

§ ii. . . . Having explained the controversy in a way that answers many frivolous* objections, I shall now show the absurdity of the doctrine which argues for *lifelong sin*,¹ even in the saints.

Second, I shall prove our doctrine by many convincing testimonies from the holy Scripture. And last, I will answer the arguments and objections of our adversaries.

§ iii. First, this doctrine, which says *that the saints cannot and never will be free from sin in this life, is logically inconsistent*² *with the wisdom of God and with his glorious power and majesty*; his eyes are too pure to behold evil.³ Since God has decided within himself to gather to himself a chosen people to worship him and be witnesses for him on the earth, without doubt he also sanctifies and purifies them, for he does not delight in iniquity but rather abhors sin. Though he is concerned about a man who is in transgression, and pities him, and gives him the means to come out of it, still he does not love man or delight in him while he is joined to sin. For this reason, if man must always be joined to sin, then God would always be at a distance from him, as it is written, “your iniquities have

¹ Latin: *quae perpetuam in hac vita etiam sanctis peccandi necessitatem affirmat*, “which affirms the perpetual necessity of sinning in this life, even by the saints.”

² Latin: *pugnat cum Dei sapientia & gloriosa ejus virtute & majestate*, “fights against (contradicts) the wisdom of God and his glorious virtue and majesty.”

³ See Habakkuk 1:13.

separated you from your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you” (Isaiah 59:2). On the contrary, it says that the saints “partake of the divine nature” even while they are here (II Peter 1:4), and that they are “one spirit with the Lord” (I Corinthians 6:17); well then, no unclean thing can be like that. It is written explicitly that there is no communion between light and darkness (II Corinthians 6:14). But God is Light, and every sin is darkness. What greater slander could there be against God’s wisdom?⁴ It’s as if he had neglected to prepare a way for his children to serve and worship him perfectly, or had not provided a means by which they might serve him in any way and yet they must still serve the devil not less than God, and even more than God. . . . What can we think of such a doctrine that would attribute this foolishness to the omnipotent and all-wise God?

§ iv. Second, *this doctrine is inconsistent with the justice of God.*⁵ Since he requires his children to be pure, and commands them to abstain from every iniquity so frequently and precisely (as I will show later), and since “his wrath is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men,”⁶ it is logical to deduce either that God has given man the ability to obey his will; or else that God requires from man more than he has given the ability to do — and that is an open declaration that God is unjust, and a hard master to a lazy servant. We have spoken before of the injustice these people ascribe to God when they say he damns the wicked to whom he never allowed any means of being good. But here is even more irrational and

⁴ Latin: *quid magis absurdum igitur contra Dei sapientiam dici potest*, “what more absurd thing could be said against the wisdom of God.”

⁵ Latin: *Doctrina ista Dei justitiæ repugnat*. “This doctrine goes against the justice of God.”

⁶ Romans 1:18

inconsistent insult, because they say that God will not even give the means of pleasing him to the ones he has chosen to be his own, although they do admit that God loves his chosen ones. . . .

Surely this makes God more unrighteous than wicked men, about whom Christ says “if their children ask them for bread, will not give them a stone, or a serpent instead of a fish.”⁷ But these men say we ought to ask God for power to redeem us from sin, and yet believe that we will never receive that power; then such prayers cannot be made in good faith, they are all in vain. Isn’t this making God as unjust to his children as Pharaoh was to the Israelites, when he required them to make bricks but didn’t give them straw? But God be blessed, for he does not treat those who truly trust him and wait upon him in the way these men foolishly imagine. Those faithful ones truly find that his grace is sufficient for them,⁸ and they know how to overcome the evil one by God’s power and Spirit.

§ v. Third, this evil doctrine is highly injurious to Jesus Christ, greatly disparages the power and virtue of his sacrifice, and represents his coming and ministry as ineffectual in regard to its principal purpose. Though there were other purposes, Christ principally came to remove sin; to gather a righteous people who would serve the Lord in purity of mind and walk before him in fear and awe; and to bring in the everlasting righteousness and the evangelical perfection which the Law could not accomplish. That is why it says that he “gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for himself his own special people, zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14). Beyond doubt the apostle* said this about the saints while they are on the earth.

⁷ Luke 11:11-13

⁸ II Corinthians 12:9

But on the contrary, these men affirm that *we are never redeemed from all iniquity*, and in this way they say that Christ's giving of himself for us was void and ineffectual and they also call the apostle Paul a liar by denying that "Christ purifies for himself a people who are zealous for good works." How can a people be zealous of good works when they are always committing evil ones? How can they be a purified people yet remain in impurity and daily sin (unless sin is not considered impurity)? It is clearly said that "for this purpose the Son of God was revealed, that he might destroy the works of the devil, and you know that he was revealed to take away our sins" (I John 3:5, 8). But according to these men, that purpose had no effect, because they will not believe that the Son of God destroys the works of the devil in his children in this world. They also refuse to believe that he came to take away our sins, because they argue that it is inevitable that we always live in sin. . . .

§ vi. Fourth, this doctrine renders the work of the ministry, the preaching of the Word, the writing of the Scriptures, and the prayers of holy men altogether useless and ineffectual. Regarding the first, in Ephesians 4:11-13 it says that pastors and teachers are given "for the perfection of the saints," etc. "till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Now, if sinning daily and in everything is unavoidable, then there can be no perfection, because people who act that way cannot be considered perfect.

And if God appoints and establishes the ministry for the purpose of perfecting the saints, do not those who deny that perfection is possible make the ministry useless and unproductive? — since there can be no other true purpose of ministry except to lead people out of sin into righteousness. And if (as these ministers assure us) we can

never expect to be delivered from sin, aren't they saying that their own work is useless? Since the purpose of all preaching is to reprove sin, what use is it to preach against sin if we can never abandon it?

Our adversaries are great exalters of the Scriptures in words, and make a lot of noise about their usefulness and perfection.⁹ Now the apostle tells us in II Timothy 3:17 that the purpose of Scripture is to "make the man of God perfect." If perfection is unattainable in this life, then the Scriptures do no good, for in the other life we won't have any need of them.

This doctrine makes the prayers of the saints completely useless, since the saints themselves say that they ought to pray daily for God to deliver them from evil and free them from sin by the help of his Spirit and Grace, while in this world.¹⁰ But though we might suppose that this doctrine implies the absurd idea that the prayers of the saints are without faith, still that would not be so bad if it did not imply the same about the holy apostles, who prayed earnestly for perfection and therefore (no doubt) believed that it was attainable. "Laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect" etc. (Colossians 4:12). (I Thessalonians 3:13 and 5:23, etc.)

⁹ Latin: *Adversarii magni Scripturarum æstimatores videri volunt*, "The adversaries want to be seen as great exalters the Scriptures"

¹⁰ Latin: *ipsi autem fatentur oportere se quotidie orare, ut Deus liberet eos ab omni malo, peccatum autem malum est. Preces autem illæ nonne sunt inutiles & fidei expertes, si eodem tempore credant Deum illud, pro quo orant, no daturum eis, quippe cum impossibile sit hoc acquiri en hoc mundo, etiam Dei Spiritus & gratiæ auxilio*. "they themselves say that they ought to pray daily that God would free them from all evil (since sin is an evil). Are not their prayers useless and devoid of faith, if at the same time they believe that God will not give them what they pray for? — since it is impossible for them to acquire in this world the help of God's Spirit and grace."

Source: Robert Barclay, *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, Proposition VIII § ii, iii, iv, v, vi (Glenside PA: Quaker Heritage Press, 2002) pp. 208-213; and Roberti Barclaii, *Teologiae verè Christianae apologia*, facsimile (Amsterdam: Jacob Claus, 1676) pp. 154-158.