words of the Psalmist, "Shall God forget to be gracious? shall He shut up in His anger His tender mercies?" as if the sentence of God were true of good men, false of bad men, or true of good men and wicked angels, but false of bad men. For the Psalmist's words refer to the vessels of mercy and the children of the promise, of whom the prophet himself was one; for when he had said, "Shall God forget to be gracious? shall He shut up

in His anger His tender mercies?" and then immediately subjoins, "And I said, Now I begin: this is the change wrought by the right hand of the Most High," he manifestly explained what he meant by the words, "Shall He shut up in His anger His tender mercies?" For God's anger is this mortal life, in which man is made like to vanity, and his days pass as a shadow. Yet in this anger God does not forget to be gracious, causing His sun to shine and His rain to descend on the just and the unjust; and thus He does not in His anger cut short His tender mercies, and especially in what the Psalmist speaks of in the words, "Now I begin: this change is from the right hand of the Most High;" for He changes for the better the vessels of mercy, even while they are still in this most wretched life, which is God's anger, and even while His anger is manifesting itself in this miserable corruption; for "in His anger He does not shut up His tender mercies." And since the truth of this divine canticle is quite satisfied by this application of it, there is no need to give it a reference to that place in which those who do not belong to the city of God are punished in eternal fire. But if any persist in extending its application to the torments of the wicked, let them at least understand it so that the anger of God, which has threatened the wicked with eternal punishment, shall abide, but shall be mixed with mercy to the extent of alleviating the torments which might justly be inflicted; so that the wicked shall neither wholly escape, nor only for a time endure these threatened pains, but that they shall be less severe and more endurable than they deserve. Thus the anger of God shall continue, and at the same time He will not in this anger shut up His tender mercies. But even this hypothesis I am not to be supposed to affirm because I do not positively oppose it. As for those who find an empty threat rather than a

truth in such passages as these: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire;" and "These shall go away into eternal punishment;" and "They shall be tormented for ever and ever;" and "Their worm shall not die, and their fire shall not be quenched,"—such persons, I say, are most emphatically and abundantly refuted, not by me so much as by the divine Scripture itself. For the men of Nineveh repented in this life, and therefore their repentance was fruitful, inasmuch as they sowed in that field which the Lord meant to be sown in tears that it might afterwards be reaped in joy. And yet who will deny that God's prediction was fulfilled in their case, if at least he observes that God destroys sinners not only in anger but also in compassion? For sinners are destroyed in two ways,—either, like the Sodomites, the men themselves are punished for their sins, or, like the Ninevites, the men's sins are destroyed by repentance. God's prediction, therefore, was fulfilled,—the wicked Nineveh was overthrown, and a good Nineveh built up. For its walls and houses remained standing; the city was overthrown in its depraved manners. And thus, though the prophet was provoked that the destruction which the inhabitants dreaded, because of his prediction, did not take place, yet that which God's foreknowledge had predicted did take place, for He who foretold the destruction knew how it should be fulfilled in a less calamitous sense. But that these perversely compassionate persons may see what is the purport of these words, "How great is the abundance of Thy sweetness, Lord, which Thou hast hidden for them that fear Thee," let them read what follows: "And Thou hast perfected it for them that hope in Thee." For what means, "Thou hast hidden it for them that fear Thee," "Thou hast perfected it for them that hope in Thee," unless this, that to those who through fear of punishment seek to establish their own

righteousness by the law, the righteousness of God is not sweet, because they are ignorant of it? They have not tasted it. For they hope in themselves, not in Him; and therefore God's abundant sweetness is hidden from them. They fear God, indeed, but it is with that servile fear "which is not in love; for perfect love casteth out fear." Therefore to them that hope in Him He perfecteth His sweetness, inspiring them with His own love, so that with a holy fear, which love does not cast out, but which endureth for ever, they may, when they glory, glory in the Lord. For the righteousness of God is Christ, "who is of God made unto us," as the apostle says, "wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." This righteousness of God, which is the gift of grace without merits, is not known by those who go about to establish their own righteousness, and are therefore not subject to the righteousness of God, which is Christ. But it is in this righteousness that we find the great abundance of God's sweetness, of which the psalm says, "Taste and see how sweet the Lord is." And this we rather taste than partake of to satiety in this our pilgrimage. We hunger and thirst for it now, that hereafter we may be satisfied with it when we see Him as He is, and that is fulfilled which is written, "I shall be satisfied when Thy glory shall be manifested." It is thus that Christ perfects the great abundance of His sweetness to them that hope in Him. But if God conceals His sweetness from them that fear Him in the sense that these our objectors fancy, so that men's ignorance of His purpose of mercy towards the wicked may lead them to fear Him and live better, and so that there may be prayer made for those who are not living as they ought, how then does He perfect His sweetness to them that hope in Him, since, if their dreams be true, it is this very



sweetness which will prevent Him from punishing those who do not hope in Him? Let us then seek that sweetness of His, which He perfects to them that hope in Him, not that which He is supposed to perfect to those who despise and blaspheme Him; for in vain, after this life, does a man seek for what he has neglected to provide while in this life. Then, as to that saying of the apostle, "For God hath concluded all in unbelief, that He may have mercy upon all," it does not mean that He will condemn no one; but the foregoing context shows what is meant. The apostle composed the epistle for the Gentiles who were already believers; and when he was speaking to them of the Jews who were yet to believe, he says, "For as ye in times past believed not God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief; even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy." Then he added the words in question with which these persons beguile themselves: "For God concluded all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all." All whom, if not all those of whom he was speaking, just as if he had said, "Both you and them?" God then concluded all those in unbelief, both Jews and Gentiles, whom He foreknew and predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that they might be confounded by the bitterness of unbelief, and might repent and believingly turn to the sweetness of God's mercy, and might take up that exclamation of the psalm, "How great is the abundance of Thy sweetness, O Lord, which Thou hast hidden for them that fear Thee, but hast perfected to them that hope," not in themselves, but "in Thee." He has mercy, then, on all the vessels of mercy. And what means "all?" Both those of the Gentiles and those of the Jews whom He predestinated, called, justified, glorified: none of these

will be condemned by Him; but we cannot say none of all men whatever.

25. Whether those who received heretical baptism, and have afterwards fallen away to wickedness of life; or those who have received catholic baptism, but have afterwards passed over to heresy and schism; or those who have remained in the catholic Church in which they were baptized, but have continued to live immorally,—may hope through the virtue of the sacraments for the remission of eternal punishment. But let us now reply to those who promise deliverance from eternal fire, not to the devil and his angels (as neither do they of whom we have been speaking), nor even to all men whatever, but only to those who have been washed by the baptism of Christ, and have become partakers of His body and blood, no matter how they have lived, no matter what heresy or impiety they have fallen into. But they are contradicted by the apostle, where he says, “Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variances, emulations, wrath, strife, heresies, envyings, drunkenness, revellings, and the like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, for they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” Certainly this sentence of the apostle is false, if such persons shall be delivered after any lapse of time, and shall then inherit the kingdom of God. But as it is not false, they shall certainly never inherit the kingdom of God. And if they shall never enter that kingdom, then they shall always be retained in eternal punishment; for there is no middle place where he may live unpunished who has not been admitted into that kingdom. And therefore we may reasonably inquire how we are to understand these words of the Lord Jesus: “This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man

may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever." And those, indeed, whom we are now answering, are refuted in their interpretation of this passage by those whom we are shortly to answer, and who do not promise this deliverance to all who have received the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's body, but only to the catholics, however wickedly they live; for these, say they, have eaten the Lord's body not only sacramentally, but really, being constituted members of His body, of which the apostle says, "We being many are one bread, one body." He then who is in the unity of Christ's body (that is to say, in the Christian membership), of which body the faithful have been wont to receive the sacrament at the altar, that man is truly said to eat the body and drink the blood of Christ. And consequently heretics and schismatics being separate from the unity of this body, are able to receive the same sacrament, but with no profit to themselves,—nay, rather to their own hurt, so that they are rather more severely judged than liberated after some time. For they are not in that bond of peace which is symbolized by that sacrament. But again, even those who sufficiently understand that he who is not in the body of Christ cannot be said to eat the body of Christ, are in error when they promise liberation from the fire of eternal punishment to persons who fall away from the unity of that body into heresy, or even into heathenish superstition. For, in the first place, they ought to consider how intolerable it is, and how discordant with sound doctrine, to suppose that many, indeed, or almost all, who have forsaken the Church catholic, and have originated impious heresies and become heresiarchs, should enjoy a destiny superior to those who never were catholics, but have fallen into the snares of these others; that is to say, if

the fact of their catholic baptism and original reception of the sacrament of the body of Christ in the true body of Christ is sufficient to deliver these heresiarchs from eternal punishment. For certainly he who deserts the faith, and from a deserter becomes an assailant, is worse than he who has not deserted the faith he never held. And, in the second place, they are contradicted by the apostle, who, after enumerating the works of the flesh, says with reference to heresies, "They who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." And therefore neither ought such persons as lead an abandoned and damnable life to be confident of salvation, though they persevere to the end in the communion of the Church catholic, and comfort themselves with the words, "He that endureth to the end shall be saved." By the iniquity of their life they abandon that very righteousness of life which Christ is to them, whether it be by fornication, or by perpetrating in their body the other uncleannesses which the apostle would not so much as mention, or by a dissolute luxury, or by doing any one of those things of which he says, "They who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Consequently, they who do such things shall not exist anywhere but in eternal punishment, since they cannot be in the kingdom of God. For, while they continue in such things to the very end of life, they cannot be said to abide in Christ to the end; for to abide in Him is to abide in the faith of Christ. And this faith, according to the apostle's definition of it, "worketh by love." And "love," as he elsewhere says, "worketh no evil." Neither can these persons be said to eat the body of Christ, for they cannot even be reckoned among His members. For, not to mention other reasons, they cannot be at once the members of Christ and the members of a harlot. In fine, He Himself, when He says, "He that eateth my flesh

and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him," shows what it is in reality, and not sacramentally, to eat His body and drink His blood; for this is to dwell in Christ, that He also may dwell in us. So that it is as if He said, He that dwelleth not in me, and in whom I do not dwell, let him not say or think that he eateth my body or drinketh my blood. Accordingly, they who are not Christ's members do not dwell in Him. And they who make themselves members of a harlot, are not members of Christ unless they have penitently abandoned that evil, and have returned to this good to be reconciled to it.

26. What it is to have Christ for a foundation, and who they are to whom salvation as by fire is promised. But, say they, the catholic Christians have Christ for a foundation, and they have not fallen away from union with Him, no matter how depraved a life they have built on this foundation, as wood, hay, stubble; and accordingly the well-directed faith by which Christ is their foundation will suffice to deliver them some time from the continuance of that fire, though it be with loss, since those things they have built on it shall be burned. Let the Apostle James summarily reply to them: "If any man say he has faith, and have not works, can faith save him?" And who then is it, they ask, of whom the Apostle Paul says, "But he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire?" Let us join them in their inquiry; and one thing is very certain, that it is not he of whom James speaks, else we should make the two apostles contradict one another, if the one says, "Though a man's works be evil, his faith will save him as by fire," while the other says, "If he have not good works, can his faith save him?" We shall then ascertain who it is who can be saved by fire, if we first discover what it is to have Christ for a foundation. And this we may very readily learn from the image itself. In a building the

foundation is first. Whoever, then, has Christ in his heart, so that no earthly or temporal things—not even those that are legitimate and allowed—are preferred to Him, has Christ as a foundation. But if these things be preferred, then even though a man seem to have faith in Christ, yet Christ is not the foundation to that man; and much more if he, in contempt of wholesome precepts, seek forbidden gratifications, is he clearly convicted of putting Christ not first but last, since he has despised Him as his ruler, and has preferred to fulfil his own wicked lusts, in contempt of Christ's commands and allowances. Accordingly, if any Christian man loves a harlot, and, attaching himself to her, becomes one body, he has not now Christ for a foundation. But if any one loves his own wife, and loves her as Christ would have him love her, who can doubt that he has Christ for a foundation? But if he loves her in the world's fashion, carnally, as the disease of lust prompts him, and as the Gentiles love who know not God, even this the apostle, or rather Christ by the apostle, allows as a venial fault. And therefore even such a man may have Christ for a foundation. For so long as he does not prefer such an affection or pleasure to Christ, Christ is his foundation, though on it he builds wood, hay, stubble; and therefore he shall be saved as by fire. For the fire of affliction shall burn such luxurious pleasures and earthly loves, though they be not damnable, because enjoyed in lawful wedlock. And of this fire the fuel is bereavement, and all those calamities which consume these joys. Consequently the superstructure will be loss to him who has built it, for he shall not retain it, but shall be agonized by the loss of those things in the enjoyment of which he found pleasure. But by this fire he shall be saved through virtue of the foundation, because even if a persecutor demanded whether he would retain Christ or these

things, he would prefer Christ. Would you hear, in the apostle's own words, who he is who builds on the foundation gold, silver, precious stones? "He that is unmarried," he says, "careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord." Would you hear who he is that buildeth wood, hay, stubble? "But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife." "Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it,"—the day, no doubt, of tribulation—"because," says he, "it shall be revealed by fire." He calls tribulation fire, just as it is elsewhere said, "The furnace proves the vessels of the potter, and the trial of affliction righteous men." And "The fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide"—for a man's care for the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord, abides—"which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward,"—that is, he shall reap the fruit of his care. "But if any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss,"—for what he loved he shall not retain:—"but he himself shall be saved,"—for no tribulation shall have moved him from that stable foundation,—"yet so as by fire;" for that which he possessed with the sweetness of love he does not lose without the sharp sting of pain. Here, then, as seems to me, we have a fire which destroys neither, but enriches the one, brings loss to the other, proves both. But if this passage [of Corinthians] is to interpret that fire of which the Lord shall say to those on His left hand, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire," so that among these we are to believe there are those who build on the foundation wood, hay, stubble, and that they, through virtue of the good foundation, shall after a time be liberated from the fire that is the award of their evil deserts, what then shall we think of those on the right hand, to whom it shall be said, "Come, ye

blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you," unless that they are those who have built on the foundation gold, silver, precious stones? But if the fire of which our Lord speaks is the same as that of which the apostle says, "Yet so as by fire," then both—that is to say, both those on the right as well as those on the left—are to be cast into it. For that fire is to try both, since it is said, "For the day of the Lord shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." If, therefore, the fire shall try both, in order that if any man's work abide—i.e. if the superstructure be not consumed by the fire—he may receive a reward, and that if his work is burned he may suffer loss, certainly that fire is not the eternal fire itself. For into this latter fire only those on the left hand shall be cast, and that with final and everlasting doom; but that former fire proves those on the right hand. But some of them it so proves that it does not burn and consume the structure which is found to have been built by them on Christ as the foundation; while others of them it proves in another fashion, so as to burn what they have built up, and thus cause them to suffer loss, while they themselves are saved because they have retained Christ, who was laid as their sure foundation, and have loved Him above all. But if they are saved, then certainly they shall stand at the right hand, and shall with the rest hear the sentence, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you;" and not at the left hand, where those shall be who shall not be saved, and shall therefore hear the doom, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire." For from that fire no man shall be saved, because they all shall go away into eternal punishment, where their worms shall not die, nor their fire be quenched, in which they shall be tormented day and night for ever. But if it be said that in the interval



of time between the death of this body and that last day of judgment and retribution which shall follow the resurrection, the bodies of the dead shall be exposed to a fire of such a nature that it shall not affect those who have not in this life indulged in such pleasures and pursuits as shall be consumed like wood, hay, stubble, but shall affect those others who have carried with them structures of that kind; if it be said that such worldliness, being venial, shall be consumed in the fire of tribulation either here only, or here and hereafter both, or here that it may not be hereafter,—this I do not contradict, because possibly it is true. For perhaps even the death of the body is itself a part of this tribulation, for it results from the first transgression, so that the time which follows death takes its colour in each case from the nature of the man's building. The persecutions, too, which have crowned the martyrs, and which Christians of all kinds suffer, try both buildings like a fire, consuming some, along with the builders themselves, if Christ is not found in them as their foundation, while others they consume without the builders, because Christ is found in them, and they are saved, though with loss; and other buildings still they do not consume, because such materials as abide for ever are found in them. In the end of the world there shall be in the time of Antichrist tribulation such as has never before been. How many edifices there shall then be, of gold or of hay, built on the best foundation, Christ Jesus, which that fire shall prove, bringing joy to some, loss to others, but without destroying either sort, because of this stable foundation! But whosoever prefers, I do not say his wife, with whom he lives for carnal pleasure, but any of those relatives who afford no delight of such a kind, and whom it is right to love,—whosoever prefers these to Christ, and loves them after a human and carnal

fashion, has not Christ as a foundation, and will therefore not be saved by fire, nor indeed at all; for he shall not possibly dwell with the Saviour, who says very explicitly concerning this very matter, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." But he who loves his relations carnally, and yet so that he does not prefer them to Christ, but would rather want them than Christ if he were put to the proof, shall be saved by fire, because it is necessary that by the loss of these relations he suffer pain in proportion to his love. And he who loves father, mother, sons, daughters, according to Christ, so that he aids them in obtaining His kingdom and cleaving to Him, or loves them because they are members of Christ, God forbid that this love should be consumed as wood, hay, stubble, and not rather be reckoned a structure of gold, silver, precious stones. For how can a man love those more than Christ whom he loves only for Christ's sake?

27. Against the belief of those who think that the sins which have been accompanied with almsgiving will do them no harm. It remains to reply to those who maintain that those only shall burn in eternal fire who neglect alms-deeds proportioned to their sins, resting this opinion on the words of the Apostle James, "He shall have judgment without mercy that hath showed no mercy." Therefore, they say, he that hath showed mercy, though he has not reformed his dissolute conduct, but has lived wickedly and iniquitously even while abounding in alms, shall have a merciful judgment, so that he shall either be not condemned at all, or shall be delivered from final judgment after a time. And for the same reason they suppose that Christ will discriminate between those on the right hand and those on the left, and will send the one party into His kingdom, the other into eternal punishment, on the sole

ground of their attention to or neglect of works of charity. Moreover, they endeavour to use the prayer which the Lord Himself taught as a proof and bulwark of their opinion, that daily sins which are never abandoned can be expiated through alms-deeds, no matter how offensive or of what sort they be. For, say they, as there is no day on which Christians ought not to use this prayer, so there is no sin of any kind which, though committed every day, is not remitted when we say, "Forgive us our debts," if we take care to fulfil what follows, "as we forgive our debtors." For, they go on to say, the Lord does not say, "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will forgive you your little daily sins," but "will forgive you your sins." Therefore, be they of any kind or magnitude whatever, be they perpetrated daily and never abandoned or subdued in this life, they can be pardoned, they presume, through alms-deeds. But they are right to inculcate the giving of alms proportioned to past sins; for if they said that any kind of alms could obtain the divine pardon of great sins committed daily and with habitual enormity, if they said that such sins could thus be daily remitted, they would see that their doctrine was absurd and ridiculous. For they would thus be driven to acknowledge that it were possible for a very wealthy man to buy absolution from murders, adulteries, and all manner of wickedness, by paying a daily alms of ten paltry coins. And if it be most absurd and insane to make such an acknowledgment, and if we still ask what are those fitting alms of which even the forerunner of Christ said, "Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance," undoubtedly it will be found that they are not such as are done by men who undermine their life by daily enormities even to the very end. For they suppose that by giving to the poor a small fraction of the wealth they acquire by extortion and spoliation

they can propitiate Christ, so that they may with impunity commit the most damnable sins, in the persuasion that they have bought from Him a licence to transgress, or rather do buy a daily indulgence. And if they for one crime have distributed all their goods to Christ's needy members, that could profit them nothing unless they desisted from all similar actions, and attained charity which worketh no evil. He therefore who does alms-deeds proportioned to his sins must first begin with himself. For it is not reasonable that a man who exercises charity towards his neighbour should not do so towards himself, since he hears the Lord saying, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," and again, "Have compassion on thy soul, and please God." He then who has not compassion on his own soul that he may please God, how can he be said to do alms-deeds proportioned to his sins? To the same purpose is that written, "He who is bad to himself, to whom can he be good?" We ought therefore to do alms that we may be heard when we pray that our past sins may be forgiven, not that while we continue in them we may think to provide ourselves with a licence for wickedness by alms-deeds. The reason, therefore, of our predicting that He will impute to those on His right hand the alms-deeds they have done, and charge those on His left with omitting the same, is that He may thus show the efficacy of charity for the deletion of past sins, not for impunity in their perpetual commission. And such persons, indeed, as decline to abandon their evil habits of life for a better course cannot be said to do charitable deeds. For this is the purport of the saying, "Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me." He shows them that they do not perform charitable actions even when they think they are doing so. For if they gave bread to a hungry Christian because he is a Christian, assuredly they

would not deny to themselves the bread of righteousness, that is, Christ Himself; for God considers not the person to whom the gift is made, but the spirit in which it is made. He therefore who loves Christ in a Christian extends alms to him in the same spirit in which he draws near to Christ, not in that spirit which would abandon Christ if it could do so with impunity. For in proportion as a man loves what Christ disapproves does he himself abandon Christ. For what does it profit a man that he is baptized, if he is not justified? Did not He who said, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he shall not enter into the kingdom of God," say also, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven?" Why do many through fear of the first saying run to baptism, while few through fear of the second seek to be justified? As therefore it is not to his brother a man says, "Thou fool," if when he says it he is indignant not at the brotherhood, but at the sin of the offender,—for otherwise he were guilty of hell fire,—so he who extends charity to a Christian does not extend it to a Christian if he does not love Christ in him. Now he does not love Christ who refuses to be justified in Him. Or, again, if a man has been guilty of this sin of calling his brother Fool, unjustly reviling him without any desire to remove his sin, his alms-deeds go a small way towards expiating this fault, unless he adds to this the remedy of reconciliation which the same passage enjoins. For it is there said, "Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." Just so it is a small matter to do alms-deeds, no matter how great they be, for any sin, so long as the offender continues in

the practice of sin. Then as to the daily prayer which the Lord Himself taught, and which is therefore called the Lord's prayer, it obliterates indeed the sins of the day, when day by day we say, "Forgive us our debts," and when we not only say but act out that which follows, "as we forgive our debtors;" but we utter this petition because sins have been committed, and not that they may be. For by it our Saviour designed to teach us that, however righteously we live in this life of infirmity and darkness, we still commit sins for the remission of which we ought to pray, while we must pardon those who sin against us that we ourselves also may be pardoned. The Lord then did not utter the words, "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your Father will also forgive you your trespasses," in order that we might contract from this petition such confidence as should enable us to sin securely from day to day, either putting ourselves above the fear of human laws, or craftily deceiving men concerning our conduct, but in order that we might thus learn not to suppose that we are without sins, even though we should be free from crimes; as also God admonished the priests of the old law to this same effect regarding their sacrifices, which He commanded them to offer first for their own sins, and then for the sins of the people. For even the very words of so great a Master and Lord are to be intently considered. For He does not say, If ye forgive men their sins, your Father will also forgive you your sins, no matter of what sort they be, but He says, your sins; for it was a daily prayer He was teaching, and it was certainly to disciples already justified He was speaking. What, then, does He mean by "your sins," but those sins from which not even you who are justified and sanctified can be free? While, then, those who seek occasion from this petition to indulge in habitual sin maintain that the Lord meant to include great sins,

because He did not say, He will forgive you your small sins, but “your sins,” we, on the other hand, taking into account the character of the persons He was addressing, cannot see our way to interpret the expression “your sins” of anything but small sins, because such persons are no longer guilty of great sins. Nevertheless not even great sins themselves—sins from which we must flee with a total reformation of life—are forgiven to those who pray, unless they observe the appended precept, “as ye also forgive your debtors.” For if the very small sins which attach even to the life of the righteous be not remitted without that condition, how much further from obtaining indulgence shall those be who are involved in many great crimes, if, while they cease from perpetrating such enormities, they still inexorably refuse to remit any debt incurred to themselves, since the Lord says, “But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses?” For this is the purport of the saying of the Apostle James also, “He shall have judgment without mercy that hath showed no mercy.” For we should remember that servant whose debt of ten thousand talents his lord cancelled, but afterwards ordered him to pay up, because the servant himself had no pity for his fellow-servant who owed him an hundred pence. The words which the Apostle James subjoins, “And mercy rejoiceth against judgment,” find their application among those who are the children of the promise and vessels of mercy. For even those righteous men, who have lived with such holiness that they receive into the eternal habitations others also who have won their friendship with the mammon of unrighteousness, became such only through the merciful deliverance of Him who justifies the ungodly, imputing to him a reward according to grace, not according to debt. For among this number is the

apostle, who says, "I obtained mercy to be faithful." But it must be admitted, that those who are thus received into the eternal habitations are not of such a character that their own life would suffice to rescue them without the aid of the saints, and consequently in their case especially does mercy rejoice against judgment. And yet we are not on this account to suppose that every abandoned profligate, who has made no amendment of his life, is to be received into the eternal habitations if only he has assisted the saints with the mammon of unrighteousness,—that is to say, with money or wealth which has been unjustly acquired, or, if rightfully acquired, is yet not the true riches, but only what iniquity counts riches, because it knows not the true riches in which those persons abound, who even receive others also into eternal habitations. There is then a certain kind of life, which is neither, on the one hand, so bad that those who adopt it are not helped towards the kingdom of heaven by any bountiful almsgiving by which they may relieve the wants of the saints, and make friends who could receive them into eternal habitations, nor, on the other hand, so good that it of itself suffices to win for them that great blessedness, if they do not obtain mercy through the merits of those whom they have made their friends. And I frequently wonder that even Virgil should give expression to this sentence of the Lord, in which He says, "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that they may receive you into everlasting habitations;" and this very similar saying, "He that receiveth a prophet, in the name of a prophet, shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man, in the name of a righteous man, shall receive a righteous man's reward." For when that poet described the Elysian fields, in which they suppose that the souls of the blessed dwell, he placed there not only



those who had been able by their own merit to reach that abode, but added,— “And they who grateful memory won By services to others done;” that is, they who had served others, and thereby merited to be remembered by them. Just as if they used the expression so common in Christian lips, where some humble person commends himself to one of the saints, and says, Remember me, and secures that he do so by deserving well at his hand. But what that kind of life we have been speaking of is, and what those sins are which prevent a man from winning the kingdom of God by himself, but yet permit him to avail himself of the merits of the saints, it is very difficult to ascertain, very perilous to define. For my own part, in spite of all investigation, I have been up to the present hour unable to discover this. And possibly it is hidden from us, lest we should become careless in avoiding such sins, and so cease to make progress. For if it were known what these sins are, which, though they continue, and be not abandoned for a higher life, do yet not prevent us from seeking and hoping for the intercession of the saints, human sloth would presumptuously wrap itself in these sins, and would take no steps to be disentangled from such wrappings by the deft energy of any virtue, but would only desire to be rescued by the merits of other people, whose friendship had been won by a bountiful use of the mammon of unrighteousness. But now that we are left in ignorance of the precise nature of that iniquity which is venial, even though it be persevered in, certainly we are both more vigilant in our prayers and efforts for progress, and more careful to secure with the mammon of unrighteousness friends for ourselves among the saints. But this deliverance, which is effected by one’s own prayers, or the intercession of holy men, secures that a man be not cast into eternal fire, but not that,

when once he has been cast into it, he should after a time be rescued from it. For even those who fancy that what is said of the good ground bringing forth abundant fruit, some thirty, some sixty, some an hundred fold, is to be referred to the saints, so that in proportion to their merits some of them shall deliver thirty men, some sixty, some an hundred,—even those who maintain this are yet commonly inclined to suppose that this deliverance will take place at, and not after the day of judgment. Under this impression, some one who observed the unseemly folly with which men promise themselves impunity on the ground that all will be included in this method of deliverance, is reported to have very happily remarked, that we should rather endeavour to live so well that we shall be all found among the number of those who are to intercede for the liberation of others, lest these should be so few in number, that, after they have delivered, one thirty, another sixty, another a hundred, there should still remain many who could not be delivered from punishment by their intercessions, and among them every one who has vainly and rashly promised himself the fruit of another's labour. But enough has been said in reply to those who acknowledge the authority of the same sacred Scriptures as ourselves, but who, by a mistaken interpretation of them, conceive of the future rather as they themselves wish, than as the Scriptures teach. And having given this reply, I now, according to promise, close this book.

