

PSALM • 101

Translated by
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1. *I will sing of mercy and justice and sing praises to Thee, O Lord.*
2. *I act discreetly and uprightly toward those who are under me and walk faithfully within my house.*
3. *I undertake no wicked thing, I hate the lawbreaker and will not let him abide with me.*
4. *A perverse heart must withdraw from me, I do not put up with the wicked person.*
5. *I destroy him who secretly maligns his neighbor, I am not fond of one who has a proud demeanor and is conceited in spirit.*
6. *My eyes look for the faithful in the land that they may dwell with me, and I delight in devout servants.*
7. *Deceitful people shall not dwell within my house, liars shall not prosper with me.*
8. *I will early destroy all the godless in the land, that I may cut off all evildoers from the city of the Lord.*

PREFACE

THIS psalm is one of those which praise and thank God for the secular authorities, as is also done in [Psalms 127](#) and [128](#) and in many others. Together with other psalms, this one has always been sung in the church by the clergy, who claimed that they alone were the church and the holy, favored people of God. But they did not realize or consider at all that in these psalms they were praising the very group with their mouth which they daily treated with utter contempt and practically trampled under their feet. Had they understood these psalms, I really think they would have omitted them and would never have sung them. It certainly makes no sense for these holy people to praise and commend the secular authorities publicly in the church.¹ In comparison with their position they have treated these authorities with contempt, and that for the sole reason that they would have liked to see

themselves alone be masters on earth and all other leaders become monks. And in this they have truly succeeded, to such an extent that fifty per cent or more of the secular leaders have forgotten their own duties and have occupied themselves with the church and with Masses, while the clergy have in the same measure given up their priestly duties and have busied themselves with hunting, waging war, and such utterly secular affairs. Still God permitted this psalm and others like it to be sung by their mouths, even as he spoke to Balaam through the donkey, although the stupid prophet was unable to understand it ([Num. 22:28](#)).

This psalm, however, is directed especially against those schismatic spirits who put on a front of great holiness by condemning housekeeping, the estate of marriage, and other high and low positions on earth.² For it instructs and comforts the people who occupy these positions and must occupy them; it bids them not to run away and forsake everything. It has a particular lesson for those high ranks in which one must maintain a court and court personnel. Therefore David, who was a king and had to keep servants at his court, cites himself as an example of the way a pious king or prince should treat his personnel. And though I myself am inexperienced at court and know very little about the treachery and deceit that prevail there,³ still, on the basis of much that I have heard and gathered from others, and with the assistance of the historical records, I will try to understand and interpret the words of the psalm as clearly as possible and to the best of my ability.

1. I will sing of mercy and justice and sing praises to Thee, O Lord.

AT the very start he gives this advice to the kings and princes: that they should praise and thank God if they have a good organization and pious servants at home or at court. It follows, then, that they should learn to know that this is a special gift of God and not a matter of their own wisdom or ability. That's the way it goes in the world: nobody thinks he is too clumsy or inept. If he were in the government,⁴ he would really do splendidly; and he is dissatisfied with anything done by others in the government. He is like that servant in the comedy of Terence who expresses the wish: "Ah, I should have become king!"⁵ And behind the back of his father David, Absalom said to the citizens of Israel: "You certainly have a good case, but no one has been deputed by the king to listen to you. Alas! If only I were the leader in the land and all affairs came before me, what fine justice I would execute!" ([2 Sam. 15:2-4](#).) Those are the Master Smart Alecks⁶ who are so clever that

they can bridle a steed in its hind end. All they can do is to condemn other people and to improve upon them. When they do get control of things, they ruin everything. It is as the saying goes: “Whoever watches the game knows best how to do it.” They think that if they got the bowling ball in their hand, they would certainly strike twelve pins, even though there are only nine pins on the alley, until they find out that running alongside the alley there is a gutter.⁷

Such people do not praise and thank God; nor do they think that such a situation is a gift of God for which they ought to pray or ask Him. Rather they are presumptuous and think their reason and wisdom is so reliable that they cannot fail. They want the honor and glory for the fact that they are better leaders than others and can do everything well. They act as if that good Man who is called our Lord God were supposed to sit by idly and have no part in people’s efforts to do well. So He acts the part and looks through His fingers, letting the arrogant children of men begin the Tower of Babel and build it. Afterwards He intervenes and scatters them and brings the whole thing to naught, so that no one can understand any longer what the other is saying ([Gen. 11:1 ff.](#)). And it serves them right! They exclude God from their plans, they want to be like God and wise enough on their own, they want to have the honor that belongs to God alone.

While I was still in the monastery, I often saw and heard wise and intelligent people make plans and present them in such a powerful and convincing and beautiful way that I thought it was impossible for them to fail. “Indeed,” I said, “that has hands and feet. That certainly is alive.” I was as sure of it as if it had already come to pass and were there before my eyes. But when they began and tried to carry it out, it failed most miserably. That fine, promising proposition became less real than a dream or a shadow; and I was constrained to say: “Well now, if that was a dream, then let the devil rely on beautiful and pretty propositions! How true it is that everything is a vain sham and deception if God is not in it!” Then I learned the passage of Solomon: “Both the proposing and the disposing are Mine” ([Prov. 8:14](#)); and of St. Paul: “He that plants is nothing, he that waters is nothing either, but it is God that gives the increase” ([1 Cor. 3:7](#)). But the children of men will not believe this until they learn it from experience. If they can plan something, they think it will surely have to take place. “How can it fail?” they say. “It is as certain as the fact that seven plus three make ten.” That is, of course, true mathematically: by number and figure, seven plus three make exactly ten, it cannot fail, and the proposition is made. But physically, in deed or in

action, it goes this way: God can melt the seven parts into one part and can make one out of seven. Again, He can divide the three parts into thirty. So in the disposition there are no longer precisely the ten parts that there were earlier in the proposition.⁸

I suppose that is also the way it happens at court. For I have not been at court, neither have I any desire to be there; may God continue to spare me from it. But this can easily be observed from some examples. For instance, Pope Clement and the king of France had the emperor for sure just outside Pavia, and they could not miss. They, too, had figured that seven and three had to make ten.⁹ But how well both of them found out what kind of disposal their proposal turned out to be! What a failure the Venetians experienced in their sure plan against Emperor Maximilian!¹⁰ How often during these twelve years¹¹ have the papists been foiled in many a fine and certain plan against the Lutherans! All the historical records are full of such examples; anybody at court will find enough of such examples among all the kings and princes every day. There sits the king or prince, wise and clever by himself, having the matter well in hand from every possible angle. Along comes a disputer or lawyer with his book; he finds the law well attested in it, so sure and clear that it cannot fail. Then there is a big fellow, whose head is much too small for his great intelligence and wisdom; he finds the thing so firmly established and so deeply rooted in the natural law that the whole world cannot tear it down. Finally they chime together, and the big bell booms along with them, that is, a bishop, prelate, or theologian, who has either advanced himself or has otherwise been elevated; he provides the Word of God and the Holy Scripture. Now the devil himself has to withdraw and leave things as they are: right and just and good, and even godly. There they sit, the four pillars of the kingdom or principality! Very likely they would even be able to carry the heavens if God assigned this to their wisdom.

Not a single one of these people would direct a sigh up to heaven to seek advice and a plan of action from God. They are either such godless people that their conscience will not permit prayer or invocation; or they are so certain and smug in their wisdom and affairs that they scornfully forget to do it, as though they had no need of it; or they are usually accustomed to lay their plans this way, calloused in their unbelief. In the meantime our Lord God has to sit idly above. He does not dare to enter into the plans of such clever people, and He chats meanwhile with His angel Gabriel and says: “My dear fellow, what are these wise people doing in their council chamber, that they do not draw us into their deliberations? They must be wanting to

build the Tower of Babel again. Dear Gabriel, go down there and take Isaiah with you, and read them a secret lesson through the window and say: ‘With seeing eyes you shall see nothing, with hearing ears you shall hear nothing, with understanding hearts you shall understand nothing’ ([Is. 6:10](#)). ‘Take counsel together, and let it come to naught. Speak the word, and let it not stand. For Mine is both proposing and disposing’ ([Is. 8:10](#)). So shall it be.”

Here you may want to say: “Should one not do what is right, what reason teaches, what God enjoins? Of what use are the laws to us? What is reason good for? What are you theologians teaching? Is it all to be in vain?” Answer: This is not to condemn or reject law, sound reason, or Holy Scripture but rather the miserable admixture of the filth of our arrogance—the fact that we do not begin such a plan and proceeding with the fear of God and with a humble, earnest prayer, just as if it were enough to have a right and proper proposal and the intention to convert this plan into action speedily according to one’s own ability. To do this is to despise God and to seek glory for yourself as the man who can do it. It is contrary to the First Commandment. Therefore such an admixture changes the best law into the greatest injustice,¹² the finest reason into the greatest folly, and the Holy Scripture into the greatest error. For if the First Commandment is missing and does not give light, then none of the others will give proper light, and the understanding will be entirely faulty.

Therefore this is to be said: It is not enough simply to have the very best law and the very finest case, and a proposal that is absolutely sound. In fact, the finer your law and the better your case, the less arrogant you should be about it, and the less you should brag about it; but you should fear God all the more as One who enjoys putting the finest law to shame and ruining the best cases. He does this because of your arrogance, because you depend upon it and brag about it. Thus you spoil everything and provoke God’s wrath against you; for He is the enemy of pride and arrogance, which deprive Him of His honor and militate against the First Commandment. Therefore He also resists the proud with all His might, as St. Peter says ([1 Peter 5:5](#)). The Children of Israel had the most righteous cause against the Benjaminites, the like of which is almost unheard of ([Judges 20:12 ff.](#)). Yet they, the much larger group, were severely whipped twice by the unjust smaller group; and they lost forty thousand men in the two battles. The third time they learned to stop being presumptuous and to call upon God for advice and power to act; then they won again and were vindicated.

Yet this is, and continues to be, the practice at the courts of kings and princes as well as in lesser ranks: If things are prospering in the very best manner, then they undertake everything presumptuously, justifying their action on the ground that they are in the right. But some do much worse, justifying their actions on the ground that they have much wealth and power. God is always forgotten, and that is why everything develops and proceeds accordingly. Yet as long as our Lord God's little remnant, the church, intercedes for the kings and lords, they get the benefit of such prayer despite their unworthiness; otherwise things would be in an abominable state. The Children of Israel also had to pray for the benefit of their enemy, the king of Babylon, and of his kingdom, until his hour came, in which he had tormented and oppressed his intercessors so much that his kingdom deserved to come to an end. Thus we are also praying at the present time for our tyrants, until they, too, accumulate a debt to us with their murder and persecution and perish without mercy when their hour comes. Amen.

May this, therefore, be the first lesson and admonition in this psalm. A prince or lord should learn and know that devout servants, faithful workers, and a good administration are gifts of God, and great gifts. Let this be his noblest treasure if he has one, two, or three faithful men at court or in responsible positions—though that is a large number—and let him thank God for this with the prayer that He may preserve and improve such a treasure for him. For the world is very wicked, false, and untrue; as David says: “All men are false” ([Ps. 116:11](#)). This is especially so at the court, where everyone, or almost everyone, seeks not the prince's welfare but rather how he himself may get warm and fat, let the prince fare as God wills. A prince cannot look into anyone's heart, and his administration must remain in the dark; for he has to rule through people whom he does not know and manage with people whose attitude he cannot perceive. He fares just like a wagon that rolls on in the night and has to go whither it pleases, often without knowing where to go. When it aims to go this way, it turns that way. Sometimes it tips over, breaking rope, wheel, and everything. For Christ says: “He that walks in darkness does not know whither he is going” ([John 12:35](#)). But Christ's kingdom is not like that. He knows all hearts, and whoever wants to be unfaithful to Him deceives himself and does not harm his Lord. Rather the Lord can turn the wickedness of His servant to His own benefit and good. This cannot be done in a secular kingdom, where the hearts are concealed.

What the psalm calls “mercy and justice” is said not of the mercy and justice of God but of the mercy and justice which a prince practices toward his servants and his subjects. This manner of speech is also customary at court, where it is said that a prince or a lord is merciful, that he shows great mercy to this one or to that one. And justice is almost equivalent to punishment. Thus they say at court: “I will let justice take its course.” Again: “Do you want mercy or justice?” For when the princes offer justice, it is almost to the little button on which the shirt is hanging.¹³ Thus David is also speaking here in courtly or princely terms about mercy and justice, that is, benefit for the pious and punishment for the wicked. A prince and lord must use both of these. If there is only mercy and the prince lets everyone milk him and kick him in the teeth and does not punish or become angry, then not only the court but the land, too, will be filled with wicked rascals; all discipline and honor will come to an end. On the other hand, if there is only anger and punishment or too much of it, then tyranny will result, and the pious will be breathless in their daily fear and anxiety.

This is also what the heathen say on the basis of daily experience: “Strict justice is the greatest injustice.” The same may also be said of mercy: All mercy is much worse than no mercy at all. A father cannot do a more unfatherly thing for his child than to spare the rod and let the little child have its own way. With such stupid affection he is finally “raising” a son for the executioner, who afterwards will have to “raise” him in another way, namely, with a rope on the gallows. Moderation is good in all things. To achieve it is an art; indeed, it is a matter of God’s grace. But because such an ideal can hardly be attained, it is good to try to come the closest to it by giving mercy priority over justice. Hence David mentions mercy first and justice afterwards. Where the happy medium cannot be attained, it is better and safer to fall short on this side than on that; that is, too much mercy is better than too much punishment. One can withdraw and reduce too much mercy; but punishment cannot be taken back, especially where it touches body, life, or limb.

Neither can one punish all the evil on earth, especially secret and malicious vice, as it is said: “Whoever would like to avenge all evil could never put his sword into its sheath.” And the heathen say: “If God were to intervene with thunder and lightning as often as men sinned, He would run out of thunder and lightning.”¹⁴ It is sufficient to punish the public and deliberate deeds of wickedness. If God wants to punish secret scoundrels, He will very likely make it known. Nothing will remain unpunished anyway,

whether it be secret or manifest. We see every day how wondrously the secret evildoers, like thieves and murderers, finally fall into the hands of the executioner. This is God's judgment and punishment, besides the punishment which He Himself inflicts with water, fire, pestilence, and the like. If a prince or lord earnestly lets it be known that he will not tolerate any manifest evil deeds, and if he diligently strives for this and looks after it, it will be easy for him to prevent many wicked deeds; nevertheless he will still have to put up with the secret scoundrels until God Himself punishes them or gives them into his hands for punishment. It may also happen that one cannot punish a manifest act of wickedness right away, especially not in a hurry. Thus we read of David that during his own lifetime he did not punish his cousin Joab, who was his field commander, even though this man had committed two wicked deeds ([2 Sam. 3:27; 20:10](#)). David himself complains of Joab and even curses him because he treacherously murdered Abner and Amasa, the two field commanders who were more pious than he. Still he permitted him to keep his position and honor, but commanded his son Solomon to punish him afterwards ([1 Kings 2:6](#)). Similarly, Jacob did not punish his son Reuben until he was about to die. Then he cursed him and deprived him of the glory of the first-born, namely, the kingdom and the priesthood ([Gen. 49:3, 4](#)). A case may occur when one cannot punish a wicked rascal so soon without great harm and danger to others. All punishment should ultimately be directed toward the goal of terrifying and bettering the others, as SS. Peter ([1 Peter 2:14](#))¹⁵ and Paul ([Rom. 13:4](#)) teach, and of bringing peace and safety to the pious.

Yet it is not possible to say or to perceive when such danger and harm are at hand. God has to teach the prince or the lord himself to consider according to the best of his ability where, when, and with what rascal he should or must settle an account. If David had punished Joab hastily, when his kingdom was not yet established and was soon to be torn asunder through Absalom's revolt, he would probably have made the entire land restless and confused and would have deprived himself of the kingdom. And if Jacob had punished his son Reuben quickly, while he was a pilgrim and living among his enemies, very likely he, too, would have brought great misfortune upon himself. He is also angry because his two sons Levi and Simeon had slain Shechem ([Gen. 34:26](#)), and finally he also curses both of them ([Gen. 49:5–7](#)). In Siena, Italy, I heard the following statement made about Emperor Frederick: "We have learned many maxims from your emperor, especially this one: 'He who cannot close his eyes or close his ears is unable to rule.' "

They would have been happy to see him plunge in headlong and avenge the harm that had been done to them.

In other words, we must make a distinction in these matters. God has two kinds of people on earth in all walks of life. Some have a special star before God; these He teaches Himself and raises them up as He would have them. They are also the ones who have smooth sailing on earth and so-called good luck and success. Whatever they undertake prospers; and even if all the world were to work against it, it would still be accomplished without hindrance. For God, who puts it into their heart and stimulates their intelligence and courage, also puts it into their hands that it must come to pass and must be carried out; that was the case with Samson, David, Jehoiada, and others. He occasionally provides such men not only among His own people but also among the godless and the heathen; and not only in the ranks of the nobility but also among the middle classes, farmers, and laborers. For instance, in Persia He raised up King Cyrus; in Greece, the nobleman Themistocles and Alexander the Great; among the Romans, Augustus, Vespasian, and others. In Syria, too, He brought all success and prosperity through one man Naaman ([2 Kings 5:1](#)). I do not call such people trained or made but rather created; they are princes and lords directed by God.

Such people are so clever that they do not need much teaching or writing to show them what to do and how to do it. Before one teaches them what to do, they have already done it. They do, of course, need instruction from the Word of God to ascribe their success and great achievements to God, to give honor to Him from whom they receive it, and not to praise and glorify themselves. They do not do this without the Word of God, nor do they know how to do it; therefore it is also quite rare for them to have a happy end, as all historical records attest. Thus that hardy warrior Hannibal did not learn from anyone how to fight the Romans and how to beat them so terribly. He had the right master and scripture in his heart and did everything before anyone could teach him; he even acted contrary to the advice and teaching of all other wise people. And here I cite an example about which Cicero writes.¹⁶ When Hannibal had fled to the great Antiochus for help against the Romans and had been given a glorious reception there, a famous philosopher by the name of Phormio was present. Antiochus demanded of the philosopher that he give Hannibal an opportunity to hear him. So Phormio demonstrated his art and lectured for a number of hours about war and about commanders, how skilled they ought to be, and what was expected of a good

warrior. When all the others praised and admired this lecture very much, Antiochus asked Hannibal how it appealed to him. Hannibal said: “In my day I have seen many old dunces, but none so great as this Phormio.” Cicero praises this answer and says: “It is truly right. Over a long period of time Hannibal had repeatedly fought and beaten the Romans, who were the conquerors of the world. And now Phormio, who all his life had never seen an army or a weapon, wanted to teach him how to make war!”

Here the master is indeed no match for such a pupil. Even if Phormio had had the most excellent knowledge and experience about the nature of war and how it should be fought, even though he were called a master of the art, he should still not have treated Hannibal as a pupil, but should have taken off his biretta before him and said: “My dear doctor of military science.” Hannibal was not created to be a pupil in matters of military science; instead, others were to learn from him and to be his pupils, as one created by God Himself to be a master of this art and not to be trained or made by other people. Otherwise it would be, as the people say: “The egg teaches the chicken, the sow is God’s master, and Phormio equips Hannibal.” And yet the world is always full of such Phormios in all classes; they are called Master Smart Aleck, that infamous, dangerous man who can do everything better and still is not the man. And if a hundred others who had Hannibal’s strength, courage, people, art, equipment, and everything, and still more, had been put in his place, they would not have been able to do what Hannibal did—neither the entire group nor any individual. Similarly, no one else in Carthage, not even his own brother,¹⁷ was able to do it, either before or afterwards.

When David wanted to beat Goliath, they wanted to teach him; they put armor on him and equipped him (1 Sam. 17:38, 39). Yes, sir. But David could not wear this armor. He had another Master in mind, and he slew Goliath before they could know how he was to do it. For he was no apprentice either, trained in this craft; he was a master, created for it by God. Again, if the king of Syria had put in Naaman’s place a man who was much wiser and much more clever than seven Naamans, he would not have been able to manage so nicely and so well in Syria through such a person. Neither Syria nor the king had trained Naaman; according to the Scriptures, God brought success and prosperity to Syria through Naaman. He would not have done it through another, even as it is not written of any other. If a Phormio had also appeared in this instance and had wanted to teach this man Naaman how to manage and govern Syria, he would have been given a reception

similar to the one Hannibal gave the other Phormio. Therefore the German proverb says: “He is not the man.” Again: “The master is not at home.” House and home, land and possessions, are always at hand; but the heirs or masters and princes are not always alike. What one has gained, one’s successor loses. And then another successor wins it back, if God is willing to give it.

In our everyday life and experience we see parents leave their heirs great possessions, land as well as people, maintained and cared for in the best possible way. The heirs also exert great diligence and effort in order to preserve or to improve the inheritance. They even work harder than their parents did. Still the property dwindles and deteriorates in their hands, and all their toil and anxiety is in vain. Thus I myself have often heard parents say of their heirs: “Alas, our son will not make it.” Why not? It certainly is the same house, property, land, and heritage; and he is active and works hard. Of course. But the same man is no longer master in this house. The house changes with the master. “Another man, another fortune.” God’s miracles are not inherited; they do not belong to us, nor are they subject to us the way possessions, house, and home are. God wants to be free to give such extraordinary leaders, such jewels, when, where, and to whom He pleases.

Thus in all walks of life there are sometimes men more outstanding and skillful than all others. There will be a lad or an apprentice who learns more in one day than another learns in five years. One person can do a thing as soon as he looks at it; he undertakes it and is very successful, while another learns and toils a whole lifetime and yet can never do it as well. Mr. Fabian von Feilitzsch¹⁸ was no doctor of laws. But when he heard a case, he gave his advice directly and to the point, whereas another doctor probably would have looked through a thousand pages and still have had a hard time finding the right page. Why? He was not an educated jurist or a trained jurist but rather a born jurist. He did not need a Phormio to preach to him at length concerning laws that were keen or dull, straight or crooked.

The sainted Duke Frederick, Elector of Saxony,¹⁹ was created to be a wise prince, to rule and carry on his affairs in peace. In his time he was, as they say, a “light of the world” in the Roman Empire. As I found out afterwards from those who were about him, he had a special way of letting his advisers give counsel. He himself would take the position of the opponent, and he did it with such astuteness and intelligence that they could not argue against it. He had not learned this, nor was he trained for it; rather it was inherent in

him beforehand. And though a number of great people and many Phormios tried to seize the reins from him and would have liked to rule him, he put on his horns and did not let anyone who wanted to give him advice have his way. He also said that his advisers had often given him really good and wise counsel; still he had not accepted it but very deliberately opposed it. Why he did that he alone knew. But certainly God put it into his mind in this way, for he was created to be one of God's extraordinary leaders. If he had put things into the hands of others and let himself be guided, his luck and wisdom could well have been reversed. Through his smart advisers he might have reached the point where he would have had to smash a dish in order to pick up a spoon. Thus we read that Augustus wanted to delegate his imperial authority to others but was concerned that things might become worse and therefore kept it.²⁰ Wise counselors and smart people often propose to princes things that promise to be of great advantage, but they do not realize that the disadvantage behind such a small advantage is seven times as great. They certainly mean well. But they do not consider that God has higher thoughts than they, and they suppose that He must approve whatever they consider good and profitable.

I must say just a little more about him, for he was my dear lord and gave me my doctorate.²¹ On one occasion Dr. Hennig Goedde wanted to teach him how to manage his household. He said: "Most gracious Lord, why does Your Excellency let the fire be made with green wood and not with dry? That certainly is unwise!" "Dear doctor," he said, "what is wisdom in your house, that is rubbish in my house." That is the kind of man he was in all things. But in acting this way he did make and leave behind him a very large number of apish imitators. There were quite a few—I knew some of them, and some are still alive—who, when they saw that this was very becoming to Duke Frederick and made him famous, thought that they would follow his example. They wanted a reputation for wisdom, too, and began to veto everything that was proposed. It was supposed to be the highest wisdom that they let no one have his way. By acting thus they quickly wanted to be Duke Frederick. But they obviously had not been created a Duke Frederick; they only made themselves into a Duke Frederick. And so they remained nothing more than useless Phormios, who could do a lot of chattering and gossiping about wisdom, despite the fact that they were neither created nor trained for it. It is like the hypocrites, who make themselves pious through good works, even though men must be pious beforehand and then do good works. What a ludicrous sport this was! The bells on their neck and on their ears rang so loud they could be heard from miles away. What is more

ridiculous than for a monkey to try to do a man's work? What can be more stupid than that a stupid person should want to do the work of a clever man? It is as though a donkey wanted to play the harp and a sow wanted to spin because her paws are nimble and well qualified for it. The Greeks say: "Even if a monkey wore royal apparel, it would still remain a monkey."²²

But so things happen in the world: If God builds a church, the devil comes and builds a chapel beside it, yes, even countless chapels.²³ And so here: If God raises up an outstanding man, either among the spiritual or the secular authorities, the devil brings his monkeys and simpletons to market to imitate everything. And yet it all amounts to monkey business and tomfoolery. Scripture says that they are not the people through whom God wants to bring success and prosperity.²⁴

But these hopeless people, these troublesome fools, have nothing else in mind than to pretend to be what the really wise and generous people are, as though making such a pretense were all that is necessary. But honest people do not pretend to be wise or energetic; they are wise and energetic and they act accordingly. I saw one like that. He could do practically anything. If you talked of war, he had slain who knows how many Hannibals. If you spoke of justice and wisdom, he had fifteen Solomons in his mouth; but in his heart there was a whole swarm of fools. Nobody was anything; he was everything. Therefore they called him "Dr. Spear,"²⁵ because he was a nobleman and a horseman. His tribe has increased to such an extent that there are many Dr. Spears. Not only at the courts of kings and princes but also in the cities and out in the country, everyone wants to be Dr. Spear. And if he succeeds in getting authority, then he really puts his seal on everything, so that people must say: "Dr. Spear was here." When they are on the spot and in a pinch, it becomes evident that fellows like them are good for nothing. The cat lets the light drop and chases after the mouse.²⁶ Both of them disappear together, the doctor as well as the spear, except that he has to be called Dr. Spear. Alas! Where there is nothing inside, there nothing can come out.

Still it would be sufferable and tolerable if such apes and simpletons made fools of themselves only in minor matters like managing a household. But sometimes it affects land and people, kingdoms and principalities, and other great and important affairs, in war as well as in peace. Then if someone who is no more than a Phormio or a buffoon tries to be a Hannibal or a Naaman, if he aspires to deeds that he has not been made man enough for,

then there is the devil to pay, and wretchedness and all manner of misfortunes rise.

At present people are beginning to praise natural law and natural reason as the source from which all written law has come and issued.²⁷ This is true, of course, and the praise is well placed. But the trouble is, everyone likes to think that the natural law is encased in his head. Of course, if you were Naaman, Augustus, Duke Frederick, or Fabian von Feilitzsch, I would believe it. But what do you make of the fact that you are none of these? If Duke Frederick put his own words into your mouth and placed his thoughts in your heart, you would still not be anything else than you are. You would remain Phormio and a buffoon as you were before, and neither success nor prosperity ought to attend you. The heathen also are constrained by experience to write this way. If two people happen to be doing exactly the same kind of work, still it is said that the one is doing right while the other is doing wrong; for it depends on the person. If God wants a person to succeed, then he will succeed, even though he be as stupid as Claus Narr.²⁸ But if he is not the person or the man, then he will not succeed, even though there be nine Solomons sitting in his head and fifteen Samsons in his heart.

If the natural law and reason were inherent in all heads that resemble human heads, then fools and children and women would be just as capable of ruling and waging war as David, Augustus, and Hannibal. Then the Phormios would have to be just as good as the Hannibals. Then indeed all men would have to be alike, and none could rule over the others. What turmoil and desolation would come from that! But God has created things in such a way that men are not alike and that one should rule while the other should obey him. Two people can sing with each other; that is, they can both praise God together. But they cannot speak—that is, rule—with each other. One has to speak, the other must listen. Therefore it is also a fact that among those who presume to have natural reason or natural law, and boast of it, there are very many great and efficient natural fools. The noble gem called natural law and reason is a rare thing among the children of men.

For the present we shall not deal with these extraordinary people of God, nor with the devil's extraordinary people who try to imitate them. God's extraordinary people, the Davids and the Hannibals, are so constituted that in their regime they do not need your advice and mine; for they have a better Master, who creates them and directs them. Thus Aristotle says in

his *Politics* that such people are the masters and the law itself, and the very statutes attest that an emperor is the living law on earth.²⁹ The apes really ought to let them do the advising and speaking, and they could very well do so. But they refuse. Instead, they want to be like the really extraordinary leaders and do everything they do, since the devil rides and leads them. But the truly extraordinary people occasionally become presumptuous, too, and go too far in tempting fortune. Or when their time is up and God withdraws His hand because of their presumptuousness and ingratitude, they fall in such a way that no advice or reasoning can help any longer. Then they must perish, as Hannibal did. But they feel it very well, and their heart tells them in no uncertain terms when their fortunes are about to change or when they have gone too far with their boldness. So we will now look at those others who are not extraordinary leaders and are not led by God this way.

Here the question arises: Should one learn nothing from the wise and great people and not follow their good example? Why are such examples set before us, as the Scriptures do in the spiritual realm when they hold Christ and His saints before us as examples? We answer: Would that someone could do that! Certainly one should follow good examples in all walks of life, but in such a way that we do not become apes and engage in monkey business. The ape wants to imitate and follow all things, but the book of the wise tells what happens to him.³⁰ When he had seen a farmer splitting a large log, he, too, went and sat astride it and split the log with his ax. But as he was not wearing a supporter, his testicles fell into the crack of the log; and he forgot to insert a wedge into the log. So when he pulled the ax out, he crushed and squashed his testicles and remained castrated, or a eunuch, for the rest of his days. Still he had followed the farmers example. The same thing will happen to all who inopportunistly follow an example the way he did.

The rule is: Whoever wants to follow the example of another, should examine himself to see what he can do; for we are not all alike. If a person is so weak that he cannot walk very well, then it is no shame for him not to be able to keep up with a strong person. It is to his credit that he lets himself be guided and led or that he walks with a cane until he arrives as best he can and praises the strong person for running so far ahead of him. They say: “Whoever has no cement must build his wall with mud.” Still he is doing mason work, too, and following the cement mason’s example, though he does not build as well. And how can a sick person work or run like a strong person without damaging himself even more or even killing

himself? Therefore if Dr. Martin cannot write such good epistles as St. Paul did to the Romans, or cannot preach as well as St. Augustine did, then it is honorable for him to open the book, to beg a morsel, from St. Paul or from St. Augustine, and to follow the pattern of their preaching. If he cannot do it as well or if he cannot do it the same way they did, then he should consider that he is no St. Paul or Augustine. They are able to jump far ahead of him, and he must creep after them. And if Dr. Spear cannot be as wise or as intelligent as Duke Frederick or Fabian von Feilitzsch, then it would be well for him to go and let himself be taught or to read the law books. These were given by the heroes of wisdom for people of little understanding and for the intellectually weak to use as precept and example, that they might creep after the heroes, with whom they cannot keep up by running or jumping on their own. If Phormio does not know how to wage war as well as Hannibal does, then let him stay close to Hannibal and learn from him as much as his gifts enable him to learn. What he cannot attain he should leave to Hannibal, remembering that he is Phormio and not Hannibal.

But this is the devil and the plague in the world that in all things we are unlike one another—namely, in physical strength, size, beauty, possessions, face, color, etc.—but that in wisdom and success, in which we are the very most unlike one another, in these alone we all want to be alike. And what is perhaps worse: in these everyone wants to be above the other one, and particularly Dr. Spear and Master Phormio. They even dare to give instructions to the truly extraordinary people and to regard them as fools. No one can do anything right for the infamous fools and wiseacres; as Solomon says ([Prov. 26:16](#)): “A fool thinks that he is wiser than seven wise men who propose the law.” The poison of original sin comes to us by birth; it stems from the bite of the apple, whereby the devil made us shrewd and like God. This is the reason why fools do not want to be fools, and why Dr. Spear is the greatest doctor and Master Smart Aleck the greatest master on earth. They run the world. God plagues us with such people.

The heathen Plato writes that there are two kinds of justice—that which is just by nature and that which is just by law.³¹ I am going to call them the healthy law and the sick law. Whatever is done with nature’s power succeeds very smoothly without any law; in fact, it overrides all the laws. But if nature is missing and things must be done according to laws, that amounts to mere beggary and patchwork; and no more is achieved than is inherent in diseased nature. It is as if I set up a general rule that for a meal one should eat two rolls and drink a small glass of wine. If a healthy person comes to

the table, he may well consume four or six rolls and drink a decanter or two of wine; thus he requires more than the law stipulates. But if a sick person comes to the table, he will eat half a roll and drink three spoonfuls of wine. Thus he will observe no more of such a law than his sick condition permits, or he will die if he has to observe this law. Here it is better that I permit the healthy person to eat and to drink what he wants and as much as he wants without any law. For the sick person I stipulate an amount according to his ability so that he will not need to eat as much as the healthy person.

The world is indeed a sick thing; it is the kind of fur on which neither hide nor hair is any good. The healthy heroes are rare, and God provides them at a dear price. Still the world must be ruled, if men are not to become wild beasts. So things in the world in general remain mere patchwork and beggary; it is a veritable hospital, in which princes, lords, and all rulers lack wisdom and courage—that is, success and direction from God—even as the sick person lacks strength and power. So here one must patch and darn and help oneself with the laws, sayings, and examples of the heroes as they are recorded in books. Thus we must continue to be disciples of those speechless masters which we call books. Yet we never do it as well as it is written there; we crawl after it and cling to it as to a bench or to a cane. In addition, we also follow the advice of the best people who live in our midst, until the time comes in which God again provides a healthy hero or a wondrous man, in whose hand all things improve or at least fare better than is written in any book. Either he changes the law, or he overrules it in such a way that all things flourish and prosper in the land with peace and discipline, protection and punishment. Thus you have what may be called a wholesome regime. Moreover during his lifetime he is feared and honored and loved in the highest degree; and after his death he is eternally praised. But if a sickly or inferior person tries to imitate such a one and to be like him or better than he, then God certainly sent that person as a plague for the world, as the heathen also write: “The children of heroes are nothing but plagues.”³²

What is the use of great and noble wisdom and of the sincerest and best advice or opinion if these are not the thoughts which God directs and to which He gives success? They are all faulty thoughts and futile opinions; indeed, they are even harmful and destructive. Therefore it has been very well stated: “The learned are the turned.” Again: “A wise man never commits a small folly.” All the historical records, even those of the heathen, attest that wise and well-meaning persons have ruined land and people. All

this is said of the self-wise or sick rulers whom God did not direct and to whom He gave no success, but who still wanted to be leaders. Thus the burden of government has been too great an assignment for them, and they have not been able to do justice to it or carry it out. They have been crushed under it and have perished, as did Cicero, Demosthenes, Brutus, et al. These certainly were immeasurably wise and intelligent people, who indeed were considered to be great lights in natural law and reason; yet they finally had to sing that wretched lament: “I did not plan it this way.”³³ Yes, sir, a good plan ruins many a man. To summarize: It is a great gift if God gives an extraordinary leader whom He Himself rules. This person may honorably be called king, prince, and lord, whether he be a lord himself, like David or Augustus, or an adviser at court, like Naaman in Syria.

Therefore Solomon also says ([Eccl. 9:11](#)): “The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong ... nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill. All things depend on time and fortune.” This is merely another way of saying: “Wisdom may be at hand, great intelligence may be there, too, fine thoughts and clever schemes may even be present; but if God does not give them and direct them, these will avail nothing, and everything will go backwards.”

Enough has been said for this one time concerning the first verse of this psalm, in which David praises and thanks God for his good government and administration. He thereby concedes that he has not established and maintained it through his own great intelligence and astute thinking but rather through the co-operation and direction of God, who provided all the inspiration and encouraged and blessed him with success and happiness. As it has been said, all princes and rulers should learn from this that it is not to their credit if they rule well, but to His who gives them such success and blessing. They should learn not to let Dr. Spear and Master Smart Aleck make apes and fools of them, but to trust in God and call upon Him, that He may guide and direct their hearts toward a successful administration. Especially they should ask God not to withdraw His hand or to let them carry on by themselves through their own shrewdness and clever schemes, or to venture boldly into something that is too high for them; for that does not make for stability, and the end thereof will be foul and unsavory.

2. I act discreetly and uprightly toward those who are under me and walk faithfully within my house.

In these three successive verses (2–4) he shows how he has run and managed his kingdom in spiritual matters, namely, in the Word and service of God. The other four verses show how he ruled in secular affairs. This is the whole psalm. First of all he says: “I act discreetly and uprightly toward those who are under me and walk faithfully within my house.” It is as if he were saying: “O Lord God, it is not my intelligence or wisdom which enables me to rule my kingdom and my house in such a good and proper way and to treat my people so uprightly and justly. It is Thy blessing and work.” Here he points out two things which, as an extraordinary leader, he is able to do personally.

First, he rules his kingdom discreetly and uprightly and keeps it close to the Word of God. Thus we read (2 Sam. 6:2 ff.) how earnestly and with all his heart David restored divine worship and set up the ark again. “At Saul’s time,” he says, “we did not ask for or seek the ark” (1 Chron. 13:3). It is as if he said: “Under Saul divine worship had fallen by the way, and the ark lay in the dust.” But now he restores them and gathers all Israel around them. Furthermore, he wanted to have the temple built, but God commanded his son to do it (2 Sam. 7:2 ff.). Still he established many divine services and prepared psalms and instrumental music for the praise of God. Finally, he also prides himself elsewhere in the Psalter (Ps. 60:6; Ps. 108:7): “God speaks in His sanctuary”; that is: “In my kingdom I have the true and pure Word of God and unimpeachable, sound doctrine. I do not establish or maintain idolatry, factions, divisions, or other kinds of false teachers.”

This is what he means when he says: “I act discreetly and uprightly toward those who are under me.” “Discreetly,” that is, according to God’s Word. This word [שָׁרָר] is also used in Psalm 2:10: “And now, you kings, be wise”; that is: “Let yourselves be instructed. Hear God’s Word. Then you will rule blessedly and happily.” So also here: “I act discreetly”; that is: “I let God’s Word guide me. Therefore my regime is also a prudent and successful one. Uprightly, that is, blamelessly and purely: I did not permit any false article of faith to be included.” For this is what this word תָּמִים means: “without flaw, without spot; clean, pure, unspoiled.” This is certainly something that we may praise and hold up as an example for all kings, princes, and lords, a truly miraculous achievement which they should emulate as far as each one can. To imitate David in this or to do it as well as he did calls for no ordinary kings or lords. This takes God’s extraordinary leaders, into whose hearts and minds He puts it, that they may

earnestly undertake it and also carry it out. Such earnestness and such deeds are not inherent in reason or in natural law. If kings and princes follow nature and the highest wisdom, they must all become God's enemies and persecute His Word, as [Psalm 2](#) says: "Why do the heathen rage, and the kings rebel against the Lord and against His Christ?" All the annals of all the kingdoms demonstrate this, so that even in the kingdom of Judah only about three kings³⁴ are given really great praise; David is the only example held up as a model for them all. All the rest of them ruled with idols and false prophets; they persecuted the true prophets and murdered them and condemned God's Word.

Therefore it is no wonder that worldly kings, princes, and lords are enemies of God and persecute His Word. This is the natural thing for them; they are born that way. It is a natural and innate characteristic of reason that it has neither grace nor intelligence to think or to act otherwise. Therefore [Psalm 2](#) paints that kind of color on their helmets and shields, calling them adversaries of God and of His Christ. And we see that what happens in the world is just what is written in that psalm. But if there are some among the kings, princes, and nobles who seriously—yes, I say seriously—concern themselves about God and His Word, you may well regard such as extraordinary leaders from God and call them a rare dish in the kingdom of heaven. They do not do this by virtue of their reason or noble wisdom. God touches their hearts and directs them in a special way so that they do not resist Him the way other kings and lords do. Instead they follow David's example and promote the cause of His Word, to the extent that God gives them the ability and help.

If reason or a high degree of intelligence were sufficient for such extraordinary work, then our kings and princes and lords in the German lands would long since have taken a different attitude toward the Word of God. For there is no shortage of great intelligence. God's Word is presented so powerfully, lucidly, and clearly in preaching, singing, speaking, writing, and painting³⁵ that they must concede it is the true Word of God. All they can say against it is that it was not begun by them or determined in a council. So now they are calling it not heresy but rather novelty and impropriety. Of what help is their high degree of intelligence here? Of what help is it that they know and see that it is right? Indeed, if that helped, then they certainly would have surpassed David by far during these ten years, for he never had it so powerful and clear. What is missing is the fact that God did not choose them to be such extraordinary leaders and to do such miracles by His Word

and in His service. Therefore He lets them remain undiscriminated within the common mass of other kings and princes, who, as [Psalm 2:2](#) says, persecute God and His Christ. Thus Solomon also says ([Eccl. 7:13](#)), “Consider the works of God, that no one can improve him whom He despises.” But that still does not excuse them. If they did not possess the grace to do miracles in the service of God, they ought to do as much as they could, or at least not oppose such work or persecute it. What did Pope Julius say? “If we do not want to be devout ourselves, let us at least not prevent other people from being devout.”

David surely began his little song on a very high note when he sang that he ruled shrewdly and irreproachably. Who can know or comprehend how much resistance he must have encountered in this and what great hatred he must have incurred for himself? Certainly it did not please all great and wealthy people when he abolished all idolatry and offense and restricted everyone to the one pure divine service. Certainly they also praised their old noses as the best ones, and they were unwilling to give up the customs and practices of their forefathers or to have them changed. If there ever was a people on earth that clung firmly and steadfastly to idolatry, then it was the people of David, namely, the Jews. In the history of David one can also detect the fact that many people were secretly and immeasurably hostile toward him. As the opportunity presented itself, they did their very best to smite, chase, and torment him, and to harm him in every way. Still he finished singing his song and ventured everything with God and His Word. Therefore, as an example to all kings, he can sing with all honor: “I act discreetly and uprightly toward those who are under me.” Thus he observes the finest order, according to the teaching of Christ ([Matt. 6:33](#)): “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things shall be yours as well.” But this takes a man who will dare to take hold of it under the direction and guidance of God.

2b. And walk faithfully within my house.

Secondly, in addition to ruling his kingdom in such a godly way, he also trained his household the same way in the Word of God, that he might not (as St. Paul says [1 Cor. 9:27](#)) teach others and himself become punishable. The apostle very earnestly enjoins the bishops, that is, the ministers and preachers, first of all to rule their own households well, to have chaste and quiet spouses, obedient and pious children; otherwise they may offend the Christians more through their home life than they can improve them with

their preaching. He straightway concludes as follows ([1 Tim. 3:5](#)): “How can they take good care of the church, when they do a poor job of managing their own homes?” There is no other way of doing it. Whoever is serious about his task of faithfully serving the church and punishing sin surely cannot permit his household, wife, or children to live wantonly and wickedly. If he lets his own household live without discipline according to its own will, then he certainly will not be greatly concerned about the church or about other people. Thus he is no longer a minister or a preacher but a wolf and an accomplice of the devil. He makes way for the devil and lets him do as he pleases, both at home and in the churches, even as the pope, bishops, and priests have done and are still doing.

If, therefore, a king or a prince can tolerate blasphemers or despisers and enemies of God’s Word at his court or in public office, can let them engage openly in evil scandalous business at will, and can let them do violence and injustice to people, without punishing and resisting them wherever and however he can, what will it profit such a one if he energetically urges people throughout his land to promote the worship of God and to honor Him and His Word? One certainly will say of him ([Luke 4:23](#)): “Physician, help yourself”; and in German: “Hans, take yourself by the nose.” People pay more attention to his court and to his personnel and officials than to his orders; they follow the example of his household more than his own bidding, and they excuse themselves by contrasting his example with his own commandment. Thus it happens that what he builds with his hands he tramples down and smashes with his feet. It is well to note how David fared in this respect. The young noblemen and court officials want to be free. They would rather be lords in the land themselves, and they are lords if a David is not ruling. When they are constrained to do something that they do not want to do, they know how to hide and lie in wait until they see their opportunity. For a time they can also conceal their envious eyes and deceitful faces very well. For a long time that rascal Ahithophel was David’s closest and best adviser. But finally he helped greatly to trample him under foot, and soon thereafter he paid himself off and hanged himself with his own hands ([2 Sam. 17:23](#)).

Thus a margrave at Meissen said: “A lord does not need to be afraid of those who are far away from him, but of those who are almost stepping on his feet; for these are the ones who would just as soon step on his head, too.” This is the truth: if God wants to be good to a prince or a country, He gives

him a fine Joseph or a Naaman to be near him, through whom all things fare well and prosper, as Sirach ([Ecclus. 10:5](#)) also says.

But if He wants to do evil to a prince, He also gives pious David an Ahithophel to be at his side and at his heels, who can demean himself in such a way—as the Scriptures say of Ahithophel, [2 Sam. 16:23](#)—as if God were speaking through him, and temporarily deceive even pious David. Thus it is very difficult at court to recognize and control the big masks of the devil. If things are to go well, God Himself must guide the prince against all the cringing courtiers or provide a devout Joseph, in whom the prince's confidence will not fail. Otherwise matters certainly will not take their course without damage both to the prince and to his people.

Who can describe the treachery and the wickedness of honorable courtiers and public officials? And even if one could tell about all of it and describe it in the greatest detail, what good would that do? They will not become better thereby but much worse, as the Jews became worse through the good sermons of Christ. A devout householder or citizen cannot set a wicked servant or housemaid right; that is, he cannot make a little rascal pious. He must tolerate the fact that when he wants to punish one evil, the rogue does him two greater evils, especially where the government is negligent and lax. How, then, will a prince or a lord be able to make such great and numerous scoundrels pious at his court and in his land, especially where these are so intent upon being free and powerful that they even put together a secret Catherine or Kate against their lord? It may indeed be said of such a lord that he is tied to a beautiful iron virgin named Kate.³⁶ A householder goes on foot and often bumps into a piece of wood or a stone; but he gets up again, even though he limps a little. But a prince and lord is a big operator. He rides big and expensive stallions that want to be filled with the best of fodder. These prefer to have along, free rein. They cannot tolerate spurs. They want to walk crossways on the road. They like to strike about them and lick and bite. They want to be highly honored and feared under the saddle and finery of their lord. Finally, when they get into an unruly mood, they deposit the master on the pavement, so that land and people have occasion to be refreshed and cooled at his expense.³⁷ I shall gladly leave the disciplining and training of these stallions to someone else. Let the devil skin such a rabbit head, for that kind of game calls for that kind of hunter.

Therefore if one of these two things does not occur—either that God gives grace to the subordinates so that they themselves are willing to be pious

Josephs and Naamans on whom the lord may rely, or that God gives the lord the fear-inspiring, stern, and strict spirit of a hero, to be about half a Matthias³⁸ or tyrant and trust no one for anything—then it is necessary to patch and darn as much as possible. In addition, patience is necessary and the realization that God is not at home, that He has withdrawn His grace from such a land in order to punish its sin, and that such punishment is better than a worse one. It simply cannot be otherwise, as we can see from the many examples in the Books of Kings. What could Samuel do when King Saul let Doeg and many others mislead him to do great harm (1 Sam. 22:18)? And under pious King Zedekiah, Jeremiah also had to witness all the wretched things which the members of the court engaged in, until God visited them with punishment. It is generally the very greatest headache for the kings and princes, especially for the devout ones, that they must not only tolerate unfaithful, false, and wicked rascals among the greatest people in the land, but that they must also place them in their positions and make them great, as David did for Ahithophel and Solomon for Eder Eser.³⁹ In their big household they fare like the citizens in a small household, in which one must put up with having a thief and a rascal as a servant, and a harlot and thief as a maid.

I have often heard it said of Emperor Frederick the Third⁴⁰ that the princes in the empire were not pleased with his administration and that they complained because he let the soup waiter run the court. To this he answered on one occasion: “Yes, but there certainly is not one among them who does not have a soup waiter at his court, too.” From this and many other incidents one can see that Emperor Frederick certainly was not lacking in wisdom, shrewdness, and power; but the courage and inspiration to act were not given him by God. Had he been a Matthias, he would have kicked soup waiters together with breakfast waiters and supper waiters onto one heap and still would have succeeded. Therefore, because he was not the extraordinary man who could make a new fur, he had to patch and darn on the old bad fur as much as he could, letting the rest go and leaving it up to God. A little earlier, Emperor Sigismund⁴¹ was not much better. He was a fine, highly intelligent, devout, and thorough man, in whom there was no lack either of brains and power. But he was too small for the things of his day, in thoughts as well as in luck. Therefore Solomon says (Prov. 16:1, 2): “Man makes preparations in the heart, but the answer of the tongue comes from God. Every man thinks that his own ways are pure, but the Lord alone makes the heart certain.” Such passages are great, exquisite, and really kingly in their criticism of meddlers and haughty folk.

“The proposal is good,” he says, “and the way is clean, right, and delightfully good.” Bah! Then let us get it done in a hurry, because it looks so very good to us. “Yes,” he says, “it is truly well conceived, and it would be good if it came out that way. But the fact remains that God must also be in on it, not only to teach the tongue how to speak and counsel but also to show how heart and spirit are to accomplish the matter with certainty and dispatch that it may prosper well. If He is not in on it, then the fine clean way and the good proposal are nothing at all. Then you cannot speak of the matter properly with your tongue or think of it properly in your heart. Then the beautiful way follows the backward walk of the crab, and the result of the fine proposal is disgraceful folly and hurtful decay for both the lord and his subjects. And it serves them right, for they want to do that for which they were not created by God: they want to jump even though they cannot walk; they want to pay out money from an empty purse and perform similar tricks.”

And so this section, too, in which David sings about godly house-holding, should be regarded as a miraculous work, which God gave him to do and which was beyond all his great intelligence and ability. It should be an example for all other lords to follow, everyone to the best of his ability—except that no one should presume to do a better job of it than David. No one should try to sing such a song in a higher key, for he will surely become hoarse and make a botch of it before he reaches five notes. The Germans also say:

Let an evil accident befall the man
Who wants to do better than he can.

And that is how it works out. It is a fact that they do fall miserably if they overdo it. They do experience a truly evil accident, so that it would be better for them to hop over two steps than to take such a fall. And the heathen say: “Neither do nor attempt anything contrary to Minerva’s will.”⁴² And again: “No one can successfully attempt what is impossible for nature”; or “Let that lie which you are unable to lift.” For they know from experience that there never has been a man of great deeds or an extraordinary man without a special inspiration from God, even though there have always been men who were powerful, very wise, and highly intelligent. Jeremiah also writes that God stirred up and directed the spirit of the Medes and the Persians against Babylon ([Jer. 51:11](#)).

These words “toward those who are under me,” read as follows in Hebrew: מִתִּי תְּבוֹא אֵלַי. The strict rabbis probably will not approve of my reproducing these words so freely in German. But for me the proper understanding is better than their contentious letter. I say this that they may not think I did it in ignorance, or without knowing better. David means to say: “What comes in to me, or as long as it comes in to me; that is, what belongs to me.” Here again a wonderful virtue of David is touched upon, which says: “Pay attention to that which is yours and to what you have been commanded to do.” For there is a common vice and a harmful bad habit in all the world, in all walks of life. When it comes to court, it is not good for much. It is called in Greek πολυπραγμοσύνη: having much to do where nothing has been commanded, and leaving things undone where much has been commanded. The Latins call it “being smart in public and stupid in private.” I call it slothfulness. It is one of the fruits of original sin; we are born with it by nature, and it clings to us. Soon each one gets tired of that which he has been ordered to do. He reaches out and dabbles in other affairs, which he would do better to leave alone and which he has not been ordered to do. He wants to be shrewd and busy in matters that do not concern him. Quicksilver is unstable; it does not stay where you want it. So also these people. What they are supposed to do they cannot do; but what they choose themselves, that they must do.

To begin at the top, the pope, the bishops, and the entire papacy ought to look after the Gospel and after souls. But they have this lazy rascal in their system; and so they must rule in worldly affairs instead, wage war, and seek after temporal wealth, which, in their shrewdness, they are happy to do. Again, secular monarchs ought to look after their administration; but instead of that they must stand in church, listen to Mass, and be altogether spiritual. Thus even now they are dabbling in matters of the Gospel and, following the pope’s example, are forbidding what God has commanded, as, for instance, both kinds in the Sacrament, Christian freedom, and marriage.⁴³ The results of this virtue are usually in evidence at the imperial diets, too; thus the essential matters are postponed, prevented, or often simply omitted. So if a David or an extraordinary leader is not in control at court, it is sure to happen that Master Lazybones will be very shrewd and will have much to do where he has been given no commands. That, however, which he has been commanded to do will be a stench to him; he will loathe it, he will simply be unable to look after it. Thus he will also help to confuse and hinder all the others with his meddling. Things do not suit him in the kitchen, in the

cellar, in the chancellery, or in the council chambers. In the meantime he neglects to obey his own orders, and nothing is done.

There is not very much harm in giving other people good advice wherever possible. In fact, one ought to praise such people who first of all do their own job well and thereafter give good advice to others, especially where it is desired and there is an obvious need for it. But Mr. Lazybones pays no attention to what he has been commanded to do. With great shrewdness he concerns himself with other matters, in which his service is neither needed nor commanded; or else his great laziness moves him meanwhile to do something else that appeals to him. Oh, he is a useful guest among the Christians too. He comes into their midst and teaches the ministers to pray or to do something easier, when they ought to be studying and preaching. Or he urges the laymen to perform outward ceremonies and to defer faith and love; as Christ says: “They give tithes of mint and dill, and omit the weightier things of the Law” ([Matt. 23:23](#)). The same thing happens in a household when servants and housemaids do what seems good to them, but put off doing what they are told; and still they think they have done well. They are a fine adornment for a house, a very useful and charming staff of servants! They remind me of the story about the servant with the three blackbirds. When his master sends him out to look for the lost cows, he stays away so long that his master runs after him to see what is keeping him. As soon as he gets quite close to him, he asks the servant: “Did you find the cows?” “No,” says the servant, “but I have found something better.” “What did you find?” The servant answers: “Three blackbirds!” “Where do you have them?” The servant says: “I see one, I hear another, and I am chasing the third.” What a wise and diligent servant! A householder really ought to get rich with such help!

This is also the place to speak of those people of whom it is said: “They pick up a spoon and smash a dish.” Where much property is involved, as at the courts of kings and princes, it makes a great impression if one dips in with a spoon and comes out with a scoop. When they have gained a gulden for the king, all ears and eyes must be focused on that gulden, to show what great wisdom was involved in getting it. But no rooster crows about the many thousands of guildens that were slothfully squandered in the meantime. But there is no place where this rascal is so clever as he is among soldiers. They stand around with their mouths open and do not watch diligently over their own positions. Then they get a very sound thrashing, and afterwards they are obliged to say: “Look, I would not have expected that.” But who

can paint all the pictures of this rogue, who rules with great power in all places where masters and housefathers themselves do not look after things very carefully?

Therefore David says here: “I am concerned about what is mine and look after those who are about me. Other kings should also be that solicitous about their own, so that if I venture to be too shrewdly and busily occupied among strangers, I may not meanwhile neglect myself and those who are mine.” And David may well be thankful for such a virtue. For it is indeed a very lovely thing and a special gift of God to be a good, diligent man who carefully looks after his own things and really pays serious attention to them, especially to God’s Word, without letting extraneous matters lead him astray. Obedience is the crown and glory of all virtues; but if slothfulness is mingled with it, then mildew, or, as Isaiah calls it, corrosive rain ([Prov. 28:3](#)), has spoiled it. Then people become nothing but quacks, bunglers, and busybodies, who neglect much and cannot do anything for anyone out of love or gratitude. Therefore St. Paul also teaches ministers and bishops ([2 Tim. 2:4](#)) that a servant of Christ should not meddle in the secular government; but rather, as he says [Romans 12:7](#), let him that is a teacher pay attention to teaching, and let him not be hindered in it by some other or better thing. He saw very well that in the future the bishops would leave the office of the ministry and seek after that which was worldly. And when Christ was asked by someone to see to it that his brother would share equally with him, He said: “Man, who has made Me a judge?” ([Luke 12:14](#).) It is as if He said: “Do not bother Me with such a matter. Go to those who are bidden to do such things. I am a Preacher, and I am commissioned to do other things.”

3. I undertake no wicked thing, I hate the lawbreaker and will not let him abide with me.

Thus far he has thanked God for giving him grace to believe aright and to serve God, both in his kingdom and in his house. He is grateful for the fact that he has not introduced any idolatry or false doctrine or false worship, but that he has done what was good and well-pleasing before God. Here he praises and thanks God for bestowing upon him the other gift as well, for enabling him to be on his guard and to defend himself against an evil and false service of God and thus to remain steadfast and firm in the good and true faith. Where God establishes His Word and service, there the devil takes no holiday, but seeks to destroy or at least to hinder. Therefore it is not enough to begin well and to do right. It is also necessary to remain steadfast

and not to let oneself be torn or lured away. As Christ says ([Matt. 24:13](#)): “He who endures to the end will be saved.” “It is no less a virtue to safeguard a thing than it is to acquire it.”⁴⁴ The same thing applies in secular affairs:

What a man cannot guard
He will not keep in his back yard.

What good will it do to win much but not to be able to defend it or to hold it against enemies? Similarly, what good will it do to start aright and get God’s Word, faith, and service and then not to be able to abide by it or to hold it against the devil but to let every manner of wind drive you away from it? As St. Paul says ([Eph. 4:14](#)): “Let us grow and become strong in Christ, that we be not tossed about like children with every wind of doctrine.”

So now he says: “I undertake no wicked thing.” For “wicked thing” the Hebrew has: “a word or thing of Belial.” Some take בְּלִיעַל to be the name of the devil; and the Scriptures do often refer to “the children of Belial,”⁴⁵ that is, wicked rascals, bad people, who are obedient neither to God nor to man. I hold that when St. Paul in [2 Thessalonians 2:8](#) calls the Antichrist ἄνομος, i.e., wicked one, he means this word “Belial.” For “Belial” as used by the Hebrews means “one without a yoke,” the one who will not be subject, just as the Antichrist exalts himself and places himself over everything that is called God. The devil does likewise. Therefore it is fitting that at this point David thanks God for the fact that he has also guarded himself against every Belial and that he has not let himself be turned aside or lured away from his true faith and the good conduct to which he has been directed by God’s Word. Now it is indeed a great thing to continue steadfastly on the right way against all the devil’s chapels, offense, devious paths, superstition, and false doctrines. On every hand false doctrine and the preaching of lies has the most beautiful appearance. It has the greatest and most numerous following among those who are powerful, wise, rich, and holy on earth. The right way, on the other hand, is despised and has no following; it must even stand for being called “heresy” and “devil’s teaching.” Belial alone is the best devil, who can disguise himself as an angel of light ([2 Cor. 11:14](#)) and can turn God’s Word into darkness in the hearts of men.

Thus it is clearly discernible in David’s psalms how diligently he guarded himself and warned others. For instance, [Psalm 1:1](#): “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly.” For this purpose he

also composed especially [Psalm 119](#), which is read in convents and monasteries at the first, third, sixth, and ninth hours. It is as if he said: “It is a great thing for a person to have the true doctrine of God and a desire to hear His Word. But it is just as great for a person to be able to continue in it and to keep it pure and fine against Belial and his servants, who are always opposing it.” As St. Peter warns us ([1 Peter 5:8, 9](#)): “Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith.” Here you hear that there must not be a milk faith, which merely begins to serve God, but a firm faith, which can resist Belial and his wicked works. Undoubtedly at the beginning of his reign David found many wrongs and abuses among his people, which had set in previously under Saul and had continued. He really had his hands full with these and experienced stout opposition, for he complained often and pitifully in the Psalter about the false teachers.

As we have said, Belial not only lures people from the right way by giving lies a great and glorious appearance and giving a despised and wretched appearance to the truth. He also drives them away from it through the power of tyrants. Thus body, property, and honor are in danger; and cross and suffering, hatred and persecution, are always present. Meanwhile the false saints are entirely free, as secure and happy as dear children. Furthermore, good friends and kinsmen also exert an influence with their faithful counsel and good opinion, in addition to the example of the large group of the powerful, the rich, and the wise in the world. Thus the weakness of our own flesh and the old Adam are also in the picture, so that on every hand it becomes difficult and laborious to remain steadfast and to await the end. That is why the Holy Spirit has so much work to do and comforts His own, as, for instance, in [Psalm 27:14](#) and [Psalm 31:24](#): “Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the Lord.” And Sirach says ([Ecclus. 2:1, 2](#)): “Dear son, if you want to serve God, prepare your heart for temptation, hold fast, and do not let yourself be lured or frightened away from it.”

While this is a great miracle that he remains steadfast and firm himself in God’s Word and service against all manner of offense, and keeps himself pure in the face of everything that the devil and his sects hurl against him, still it is even greater that he also prides himself on hating the lawbreaker. He means: “I do not only hold fast to the Word and service of God for myself and for my person; but wherever I notice that one of my subordinates or of

those who belong to my household transgresses and speaks or does otherwise than God commands, I am hostile to him.” And that is what actually happened. He had many a fine man whom he otherwise loved and esteemed for being so helpful and essential to him in his house and in his kingdom. The godless often receive much better and nobler gifts and skills from God in secular affairs, so that they are almost indispensable at home or in the government; in fact, the pious are not even pupils in comparison with them. Such a one was Ahithophel; at that time he far surpassed all the skilled and wise people in David’s kingdom, so that his proposals were regarded (as the text says [2 Sam. 16:23](#)) as if God Himself had proposed the things that he suggested. And yet he was an archrascal, traitor, and rogue at heart, and afterwards also in deed. Therefore David, exiled through his advice, feared no one so much, and prayed against him and said: “O Lord, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into folly” ([2 Sam. 15:31](#)).

To hate such useful, wise, and capable people, who do so much good in the kingdom and the home and have acquitted themselves so well but still are godless, wicked rascals, and nevertheless to tolerate them for God’s sake—that takes a man who can do more than eat bread. For it appears that if they were not there, the kingdom would fall and not a single rafter would remain on the house. Therefore if a lord or householder is to hate and yet tolerate such useful servants, he must truly have the heart of a lion and be a remarkable man in God. He must be able to place his kingdom and house in jeopardy and to rely confidently on God alone and say: “Now, then, before I would tolerate the enemy of my God in my kingdom or house, I would rather let everything be ruined and figure this way: He who gave me this kingdom or house can very well give me another and still more.” When God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, the son of promise, Abraham must have thought that God would awaken this same Isaac from death ([Heb. 11:19](#)).

For that is the way things go in the world, especially at the courts of princes. There are few Josephs or Naamans, but many Ahithophels and Zibas ([2 Sam. 16](#)). They do as that abbot said when his humble brethren bowed very low before him: “They do not mean me. They are looking at the keys on my belt.” Thus there are many serving at court and doing very much good, but not for the lord’s sake. They have the keys in mind; they want to capture the lord and break his hold on them, so that afterwards the lord will have no good right or authority either to hate or to tolerate them. But if he

does so anyway, then the calendar and record is full of all the virtuous things—more than there are days in the year—which they have done in the kingdom and the house. They throw mud and dirt at their lord; they spit at him and say: “Ugh! Who wants to serve such a master, on whom all faithfulness and service is lost?” They also compose verses and rhymes, which they write on the walls:

My dear smock, do not tear!
You serve a lord who doesn’t care.

Or: “April weather!”⁴⁶

But if the master does not hate them, then he must put up with such mischief from them toward God and toward his subjects that he cannot be responsible for it. And still he has to go on saying: “Yes, Master Ahithophel, you are pious.” But they go their way freely, almost as if they had done well. Though they know it very well and feel it in their hearts, they do not consider that they are the kind of rascals and scoundrels who not only earned no grace by their evil works, but even earned utter disgrace by their good works. They also rejoice secretly because they have made such a consummate fool out of dear David, as that disgraceful Ahithophel did. Thus a pious king and lord is indeed a wretched man, for whom one really ought to pray. If there was something over which David could not achieve mastery, let no prince or lord who wants to please God get the mistaken idea that he will fare any better.

For such a great king as David it would indeed have been a simple virtue to hate a farmer at Tekoa or at Gilo. But to hate the lords at Jerusalem and in his court of Zion, that is reaching too high, even for David himself. But he is something more than David of Bethlehem. He is a hero and an extraordinary man. He tears right through; he lets God rule and be his Lord. Even if he should lose a hundred Ahithophels, he would still prefer to keep his Lord and God, who is called almighty and can create and give many, many kingdoms. Of these kingdoms he certainly would not earn a single one by tolerating his wicked rascals, even if he lifted them up into heaven with his own hands.

There is another shameful practice that goes on in the world and at court. Many a fine man often serves faithfully and well and afterwards is left out or even put out in a pitiful way. He is replaced by some scoundrel, who takes everything that the first one earned, though on his own he would not even be able to lure a dog away from the stove. On this, Jesus Sirach has a

powerful passage ([Ecclus. 26:25–27](#)): “There are two things that annoy me, and the third makes me angry: if one finally permits a valiant man to suffer poverty, if one finally despises the wise counselors, and if one departs from the true faith.” If such things did not occur at court, how would Sirach have known about them or been able to refer to them? That is how the worst rascals on the face of the earth behave. All they can do is to spit and wash and fill the ears of a king or a prince until he practically becomes deaf to his faithful servant. They are like the bumblebees, those useless, lazy, and gluttonous insects; they are unable to make any honey, but they devour everything that the good little bees make. Still they buzz and hum and hiss with their wings just as much as, or even more than, the good and useful bees.

Thus the heathen Terence⁴⁷ also says (not, however, out of his own head but on the basis of the word and example of great men and wise people): “Truly, anyone as clever as you can easily acquire for himself all the honor that other, respectable people have earned for a dear price.” He says this mockingly of a big uncouth fool and filthy rogue by the name of Thraso, who would have been good or useful for nothing except to support a dike or fill a ditch with, even though such honor would have been too great for him. And yet he engaged in such big talk and chatter as though he alone were it and there could be none like him on earth. But that’s the way it goes. If God Himself does not graciously clean house, the world must suffer such people as a veritable pestilence, like boils, syphilis, fever, and other misfortunes of the devil, until the hour comes when it finally stops. For God is still Judge upon the earth, as [Psalm 58:11](#) says; and what is not right will continue to fail until the Last Day, when all things will simultaneously and everlastingly come to an end. In the meantime we must suffer the louse to fatten itself on the mange and to walk with stilts on the old fur.

But where there are godless kings and lords, who, according to [Psalm 2](#), are enemies of God and of His Christ, there you have a nice mess. There no one is more welcome and better off at court than those transgressors of whom Solomon says ([Prov. 29:12](#)): “If a lord has pleasure in lies, all wicked people will be his servants.” Wicked lords also need and want such servants, and they are fond of running to such lords and insinuating themselves to become rich and help drive away the pious or even murder them. Solomon uses the word “lies,” as it is often used in the Scriptures, to refer to idolatry, false service of God, false doctrine; as in [Psalm 4:2](#): “O men, how long shall

My honor suffer shame? How long will you love vain words, and seek after lies?” And the word “lawbreaker” in this verse also refers to a desertion of God and of His Word, as a wife deserts her husband. [Hosea 5:2](#): “They slaughter much and deceive,” that is, they practice gross idolatry and thereby tempt the people to fall away from, or to transgress against, the true worship of God. This is evident, too, in all the prophets. If a king was idolatrous, then there were dire consequences; and enough rascals were available to serve the king well and to drive the pious from the court and from the land. Thus at the time of Ahab not one true prophet appeared in public in the land, while eight hundred of the others were well taken care of by Queen Jezebel in public, as we read in [1 Kings 18:19](#). Thus King Saul had Doeg and his companions, who helped to impose all manner of suffering upon David and his followers. And Doeg, that dear little fruit, served his lord so well that he slew eighty-five priests and put to death the entire city of Nob, with women, children, cattle, and everything that was in it ([1 Sam. 22:18, 19](#)). He did this for no cause whatever—his victims being entirely innocent—except that the priest had given David something to eat in his need and had told him God’s Word. For all the priest knew, Saul still loved David as much as before; and yet this kindly act had to be called rebellion against the king.

It seems to me that in our times one should see enough examples of this before one’s own eyes, how people at court rave against the Word of God and aid and support idolatry and lies. The “lawbreakers” have so much to do there, and they are busy persecuting and murdering the pious. The big offense of the pious consists in this that they seek and hear God’s Word, or that they desire the works and creations of God (like marriage) or His ordinances and Sacraments. The fact that they are obedient and serve most quietly and willingly with body and goods does not help. But those bloody dogs, the Doegites, see very well that such things are looked upon with favor by their lords and may bring them a bishopric and benefits, money and honor. Therefore they take pleasure in shedding innocent blood and in persecuting the saints of God and members of Christ, so as to preserve their lies and transgressions by violence. David complains about this in many psalms, especially in [Psalm 12:8](#): “Every place in which such loose folk are exalted will be full of impious people.” But let it be. Thus it will and must be if God does not give His David grace to hate the transgressors at his court, as we have said.

In the third place he says: “I do not let him abide with me.” The Hebrew has it this way: “He must not cling to me,” as it is said in [Genesis 2:24](#): “The man shall cling to his wife.”⁴⁸ Thus he shows that he not only hates the transgressors but also hates them constantly and he does not let them cling or stick to him in any way or manner. The transgressors or false saints have a masterful way of imposing themselves on the lords or princes. So well do they know how to wield and sharpen the stick that they may even mislead a chosen David. According to the Scriptures, King Joash was a fine king as long as the priest Jehoiada was alive ([2 Kings 12:2](#)). After the death of Jehoiada he was changed so much—undoubtedly through these רשעים or transgressors—that he had Jehoiada’s son Zechariah murdered between the temple and the altar. Christ also speaks of this in [Matt. 23:35](#), and the Scriptures lament it bitterly in [2 Chronicles 24:22](#): “And King Joash did not think of the good deed which Jehoiada the father had done for him, but put his son to death.” At first Herod also loved John, enjoyed listening to him, and did a lot, as the Gospels state ([Mark 6:20](#)); afterwards he had him beheaded for the sake of Herodias. Often devout servants cannot approve of everything the lords undertake and must advise against it, especially against the transgressors, as this Zechariah did, even though the truth is not pleasant; and no one enjoys being denounced. But a transgressor and a saintly rascal is in no such danger, rather he can polish apples, lick boots, and say and do what people are fond of hearing.

So it is a great miracle indeed which David here extols: that a prince should feel obliged and able to hate the transgressors or the spiritual rascals and saints of Satan, and to separate them from himself in such a way that they do not stick to him or cling to him or remain around him at all. Undoubtedly some of David’s great princes and lords and friends sang very sweetly to him, praising this one and that one and extolling “our” cousin here or “our” brother-in-law there, in the hope of getting them a place in court or a promotion in the government, regardless of whether they were devout or not. People like to hang such fixtures on the great leaders under the pretense that they are all useful gems in the kingdom. And they succeed, too, unless God gives the leaders a spirit like David’s so that they follow his example in constantly knowing how to avoid these false servants of God. Up to this point, then, he has praised God, because he kept himself pure and remained true to the right service and Word of God, and because he also kept his court and personnel that way and always hated and constantly avoided false servants. Now there follows the last verse concerning his spiritual rule.

4. *A perverse heart must withdraw from me, I do not put up with the wicked person.*

Here he leaves his court and visits the whole area of his kingdom, speaking especially of the false teachers and the idolatrous priests who were to be found now and then in the land. It is evident from the Scriptures that even Moses himself did not rule so well and that there was still idolatry under his regime. St. Stephen cites [Amos 5:26](#) to reprimand the Jews for carrying the idol Remphan with them in the wilderness ([Acts 7:43](#)), and in the fields of Moab they worshiped the idol Baal Peor ([Num. 25:3](#)). And so thenceforth under all the judges and prophets, no matter how pious they may have been, there was always at least some secret idolatry remaining. Undoubtedly in David's kingdom, too, not everything was pure and holy. But he exercised diligence and always prevented it from spreading freely and openly. The devil does not rest and sleep, and so the spiritual rulers certainly must not rest or sleep either. Otherwise everything will be lost. Even if one watches and toils, it still takes effort and exertion to keep the Word of God pure. What would happen, then, if one slept securely and snored, as they unfortunately have done in the papacy, permitting everything to spread that the devil wanted? Now that he has taken his seat, he will not let himself be driven out; he will not give an inch.

So in the verse before us the devil and his church are briefly and well described: he has a perverse heart and is mischievous. A perverse heart is what we call heresy or false doctrine, for they pervert God's Word and service. They turn the Word around and improve it. For instance, when God commands that we should build on His grace alone and not upon ourselves or upon men—as He says, [Exodus 20:2, 3](#): “I am your God. You shall have no other gods”—then they teach us to build upon our own works. They always set up and teach other new ways. Everything must be turned around, no matter how God does it. Thus he also turned God's Word around in Paradise when God said to Adam ([Gen. 2:17](#)): “If you eat of the tree, you will die.” “No,” said the devil, “if you eat of the tree, you will not die; you will become like God!” ([Gen. 3:4, 5](#).) Therefore Christ calls the devil the father of all lies ([John 8:44](#)). Whatever God (who is the Truth) says, this the devil turns around and makes a lie out of it, even as all the heretics, his disciples, have done ever since. What God says must be false; what they say must be right. The gentlemen of the papacy take the same view. What God speaks must be heresy; what they speak—in spite of the fact that they know well and acknowledge that they are speaking contrary to God's Word—is

the Holy Christian Church and the Spirit of Christ speaking, even though they know well that the devil bids them speak this way. This is the first characteristic of the heretics, called “a perverse heart.” Of course, a perverse heart will also have perverse words and deeds. “For an evil man,” Christ says in [Matthew 12:35](#), “brings forth evil things out of his evil treasure.”

“Wicked persons” means harmful, murderous, bloodthirsty people. For once an idolatrous man has killed God’s Word in his heart through lies and idolatry, he is much less able to let people live, because of his envy and hatred. Therefore Christ also calls the devil a liar and a murderer. The children of such a father, the false teachers and liars against the Word of God, must take after him. When Cain had left the truth for falsehood, he speedily had to become a murderer also; and because he could not carry it out on anyone else, he had to demonstrate it on his own brother ([Gen. 4:8](#)). But if they are unable or unwilling to kill, this still does not keep them from doing harm, persecuting, or heaping misfortune upon property or honor. For they are called wicked, and they are wicked; they are envious, venomous, hurtful people, who are intent upon doing harm and damage day and night. If they cannot commit murder with their fists or help make it possible by advising or inciting someone else, they certainly do not lack the will to murder; and their greatest sorrow is that they cannot do enough wickedness. Therefore Solomon ([Prov. 1:16](#)) and Isaiah ([Is. 59:7](#)) say that their feet are quick to shed blood. False doctrine and murder will be together and must be together, as all Scripture, history, and daily experience attest. The devil wants to have man completely dead—the soul through lies, the body through murder. Therefore if he does the first, he will immediately press forward to the second; and if the serpent gets in with its head, it will certainly also pull its tail through and will want to be inside completely.

Such lies and murder become the very devil himself, since they are more grievous than Cain’s lies and murder. He made no pretense of his wickedness. He was a simple knave, and his wickedness was simple wickedness. He did what he did, not as a service to God but in anger and lust for revenge. But the hypocrites, the real liars and murderers, make a service to God out of it. They do it out of zeal for the glory of God and for the salvation of souls. As Christ says in [John 16:2](#): “They will put you under the ban (that is, they will condemn your truth as blasphemy and misleading of souls in order to preserve their lies, that is, God’s praise and glory, and to safeguard the salvation of souls); and whoever kills you will think that he is doing God a service.” Thus they want to prevent the entire group from

having to die or from being punished by God. Mr. Caiaphas gave the same holy and godly advice and said ([John 11:50](#)): “It is better that one man be killed than that all of the people should die.” This is wise and charming counsel, and it has tremendous prestige in the world.

These folk greatly surpass their first father Cain. They are liars and murderers on two counts. The first lie is that they have fallen from the truth and do not have God’s Word. The second is that they want their lies to be regarded as truth and as the service of God. They give the impression of deep obedience to the Word of God in their condemnation of the truth and their blasphemy. Indeed they are liars and murderers sevenfold, for they fall from the truth and attach themselves to lies. Afterwards they want the lies to be regarded as truth and the truth to be regarded as lies. They defend the lies. Finally they condemn and blaspheme the truth as the devil’s word and praise their lies as God’s Word. Thus they make the devil into God and God into the devil; they put hell into heaven and heaven into hell. Similarly, their first murder is killing the people; the second is looking upon such murder as a preservation and creation of life and thus also as a service to God. They deem it right not to grant life to any heretics (by their definition), and they are in duty bound not to grant it to them. Anyone who looks upon such murders as murders and wickedness they condemn, insisting that all this be looked upon solely as a good deed and a preservation of life.

But what place shall we assign to our liars and murderers, the noble papists? They are three times as bad as the others, for their lies and murder make no pretense of being a service to God. They know that their lies are lies against God’s Word and that their murder is murder and not a service to God. Here there is no little leaf of ignorance, which might cover them as it covered the others. Nor is it a simple lie and murder like Cain’s; for they fabricate an artificial excuse for themselves, violating their conscience. Such action is tantamount to admitting: “We know very well that our lies are lies against God and His Word and that we have neither basis nor foundation for pretending to praise them as the truth. Nevertheless we insist on dragging the name of God into this and on debasing it—violently, deliberately, and knowingly. We want to create and preserve the impression that our lies are God’s Word; we want to have the devil be God and to have God be a devil. Whoever is unwilling to accept this should die, and he should regard such wickedness and murder as a service to God and the saving of life. Yet we ourselves know that it is murder and wickedness and that it cannot by any stretch of the imagination be regarded or considered as a service to

God.” These are the lowest and worst liars and murderers. They will end up in the third and lowest hell. Therefore no example or passage can be applied to them. They are sovereign and incomparable in their power. The only place for them is in the kingdom of the Antichrist, who was to be an unspeakable abomination. For how can people possibly become any worse when the devil himself cannot be more evil or wicked? But prior to the end of the world and up to the Last Day the devil must have such saints, thus compelling Christ to hold the Last Judgment that much sooner.

To come back to David, this might well have sufficed as a royal virtue—that David continued to be innocent of all lies and murder in his kingdom, that he did not have an evil conscience, that he had perpetrated no lies or idolatry, that he was not guilty of murder or of shedding innocent blood. Let us also recognize this as a gift of God: that a man, especially a prince, can have a good conscience and be free; that he has not been the cause of any error or of any misguided souls; that he has no murder or a drop of innocent blood on his conscience. For there have been few such kings and princes even among the one people of God. The others all remained in the ordinary group of kings, whom the Holy Spirit rebukes in [Psalm 2:2](#) as enemies of God and of His Christ. With these words He clearly condemns them as liars and murderers against God’s truth and service, and thus reckons them among the terrible group of bloody dogs and saints of Satan, upon whom all the innocent blood is to come that was shed from the beginning of the world, from the first blood of St. Abel to the blood of the last saint ([Matt. 23:35](#)).

But dear David is highly talented. He is such a rare and extraordinary hero that he is not only innocent of all the lies and murder which did occur or might have occurred anywhere in his kingdom but also takes a stand against such liars and murderers; he will not tolerate them, and he withstands them with all his might to make them retreat. Oh, what a great mass of false teachers, idolaters, and heretics he had to drive out here! At least he had to stop their mouths in such a way that they did not dare utter a sound or make a move. On the other hand, he permitted all pious, faithful, and true teachers to move about in freedom and in peace, giving them shelter, protection, and provision. In addition he sought, demanded, called, ordained, and commanded everywhere that the Word of God be preached in its truth and purity and that God be properly worshiped. This is evident from [1 Chronicles 15](#). Here he himself establishes, arranges, and prepares the entire worship service with all diligence. He himself composes psalms as a model of how they should teach and praise God, and he stimulates and appoints

many others for the same work of composing psalms. “No,” dear David says, “I will not tolerate liars, hangmen of souls, bloody dogs, and murderers in my kingdom. They shall not mislead my people this way; they shall not murder or persecute the faithful priests and teachers this way. I will not tolerate them. They must go! Then the true teachers will be able to praise my God securely, freely, and joyfully, and to preach to the people in a profitable and salutary manner.”

Oh, what a fine and lovely kingdom it was in which the Word of God for once received a pious and faithful king! There everything had to be in very fine fettle, flourishing and prospering amid all wisdom and virtue; for God’s Word cannot fail to produce virtue. Therefore it was also during this period that this noble book, the Psalter, was produced, the like of which had not existed or been produced among the people. In fact, there were more people properly trained in the Scriptures at that time than before or after. No school will ever match this high school of David, be it high or low. “As the ruler is,” Sirach says, “so his officials will also be. As the councilor is, so the citizens will be also” ([Ecclus. 10:2](#)). If the king himself takes hold of things and goes ahead, then things must fare well. But how rare such kings are and how briefly their work lasts is shown in the unfortunate example of David’s son Solomon. At first he gloriously improved and adorned the work which his father had begun. But later on, when he grew old, he let the women make a fool and an ape of him; and he dedicated idol churches and idol worship to them. Therefore he was unable to sing this royal psalm to the end, as his father David did. David composed two other psalms, extolling this great gift and thanking God for it.⁴⁹ For instance, in the superscription of [Psalm 60](#) he calls his kingdom “God’s golden span of roses” because of the fact that “God speaks in His sanctuary”; that is, God’s Word was in his kingdom (v. 6).

So there you have it; the goal is achieved. David has presented himself here to all devout kings and lords as an example and master model of the way one should seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness first ([Matt. 6:33](#)), as well as of faithfulness with which one should keep one’s subjects loyal to the Word of God and to the ministers and preachers, not permitting the schismatic spirits and the perverse wicked hearts to mislead the souls and murder or persecute the innocent. Let anyone who can, follow David’s example and do his best with the ability that the grace of God gives him. Nobody will be able to do it as well as David anyway. He easily has the advantage over all kings and lords, because he did it so well. But everyone

can at least be careful not to join that group to which the murderous kings and princes or, as [Psalm 2:2](#) calls them, the enemies of God and of Christ belong, and not to help or support the schismatic spirits in seducing souls and shedding the innocent blood of righteous teachers and Christians. He will also have toil and trouble enough preserving the preachers and the Word of God in the land, especially in our times. Nowadays the people are so terribly unthankful and scornful, and the devil's rage is immense. Apparently his plan is that the people should want to be entirely free, without any preaching and teaching.

Now that they have become free from the compulsion of the pope and from his manifold deception, they think that they are also completely emancipated, and free from all obedience and service to God. They would also like to be free from all secular law and order, and the devil fills them up with spiritual and temporal rebellion against both God and men. Those who want to subjugate other people to the pope—like the bishops, princes, canons, and nobles—are the very ones who seek and need freedom from the pope more than anyone else. They would not give a blade of straw for all the papal doctrine. All they want is freedom to defy the pope, because he is now threatening the bishops and princes or excommunicating them as he did before. They should turn Lutheran against him seven times and squeeze him a little more than Luther did. This is what they finally will do, according to the prophecy of [Revelation 17:16](#). Other people, that is, the Lutherans, who earned such freedom for a dear price, are supposed to remain under the coercion of the pope and his publicly acknowledged lies, or run away and die. This means: we should be the industrious bees which make the honey, while they, the lazy bumblebees, want to devour the honey.⁵⁰

Therefore I say this as a warning to anyone who will accept it. For almost everything and everyone wants to be free, and God's Word is despised. Among the pictures of the Antichrist⁵¹ there is an old prophecy which says that at the end of the world, when the deception of the Antichrist is uncovered, people will become wild and fierce, falling away from all faith and saying there is no longer a God and living in all sorts of wantonness according to their own lusts. Such old pictures move me very much indeed and also hit the nail squarely on the head. To have no God means to believe neither this nor that but to be free from all the teaching and preaching that is done in God's name. One cannot have God except through the Word and faith. Therefore St. Paul says ([Eph. 2:12](#)) that previously the heathen had been without God, even though the world was filled with gods; but they had

no Word or faith from God. He also says ([2 Thess. 2:4](#)) that the Antichrist will exalt himself, not above God—for that is impossible—but “above God’s Word and worship.”

Such Epicureans and scorers of God are now spreading publicly in Germany, too, as they spread previously in Italy. Unfortunately this may lead to Italian domination both in temporal and in spiritual affairs. This was brought in by the courtesans and mercenaries, as they saw and learned it in Rome and in the Latin land. With such Italian domination the Italian plagues and misfortune will also come. And that will be the end of Germany; it will be called “done for.” A very fine man spoke to me one time—and why not mention his name?—the sainted Mr. Assch von Cram, asking whether soldiers who were believers might accept wages with a good conscience. I answered this in writing. I do not know how it happened, but among other things we talked about the great usury called “interest.”⁵² It had been quite unknown to me before that time—the word as well as the practice. “What?” I said, “Have these people no conscience that fears God’s judgment and hell.” “Aye,” said he. “This is what they say: ‘Do you think there is another fellow inside this fellow?’ ” This word pierced through my heart, because I had not suspected or been concerned about such impertinent and unlicensed talk in the German land. God grant that there are few such people in the nobility and not many among the peasants.

Such fellows will help to undermine the dear Gospel very soon and very thoroughly, and will help to speed the final darkness, of which Christ says ([Luke 18:8](#)): “Do you think that when the Son of Man comes He will find faith?” Both He Himself ([Matt. 24:29](#)) and St. Paul ([1 Thess. 5:2](#)) say that the Last Day will come in the night when it is darkest. In their perpetual freedom and pride, the dear noblemen, bishops, cardinals, and canons are working in full swing and helping with all their might to bring this to pass. They neglect things; they even leave many parishes vacant and desolate, so that the masses may quickly become rude and wild and heathen and may hear and learn nothing at all about God and the salvation of souls. Thus it is evident what very pious Epicureans they are themselves and how they want to make the entire world as epicurean as they are. Very well. It is their job. Let them do it. That is all they are worth. The wrath of God is impelling them so that they must help to bring this business to a conclusion and yet give the impression that they will not tolerate any Lutherans. As though they were serious about keeping their papal doctrine and letting it be taught, which would be ten times more insufferable to them than Luther’s! But let

them go the way they are going, since they are going the way they want to go.

This terrible and thoroughly papal, that is, epicurean and Italian, way of life is on the increase. Therefore let anyone help who is able to help. And pity the poor youth, those dear descendants of ours, as well as all the elect children of God still to be added, some of them yet unborn. They must also come to Baptism and to Christ through our ministry and administration. For them we have been called; and it is for their sakes that we go on living, since our faith would be sufficient for our own persons, no matter at what hour we should die. And woe upon all woes, if we cast such a ministry and calling to the winds! God will require of us and hold us accountable for the souls of all the descendants we neglect. Therefore I say again: Whoever is able, let him be a David and follow his example as far as he can, especially the princes and lords who have received sufficient power and wealth for this from God; and He will give back much more, even a hundredfold, and in addition eternal life, as He so generously promises ([Matt. 19:29](#)). And if no more can be done, then at least let the schools and the pulpits remain—there may not be very many of these anyway—because there is such an abundance of charitable institutions, monasteries, and endowments. The prophecy I have cited will certainly be fulfilled. God grant that before it is fulfilled, we may prove to be men who have acted and taught against it, and that together with all those who are dear to us we may depart in a good hour and be rescued with Lot from condemned Sodom and Gomorrah ([Gen. 19:16](#)). Amen. Let this much be said concerning the first part of the psalm.

The second part of this psalm is contained in the four verses that follow.

5. I destroy him who secretly maligns his neighbor. I am not fond of one who has a proud demeanor and is conceited in spirit.

Thus far David has shown by his own example how devout kings and princes are to serve God that through their help and co-operation God's Word and honor may be furthered and the erroneous spirits curbed. Thus he has brought them to the church in a proper Christian way, not to serve God as the hypocrites do, with the burning of candles or other foolish actions that help to bring temporal wealth and honor to the false teachers, but to maintain the pure doctrine and divine ordinance with true sincerity and spirit, for the sake of the soul's salvation. Now he also presents himself as an example in the area of secular government. He shows the proper behavior of a pious

prince among his people or subjects. He should protect everyone against the power and wantonness of others, help him to his rights and keep him there, and lead him to the right town hall.

Thank God, it is now manifest enough to all the world how the two areas of authority need to be distinguished. The nature of the work itself demonstrates such a difference abundantly enough, even if there were no command or prohibition from Christ concerning it. We see very well that God distributes secular dominions or kingdoms among the godless in the grandest and most wonderful way, just as He also lets the good sun and rain minister to the godless, without establishing the Word or worship of God among them or teaching or directing them through prophets as He did at Jerusalem among His people. Still He calls this secular government of the godless His ordinance and creation, though they may abuse it as badly as they can; in the same way He lets a villain and a whore use body and soul, and yet He wants to be praised—as He also is—as the Creator, Lord, and Preserver of such a body and soul. From this it certainly is to be concluded that the secular kingdom is a different one and can have its own existence without God's kingdom.

On the other hand, we see that He separates His spiritual kingdom so precisely and sharply from the secular kingdom that He lets His own people suffer all manner of misery, wretchedness, and poverty on earth. And as little as He lets the godless share in His kingdom, so little does He let His own people share in the kingdom of the godless. Surely the emperor at Rome never had a word of God or a prophet to advance and preserve him and to make him so powerful. So also SS. Peter and Paul in Rome did not own a single foot of ground or a blade of straw whereby one of them might have preserved himself, to say nothing of governing or ruling. And yet both kingdoms were in Rome at the same time—Emperor Nero ruled the one against Christ, Christ ruled the other through His apostles Peter and Paul against the devil. And as a sign that SS. Peter and Paul did not rule in the empire at Rome, the one was crucified and the other beheaded. Now that certainly is no way to inaugurate a reign on earth, to let oneself be crucified and beheaded. On the other hand, as a sign that Nero did not rule in the kingdom of Christ, he, the enemy of this kingdom, let its chief princes, SS. Peter and Paul, be put to death, as though they were the enemies of his secular kingdom.

Now, above all these events and evidences of history stands Christ, who says ([Luke 22:25](#)): “The kings of the heathen rule over them, but you do not do thus.” That is to say: “Do not think that I am minded to make you secular leaders. Let the heathen have their authority.” Again, He says ([Matt. 8:20](#)): “The foxes have holes, and the birds have nests, but the Son of Man does not have where He may lay His head.” Now guess where He will lay His hands and His feet along with His entire body? Did He not lie in the manger, on the lap and arm of His mother, and also on a pillow in the ship? But this is the meaning: “My kingdom does not consist of being on earth, lying down, eating, drinking, putting on clothes—although the body needs all this for an hour or two, the way a guest does—but of something else, something that will continue when all this passes away. The fox’s hole is the fox’s kingdom. If he no longer has this, then all his kingdoms are gone; and he is gone with them, for he cannot continue without a hole. But I continue without secular authority.”

Constantly I must pound in and squeeze in and drive in and wedge in this difference between the two kingdoms, even though it is written and said so often that it becomes tedious. The devil never stops cooking and brewing these two kingdoms into each other. In the devil’s name the secular leaders always want to be Christ’s masters and teach Him how He should run His church and spiritual government. Similarly, the false clerics and schismatic spirits always want to be the masters, though not in God’s name, and to teach people how to organize the secular government. Thus the devil is indeed very busy on both sides, and he has much to do. May God hinder him, amen, if we deserve it!

“Aye, but David does the very thing in this psalm that your interpretation talks about: he mixes the spheres of spiritual and secular authority together and wants to have both.” indeed, here I must have struck myself on the cheeks and must be caught and refuted by my own words, especially if the sharp proponents of logic come upon this book. They hold me by the tail like an eel and know how to make fun of all my tiresome talk. Very well, if the most holy father pope with his followers will not be gracious to me or help me out of such troubles, then may the dear Lord Jesus Christ, whose enemies they are and whom they persecute, help me! I have this to say about it: Surely all common sense, even a child of seven years, will have to say that commanding and obeying are two different things, even as ruling and serving are two different things. The one means being over, the other we may call “being under”; that is clear enough, and good German besides.

Now we shall have to let God, our Lord, be the single supreme Authority over all that is created, and we shall all have to be utterly subordinate to Him. If we are unwilling to do it in weal, we will be compelled to do it in woe. There is, praise God, no other way out. For He Himself says in [Psalm 68:5](#) that His name is Lord;⁵³ and in the Creed the children call Him “God the Father, the Almighty.”

Now, if a preacher in his official capacity says to kings and princes and to all the world, “Thank and fear God, and keep His commandments,” he is not meddling in the affairs of secular government. On the contrary, he is thereby serving and being obedient to the highest government. Thus the entire spiritual government really does nothing else than serve the divine authority, which is why they are called servants of God and ministers of Christ in the Scriptures. Indeed, St. Paul even calls it a service to the church and to all heathen ([Rom. 15:16](#)). Thus, if David or a prince teaches or gives orders to fear God and to listen to His Word, he is not acting as a lord of that Word but as an obedient servant. He is not meddling in spiritual or divine government but remains a humble subordinate and a faithful servant. For with respect to God and in the service of His authority everything should be identical and mixed together, whether it be called spiritual or secular—the pope as well as the emperor, the lord as well as the servant. No distinctions and no respect of persons apply here: one is as good before God as the other. For He is one God, the same Lord of all, of the one as well as of the other. Therefore they should all be identical in their obedience and should even be mixed into one another like one cake, everyone of them helping the other to be obedient. Therefore in service or submission to God there can be no rebellion among the spiritual or the secular authorities. Even in the world, rebellion never stems from obedient service but from an ambitious desire to rule.

But it is a confusion and a mingling of the secular and the spiritual realms when those sublime and meddlesome spirits want to change and correct the civil law in a dictatorial and dominating fashion, even though they have no directive or authority to do so, either from God or from men. The same is true when spiritual or secular princes and lords want to change and correct the Word of God in a dictatorial and dominating fashion, when they themselves dictate what should be preached and taught, even though they have no more right to do this than the lowest beggar. Such people want to be God themselves, and not to serve Him or to remain subordinate to Him. Like Lucifer ([Is. 14:12](#)) they seek equality with God, even superiority to

Him. Thus they cease to be subject to Him, they meddle in His government, and finally they set themselves above Him. Therefore all the wrangling and complaining about the confusion of the spiritual and the secular realms are in the interest of domination and not of service. Everyone wants to produce and make something new; no one wants to serve and obey, either in divine or in secular matters. All this comes from that wretched original sin, that hereditary plague, that poison ingrafted into the original tree and into the paternal blood of Adam when the devil pelted him and poisoned him thoroughly with the word which he spoke ([Gen. 3:5](#)): “You will be like God.” It is this same damned deity that is responsible for the fact that everything is mingled and confused.

A secular lord or manager cannot tolerate it and should not tolerate it if his subordinates want to be both servants and lords in his house, if they do not listen to what the lord commands or forbids them, and if they do something else or command something else to be done. What is to become of such management? But if things are to proceed properly, then one pious servant must say to another: “My dear fellow, you know that our lord wants this and that and has commanded it. Let us therefore be obedient and everyone do his share.” Certainly such a pious servant is not thereby meddling in the authority of his lord. He is serving faithfully and helping his lord to preserve his authority and the obedience of the servants, even as Joseph did for Pharaoh in Egypt ([Gen. 47:13–26](#)) and David for his enemy Saul ([1 Sam. 24:7](#)). All the world must concede that such a servant is not acting as a lord, but as a most subordinate and faithful servant. So if David is here meddling in matters of divine or spiritual authority—as it appears to a mad saint—and saying to his followers, “You should do so and so, as God has commanded,” then he is not a lord, but a faithful servant of his God, whose honor and lordship he is humbly seeking.

But if he had spoken thus: “My dear people, our God has commanded this and that, as you know. But I refuse to have it so. As your earthly king and lord, to whom you owe obedience or forfeit life and property, I command you to do otherwise”—that could truly have been called a mingling of spiritual and secular, or of divine and human authority. This is what people are doing in our time, amid praises and laments to God, and what the noble Antiochus and his like did before, of which enough was written by others many years ago.⁵⁴ Whoever will note it, let him note it. Whoever will not, let him leave it. God will not suffer such a mingling, even

as He has never suffered it before. Very well, you had better stop; that is enough of that.

Now we come back to David in his secular administration. In this psalm we also hear of the many fine, princely virtues which he practiced. In this part he does not point out how to serve God, as he did in the first, but how he kept the people within the law, everyone in relation to his neighbor. The spiritual government or authority should direct the people vertically toward God that they may do right and be saved; just so the secular government should direct the people horizontally toward one another, seeing to it that body, property, honor, wife, child, house, home, and all manner of goods remain in peace and security and are blessed on earth. God wants the government of the world to be a symbol of true salvation and of His kingdom of heaven, like a pantomime or a mask. He lets His great saints run their course in it, too, some better than others, but David the best of all.

To be sure, God made the secular government subordinate and subject to reason, because it is to have no jurisdiction over the welfare of souls or things of eternal value but only over physical and temporal goods, which God places under man's dominion, [Genesis 2:8 ff.](#) For this reason nothing is taught in the Gospel about how it is to be maintained and regulated, except that the Gospel bids people honor it and not oppose it. Therefore the heathen can speak and teach about this very well, as they have done. And, to tell the truth, they are far more skillful in such matters than the Christians; Christ Himself says ([Luke 16:8](#)) that the children of this world are wiser than the children of light. St. Paul also says ([1 Cor. 1:26 f.](#)) that not many wise, noble, or strong are called, but that God has chosen what is foolish, weak, and despised. Every day we find out how swift, tricky, clever, smart, and quick the children of the world are in contrast to us devout, stupid, good, simple wethers and sheep. If God were not on our side to change their exalted wisdom into folly, they would long since have brought things to an entirely different pass before we even discovered what was going on. God is a gentle and wealthy Lord. He casts much gold, silver, wealth, dominions, and kingdoms among the godless, as though it were chaff or sand. Thus He casts great intelligence, wisdom, languages, and oratorical ability among them, too, so that His dear Christians look like mere children, fools, and beggars by comparison.

And what need is there of many words? The imperial law, according to which the Roman Empire still rules today and will continue to rule until the

Last Day, is nothing more than heathen wisdom, established and set down before Rome had ever heard a thing about Christians or even about God Himself. Yet I dare say that if all the jurists were now baked into one cake and all the wise men were brewed into one drink, they would not only leave all the cases and disputes unresolved but would even be unable to speak or think this well about them. Those who set down the law had to be experienced in big deals and to be familiar with the thinking of many people; for this they had been endowed with a high degree of intelligence and brains. In other words, those who had such wisdom in secular government lived once and will never live again. On the other hand, it is clear what a childish, silly, and bad thing the canon law is, even though the people who set it down were much holier and better. Thus the jurists themselves say: “A pure canonist is a jackass.” And it must be admitted that this is so, for they have lost themselves in all sorts of ideas and have taken little account of worldly wisdom.

Therefore whoever wants to learn and become wise in secular government, let him read the heathen books and writings. They have truly painted it and portrayed it quite beautifully and generously, with both verses and pictures, with teachings and examples; and they became the source for the ancient imperial laws. I am convinced that God gave and preserved such heathen books as those of the poets and the histories, like Homer, Vergil, Demosthenes, Cicero, Livy, and afterwards the fine old jurists—as He has also given and preserved other temporal goods among the heathen and godless at all times—that the heathen and godless, too, might have their prophets, apostles, and theologians or preachers for the secular government. In this sense St. Paul also calls the Cretan poet Epimenides “their prophet” ([Titus 1:12](#)); and Matthew calls the three holy kings “Magi” ([Matt. 2:1](#)) because of the fact that they were the priests, prophets, or teachers of the Arabs. Thus they had their Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Ulpian, and others, even as the people of God had their Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, and others; and their emperors, kings, and princes, like Alexander, Augustus, etc., were their Davids and Solomons.

Just as the spiritual and holy prophets and kings taught and directed the people about how to come to the eternal kingdom of God and to remain in it, so these secular, heathen, godless prophets and kings taught and directed the people about how to preserve the secular kingdom. Because God willed to give temporal dominion to the heathen or to reason, He also had to provide people who had wisdom and courage, who had the necessary inclination and

skill, and who would preserve it. In the same way He always had to give His people true, sound, and faithful teachers who were able to rule His Christian Church and to do battle against the devil. By these two groups all sorts of books, laws, and teachings have been produced and preserved until the present day. The heathen, for their part, have their heathen books; we Christians, for our part, have the books of the Holy Scriptures. The former teach virtue, laws, and wisdom with respect to temporal goods, honor, and peace on earth; the latter teach faith and good works with respect to eternal life in the kingdom of heaven.

How could a prince or king on earth be portrayed any better than the heathen have portrayed their Hercules? What more could be desired in a secular prince than that his deeds resemble those of Hercules, or that he follow Hercules' example? It is true, that example includes sins or vices, too. But is this to be wondered at in a heathen, when even the saints of God like David have fallen? But in the exercise of government they have nevertheless remained fine heroes. What is wrong with Alexander the Great and his father Philip, or with Augustus, Trajan, and their kind, if one is seeking noble examples of worldly government? To say nothing now about other books, how could one prepare a finer book on worldly heathen wisdom, than that ordinary, silly children's book called Aesop? Indeed, because the children learn it and it is so ordinary, people pay little heed to it; and some who have not yet understood a single fable in it think they are as good as four doctors.⁵⁵

Here again, as was stated above, it must be kept in mind that the worldly-wise or the worldly rulers are not all alike. In his time and in his administration David was an extraordinary man, ahead of the other saints of God, an example to all pious kings and princes. The situation is the same with regard to the heathen. While all heathen alike are heathen, and all alike have been men and rational beings, still some among them also had to be extraordinary men. They did the best ahead of and before others; and the others could not match them but emulated them as much as possible, patching the bad fur as well as they could. The same thing is still going on and must go on. Just as among His holy people God does not make all alike prophets or learned men, or give them all the same high degree of talent, so also among the heathen He has not made the precious stones as common as the pebbles on the street. Only rarely has He given them a fine hero, as He still continues to do. No one has appeared who has been comparable to Homer or Alexander, to Vergil or Augustus. Thus even when the blind

heathen have been, or have done, something extraordinary, this remains a miraculous deed of God among them, not a result of their wisdom but altogether a gift of God.

Therefore also in this psalm dear beloved David thanks and praises not his reason or power but God for his earthly kingdom. To demonstrate such a high and noble virtue—whether it be David or Hercules—this also takes God’s directing. The heathen could not know the source of such a difference among princes. They called it “fortune” or “luck” and made a goddess out of it. They honored her very highly, especially the wisest and most powerful lords at Rome. The very wisest among them, like Cicero, say it is a divine inspiration; and they conclude that no one has ever become a great man through his own powers but only by a special secret inbreathing or imparting of the gods.⁵⁶ They saw very well how strange it was that one man had more luck than another. One person could carry a thing out, who was not one half or even one seventh as capable with respect to intelligence, strength, and power as many others who should easily have done it better; but they did not know how to begin or how to proceed, in thought or deed, with all their wisdom. This is what happened in the case of Demosthenes and Cicero. This is also what the German proverb says: “The one who has good luck is the one who brings the bride home.”

Such divine direction is especially necessary in that secular government in which David and God-fearing Christian princes rule; for they are supposed to do both—serve God and rule the people. The devil is much more hostile to these than he is to the heathen, who are his subjects. This is on account of God and His Word, as God says of Jerusalem ([Ezek. 5:5](#)): “Behold, that is Jerusalem, I have placed her in the midst of the heathen.” It is as though He said: “She has nothing but enemies and the devil himself round about her for My sake. They will not let her have the husks with the swine; they will not let her have life itself, to say nothing of a free, good, and regal government in the world.” As the Bible teaches us, therefore, God Himself has always had to protect and preserve His people’s kingdom through His own power and miraculous deeds, through all the extraordinary leaders whom He chose and awakened for this purpose. While the devil is also hostile and opposed to the secular government of the heathen, still he hates the government of the saints of God on earth much more fanatically. Against this he has always used the kingdoms and the powers of the heathen, as is shown by all the heathen who have been round about Jerusalem; and

he will never quit until the Last Day, when he will finally have to stop. Thus David sings about his first virtue in the secular realm:

5a. I destroy him who secretly maligns his neighbor.

Here you perceive that now he is not dealing with God but is looking about him and taking his neighbor's part; that is, he wants to exercise justice also among the people as an earthly king. At court, moreover, there are two kinds of slander.⁵⁷ One concerns the king or the prince himself, as when one speaks evil of him, curses or reviles him; thus the mercenaries are also accustomed to curse their lord. Of this David is not speaking here, in my opinion. The attitude of the heathen toward this has varied, and everyone may find examples to suit him. The noble-minded princes have generally disdained it. When, for instance, Alexander the Great was told that people were saying bad things about him, he did nothing about it and did not become angry. He said: "The royal thing to do is to do good and to hear poorly. Things are succeeding royally, if we do a good job and the people speak evil about it." It is as though he said: "Royal virtues are too high for the mad public to understand and too good to be paised by good-for-nothing people." He learned this from his prophet Homer, who writes about a nasty fellow named Thersites, who could do nothing but curse his king.⁵⁸ A number of Roman emperors also said: "In the free city of Rome there must be free tongues." But among the people of Israel, as well as among many other heathen, slander against the king was a mortal sin. The Jews regarded it as blasphemy; because of it they slew the true and holy prophets, who were in duty bound, and bidden by God, to denounce both kings and prophets, as we read in all the prophetic books. But their position did not help them. When they denounced the vices and the idolatry of the kings, then it was only necessary to cry, "They have blasphemed God and the king!" and they were quickly put to death. A statement of Moses ([Ex. 22:28](#)) must have contributed to this: "You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people." With this passage and the sword of Moses very much innocent blood was shed, just as the names "church" and "government" must kill and torment many innocent Christians nowadays.

The world is a head of thistles; whichever way you turn it, it stretches the thorns about itself. Before our Gospel came, no one knew how to preach about how good an estate the government is; but now that it has been praised and exalted through the Gospel, it also wants to be above God and His Word and to command what is to be preached and believed. Again, if one

denounces it, this must needs be called sedition. I am tempted to say what that preacher did about skinning rabbits, when he said that the head was hard to skin (meaning the princes and lords), and added: “Let the devil skin you!” Now things are proceeding as they should, except that nobody wants to stay on the right way; everybody wants to bolt either to the right or to the left, the way wild and obstreperous steeds do.

The other slander concerns the neighbor, as the text states and laments. For here David clearly admits that there have been such rascals at court and that they have tempted him. Otherwise how would he dare speak so sharply against them, to praise his ability to eradicate such a vice at his court, not only as a royal virtue but also as a miraculous deed of God? What is not present need not be eradicated. But maybe he is speaking only of his own time and of his own court. Now in our time, please God, there are no longer such people at court, and everyone has become pious. And if they were there, they would still, please God, not be there. Thus a spirit speaks out of a fool: “If I have done it, then, if it be God’s will, I have not done it—neither I nor you nor my brother nor my brother-in-law. That disgraceful Nobody⁵⁹ has done it. He does every wicked deed and yet gets off scot-free, unpunished by any law or authority. So it is in every government, whether it be great or small, with the exception of the government of either Master Hans⁶⁰ or the devil, if God wants to give it into their hands.” To my great amazement, they know where to find that rascal Nobody, as Solomon frequently preaches and warns in his Proverbs.

The heathen have a good joke. They tell about a strange god, called Momus, who cannot leave anything unrebuked; therefore his name is called Momus, that is, “a rebuker.”⁶¹ He praises very highly those features of man which the other gods made; but, according to him, one thing was forgotten and shamefully overlooked. No window or oven-mouth was made into man’s heart, through which to see what people had in mind and what they were thinking. Such a window would have prevented much misfortune, and everyone would have known how to protect himself against the other. Then, as we Germans say, what he had on his heart would be written on his forehead; and no liar or hypocrite or flatterer or cheat could attempt anything, much less accomplish it. But this is a complaint from the noble reason of wise people about the hypocrites and cheats, because they cannot be satisfied or figure out what God means by letting false people torment us this way on earth. Reason figures that if she had a hand in it, she would have

given God the good advice to make man with a window into his heart at his left nipple.

If it were not for false tongues at court and in the governments, the sword would often remain in its sheath, whereas now it unnecessarily causes great misfortune, bloodshed, and murder. Then, too, justice certainly would not remain hidden so deeply in the books but would come forth freely and arise like the dear sun for all those who must otherwise suffer injustice. Very well, this is a fur on which neither skin nor hair is any good, as all histories attest, except for the good which God does on it when He patches it. Thus that poor impatient Momus—to speak carnally—has some reason to be angry and to wish that matters would take a different turn. In this matter, therefore, David certainly shot close to the mark, neatly striking the most prominent vice and evil at court. It is almost as though he had known from experience that no sword or any other weapon, whether it be a gun or a lance or a mouse,⁶² regardless of how bad it may seem, is as dangerous as the tongue. If evil tongues were gone, no sword would be necessary. Therefore David also says in the Psalter ([Ps. 57:4](#)): “Their tongues are swords and spears.” And we Germans say of an evil word that it is an arrow. Again: “That is a thrust which does not bleed.”

What else shall I say about it? It is too high for me; for I have not been at court or in the government, and I am happy to be far from it. But I suppose that things go there the way they do in Christ’s kingdom, in which I am tried and experienced quite a little and in which the false tongues do the very greatest damage to me—I ought to say, to my Lord Christ. I heard a couple of things about secular government from people who are now dead, and I believe them. A thing or two I have seen myself. If the other things, which I do not know, are also of this kind or worse, then God help all princes and rulers! Then, to speak according to reason like a heathen, I must commend anyone who kept himself at a distance from it and became a monk or a hermit. I see that there are also heretics and schismatic spirits in the secular government. They do not fight and make war with the sword—they are much too faint-hearted for that—but with the tongue.

Well, I will not, and cannot, know more about it than that the מְלִשָּׁנִי (that is the way it reads in the Hebrew), “tongue-thresher,” or (in German) “gossiper,” must and ought to be a fine kitten, which can lick in the front and scratch in the back. He must surely have these two virtues in him: first, that he can lick very well; second, that he can scratch even

better. That is how David himself portrays Doeg: he could lick King Saul very well and say what pleased him, and he could scratch poor David so shamefully that thereby more than eighty priests were murdered. Such a kitten must have two people: one whom it licks, that is, Saul; the other whom it scratches, that is, David. But finally Saul perishes with his cat, and David remains a lord—unscratched, unbitten, undevoured. For David says here that they must be destroyed. If he is lying, I dare say they will find out.

The heathen say of Hercules, who was their David, that he finally let the women make a fool of him.⁶³ One put a veil on him, another placed a distaff and spindle in his hand, and on account of his great love he had to spin. Well, perhaps it is credible that such great princes become fools in their love for women, as David did with Bathsheba. But this I do not believe—that he actually spun. The poets and sages have painted it this way and have embellished it with words, to show that if no other tremendous miracle can lull a hardy prince or man to sleep, and if he has overcome all the enemies round about him as Hercules did, still he cannot finally overcome that domestic enemy, the house devil. The dear young lady, the beautiful Queen Omphale, with her beautiful face and her smooth tongue, puts a veil on dear Hercules and tells him to spin. There he sits, this great man of victory, who tore all the lions asunder, who caught the hound of hell, who smote the Centaur and the Lapithae, who slew the dragon and performed other wonders they write about—there he sits, I say, drops his club, and takes the spindle in his hand, while his beautiful Omphale threatens him with the whip if he does not spin properly.

Thus the poets have pictured the beautiful kitten at court, called Adulation. She tramples on the mouth of princes and lords and bids them do what she wants of them. Yet she does it with such a beautiful figure and with such lovely speeches that she makes dear Hercules think she is the angel of God and that he himself is not worthy of having such a fine lady as Omphale. Thus he becomes her willing subject and servant, but not without great damage to those whom his club should meanwhile have been saving and protecting and helping against wicked rascals. Whether there ever has been, or ever will be, a king or a prince who stayed undeceived by this beautiful wench Adulation, this I do not know; and I will let them look after it. But this I know very well from Holy Scripture: that the highest king of all kings, David himself, did not remain immune to her. What his own son Absalom did to him with a handsome figure and fine words is obvious enough. Later Ziba tickled his ears at the right time and smeared his mouth so well that he

deprived poor Mephibosheth of some properties which he had already promised him, and gave the kitten Ziba the half thereof (2 Sam. 19:29). Still Ziba scratched even this off Mephibosheth by licking King David's mouth (2 Sam. 16:4). And yet in this psalm he prides himself on the fact that he destroys the slanderers. We shall question him at the end of this psalm as to why he permits himself to boast of what he neither did nor had.⁶⁴

It also seems to me that the prophets of the heathen do not want to give any king the honor of staying undeceived by such a beautiful bride. This is why they paint the very best prince in all heathendom, namely, Hercules, as one who had to spin. It is as if they said: "What Hercules did not do you other princes should let be. What he did not become the master of, you also should suffer. He had to spin, and you will have some spinning to do, too." How can it proceed otherwise? He who is to govern must trust people; otherwise what would he do in his government? But he who trusts is certainly deceived, as the Germans say: "Trustwell rode the horse away." And the Hebrews say: "All men are false" (Ps. 116:11). For it needs to be marked well that no unfaithful courtier or harmful servant wants to say the worst about himself and put himself to shame. Such a man would have to be a great fool. No, the kitten must cleanse and beautify herself for the guests whom we shall get. Therefore this bride will stay, and must stay, awhile at court and in all governments, both high and low.

They write about a Duke of Meissen who is supposed to have said: "A prince does not need to be afraid of the enemies who are far away from him but of those who are almost stepping on his feet; for these are the ones who would just as soon step on his head, too."⁶⁵ He was an unusual man, and apparently he did not want to suffer this bride at his court. I will let him be smart and boast; yet at the same time I wonder whether he knocked off the sides of pork in front of hell and left the lock on the door.⁶⁶ Though I do not understand anything about such matters, I do think that whoever has a bad fur will not be able to patch all the holes, much less prevent all the new holes. It is likely to remain this way: where there is an unhealthy body, there will also be boils, puss, and other filth. Government, moreover, is a beggar's fur and a pimpled child with the pox and the measles. Therefore there must be a number of pious Josephs, Naamans, Nathans, and Zadoks in it, to keep it alive and functioning, so that it does not come to a complete halt. The others are boils, sores, syphilis, epilepsy, erysipelas—that is how they now picture themselves with curses—who make such a body unhealthy, as Ziba, Ahithophel, and the likes of them.

But who can say enough about this vice or damage? The heathen have written very many books about it, especially Plutarch. But the motto is: “Let the devil skin you!” It is an unfathomable evil with which the kingdom of the world is plagued, like a dog with his club, perhaps to keep it from becoming too proud and self-willed. Yet David boasts here that he has done his part in the matter and has destroyed it thoroughly. If a prince deliberately lets himself be milked so shamefully when he could well prevent it, that would be a bad game of cards, in which diamonds were always trump and never hearts. There I would certainly lose all my property, and might even be stabbed in addition. There is too much of this, that a prince has to let himself be milked secretly and let the milk be stolen without being able to prevent it. Therefore David must have provoked and enraged many a great lord with this virtue. What kind of glory would it be if he had destroyed a groom in the stable or a hired man? But to destroy royal, princely slanderers who sit in government offices, not only at court but also in the country—that is what I call the virtue of a David and an example of princely courage, a special impulse from God, as we have often said.

One should also reckon and include in this vice that happy and lovely nobleman called Mr. Envy or Traitor, the entire tree with all its branches and fruits. David does not wish to speak about spiritual or angelic envy, which no earthly king or prince can recognize, condemn, or punish. Therefore he describes and names Mr. Envy according to his outward fruit, by which he may be recognized; this is called slandering. Mr. Envy cannot practice his wicked craft at court without first slandering and then scratching and oppressing the innocent. Thus he gives the impression that he is not Mr. Envy but a good friend and a lover of righteousness, while people say, “It serves him right!” about the innocent one who is being scratched. In addition Mr. Envy must be able to pretend that he is sorry about it all; as Sirach says ([Ecclus. 12:15–19](#)): “The enemy speaks nice words and is very much grieved for you and pretends to be friendly. He can even shed tears. But in his heart he is thinking how he will push you into the pit. And if he gets the chance, he will not be able to get enough of your blood. If someone wants to harm you, he is the first to pretend that he wants to help you; then he strikes you down like an assassin. Then he shakes his head and laughs up his sleeve, ridiculing you and opening his big mouth.” Alas, what a horrible text this is! But how true it is, is shown by many, yes, countless examples, with which the heathen books are also filled. And so David attacks this vice as the first and worst, which rules most powerfully in the governments. As they say in the verse:

Through envy, greed, and councilors young,
Jerusalem, Troy, and Rome were hung.

But enough has been said for this time concerning that part of the psalm. In addition, one may read other books about it. For I dare say that all heathendom cries as loud against this domestic devil as does the Scripture.

The other virtue follows:

5b. I am not fond of one who has proud demeanor and is conceited in spirit.

What business does this virtue have at court? Or how does such an insufferable vice get to court, making King David cry that he cannot tolerate it when anyone is proud and conceited? Aye, where else should such a little weed grow except in governments, where there is great power, honor, wealth, and friendship? There may occasionally be a beggar who is also proud and conceited. But no one is afraid of him. Everyone laughs at him and says: “Poor man’s conceit! The devil uses it to wipe his behind. And even though it squeezes hard, it cannot pass anything, because it has nothing in its belly.” In this connection Aesop tells of the frog who blows himself up and wants to be as big as the ox. But the young frog says: “No, dear mother, even if you tore yourself open and burst!” But David is speaking of serious conceit, which can do harm and is common at the court, such as the powerful, rich, and big people are able to practice. And just as he did not speak about spiritual slander or envy above, so also here he is not speaking about spiritual but about secular pride. Secular conceit rears its head in secular affairs here on earth. Spiritual conceit and envy were in Paradise and among the angels of God, where one wanted to be holier than the other and they fell into the abyss of hell on account of it; the false prophets and all the schismatic spirits in the church and among the children of God follow their example.

In other words, that we may finally get to the end of the psalm, court conceit or pride is not peasant pride—pride in clothing, in ornaments, in being on top, in strutting, and in similar idle matters. For that matter, such things are also being overdone nowadays among the princes, lords, noblemen, and commoners. Scarcely anyone knows how high he would like to be over the next man. But that is all countrystyle pride, an example or an allegory; for horses are also proud in such a way, and they feel their adornment and honor. If we wanted to give it a polite name, it would be

“Hans’s pride” and not the prince’s pride, or private and not governmental pride. But in Greek, court pride and conceit is called “tyranny,” in German a “savage fellow.”⁶⁷ Thus a king, prince, or lord could wear a gray coat and have no golden, silk, or velvet haughtiness on him; and yet in the government he could torment either his neighbor or his subject with boasts, spite, oppression, and all misfortune—and that for no other reason than that he enjoys flying into a rage and would rather be feared than loved. As long as there is peace in the land, he may be able to get away with it. But when war comes, he must fear as many tyrants as he has horsemen and mercenaries. In addition, he must also give them money. Thus each pays for the other: because he himself is a tyrant in time of peace and takes in money, all he gets for his money in time of war is tyrants on his neck.

But here David is speaking of governmental pride in relation to subjects. He not only prides himself on the fact that he himself has not been proud in relation to his subjects—which is itself truly a high, royal virtue—but that he has also not permitted it among those who served at his court. Let anyone who can, imitate him; he has an example there which is set high enough. Having power, honor, wealth, and authority, and making up your mind to ignore it, or not becoming proud in relation to your subjects because of it—that is not the work of ordinary intelligence or of common human nature. That must be the virtue of a Hercules or a David, inspired by God. Everyone may read for himself about this modesty of David in the Books of Samuel. There his modesty is truly well described as a miracle of God. He conducted himself in such a friendly way to his people, in war as well as in peace.

Secular authority is like the authority of the household or the estate of marriage, where there are four possibilities: the first, that both of them, the man and the wife, love each other; the second, that each is hostile toward the other; the third, that the man loves his wife, and she is hostile toward him; the fourth, that the wife loves the husband, and he is ill-disposed toward her. Which is the best and which is the worst among these four is easy to understand. Therefore, if a land is in the situation that lord and servant love each other and are faithfully disposed toward each other, they will very likely stand over against their enemies. And if they are not mighty, they can become so, as it is written of Solon and the city of Athens.⁶⁸ There modesty confronts modesty, and they embrace each other cordially. But where a prince and a land hate each other, as they write about Sicily, there a prince will become a poor schoolmaster, as happened to Dionysius.⁶⁹ There pride confronts pride, as the Latin historians write about an emperor who said:

“Let them hate, provided that they fear,” grudge against grudge.⁷⁰ For many years Italy, the noblest but now the most wretched land on earth, has daily shown us examples of what such an administration does.

In the third instance, where the prince loves and the land does not love—ah, that is the regime of our Lord God Himself! For thus He complains in all the prophets, that He loves His bride and yet she wants to be a whore. Therefore our Lord God must be a cuckold—as they say in Saxony—but only by synecdoche. That is, they are not all that way; some are still faithful virgins in the faith. Many fine Roman emperors had such a government, and some of them were innocently put to death. Next to the first, this is the best of all. For our Lord God can still make it turn out well, pointing out that even if His bride becomes a whore, still seven thousand men do not pray to Baal ([1 Kings 19:18](#)) but remain pure virgins. So the outcome is still that a devout prince remains, while those who are hostile to him finally perish, and that he still finds pious subjects who stand by him. I need not cite examples here; for they do not pay attention to the ancient and unfamiliar ones, and they do not believe the modern ones.

The fourth possibility is that the lord is wicked and false, while the people are pious and faithful. Alas, the children of God have to put up with this sort of wonderful government! Not only must they put up with their tyrants, but they must also pray for them, wishing and doing everything good for them. Emperor Julian was such a lord. He had learned that the Christians were to suffer injustice. So he took their property away from them and said sneeringly and mockingly: “Your Christ has told you to suffer.”⁷¹ As [Psalm 137:3](#) says, the Chaldeans did the same thing to the poor, devout Jewish people in the Babylonian captivity: “Friend, sing us a little song of Zion.” The papists are manifesting such conceit and haughtiness now, especially the bishops, practicing their mockery and insolence on the obedience of their most faithful and pious subjects. They also tell them to call upon their Christ and Gospel, because they know that people suffer their conceit. They remain unmoved by the wrath and vengeance of God, which raged quite soon against Julian and the Chaldeans.

The heathen write—for, as we said, in secular government one should also let their books, sayings, and wisdom stand—that the wise man Bias, who was one of the sages of Greece, a heathen philosopher and prophet, was once asked: “Which is the worst among the tame animals, and which is the worst among the wild animals?” He answered: “Among the tame animals a

flatterer is the worst, among the wild a tyrant is the worst.”⁷² I should not have answered this way. I would have said that among the tame animals cats and horses are famous as bad customers, and among the wild it is the wolves and foxes. But they are experienced in governmental affairs, and they have the knowledge to speak in such matters. Necessity teaches a person to speak and act who otherwise neither would nor could say or do anything. A tyrant claims to be free like a wild beast and to be doing what he pleases. A flatterer does not claim to be free. He poses as the most faithful subject, completely involved in service. Yet in his freedom he is ahead of the tyrant. For one can rebuke and hate the tyrant publicly, but one must praise and honor the flatterer. The tyrant does everything bad, the flatterer does everything good. Therefore David is still minded to place Mr. Envy and Mr. Flatterer in the forefront as the most artful scoundrels of all. It was also Mr. Envy who sent the devil into Paradise, because there could be no more dangerous messenger to bring Adam and Eve into all misery.

As we have said, therefore, dear David is an example of the fact that a king should not be proud or conceited or tyrannical in his own person. In addition, he should not permit his court personnel to be tyrannical and proud toward his subjects. Whoever is able to do this should praise and thank God for it, if he is a Christian or a believing man and knows that such great virtues are gifts of God. It is not enough for him to be neither proud nor tyrannical in his own person, if he permits his court personnel or his officials to treat his subjects as they please. Nor dare he trust anyone not to be tyrannical. Both David himself and Solomon complained very much about this, and there is no chance that the world has improved since that time. As Solomon says ([Eccl. 1:9](#)): “What happened before is still happening, and there is nothing new under the sun.” And in German: “No matter how minor the office, it is worth hanging for.” The offices of princes and officials are divine and right, but those who are in them and use them are usually of the devil. And if a prince is a rare dish in heaven, this is even more true of the officials and the court personnel. This is caused by the evil, depraved nature, which cannot stand success; that is, it cannot use honor, power, and authority in a divine way. No matter how insignificant the little office may be, they take a foot though they do not have an inch,⁷³ and always want to be God themselves when they ought to be God’s maid.

In praising the government highly in [Romans 13:6](#), St. Paul truly pays it the highest tribute when he calls it “God’s maid.” Otherwise, who would think so highly of it, sincerely and without compulsion, if it did not have to

be regarded as God's maid? Now, if the maid herself wants to be God and to rule tyrannically with Lucifer ([Is. 14:12](#)), thinking that everything is to be done for her own benefit, greed, rest, and pomp, then she may also expect what is written in the Magnificat ([Luke 1:52](#)): "He pushes down the mighty from their seat, and exalts the humble." Thus it has happened, and is still happening daily to all the empires, to high and low authorities, to princes as well as to officials. For it is the rhyme of our Lord God which St. Peter writes ([1 Peter 5:5](#)): "God opposes the proud." He has carried it out very strictly since the beginning of the world. He has smashed many tyrants who did not want to believe it until they experienced it, like Pharaoh, Sennacherib, etc. Thus the heathen also write that their giants fought against the gods and carried hills on top of one another. And Sirach says ([Ecclus. 40:10](#)) that the Flood came because of the tyrants, as it is easy to understand from Moses ([Gen. 6:4 ff.](#)).

The sixth verse of the psalm follows, which is the second verse concerning secular authority.

*6. My eyes look for the faithful in the land, that they may dwell with me,
and I delight in devout servants.*

My dear David, if you had, and preserved, such an election and choice in your land, then most assuredly you should be called not only a prince-electoral but also a king-electoral. But I am wondering. If you destroyed and so completely annihilated all the slanderers, traitors, envious, proud, tyrants, and all unworthy wicked officials and court personnel, where did you find others in their place, especially, as the text says, "faithful and devout ones"? Elsewhere in other kingdoms, and also among us in the German lands (at least a number of times), things proceed according to the Gospel; as Christ says ([Matt. 12:43–45](#)): "When one devil goes out, seven more wicked ones come in his place; and the longer it goes on, the worse it becomes." Thus the histories or fables tell of a widow who prayed that her tyrant might not soon die, and of the beggar who severely scolded a man who was chasing the flies out of his wounds.⁷⁴ I heard Doctor Staupitz speak of Duke Frederick's repeated complaint that the longer he ruled, the less he was able to rule; for the people became so strange that he did not know whom he could trust at all. This was a strange statement to me, because I thought that the government of such a great and shrewd prince would have no offense or temptation whatever. But, judging from my experience in church administration and from the common experience of all householders in

managing their affairs, I think that now I can smell the meaning of such words from a long way off. Some will feel the smack and the grip, namely, pious princes and lords. For the others always have more good luck than justice. May God help them and be gracious to them. Amen.

Maybe David succeeded, as he boasts here, because he surveyed the entire land, opening his eyes, looking around for faithful, devout people wherever he was able to find them, and selecting without any discrimination among persons. This is what God does; He does not discriminate among persons when He distributes His gifts; but he makes of the shepherd boy David such a great and shrewd and blessed king, while He lets Saul the king become a fool and an unhappy and frustrated man. It is true, and it should be, that prominent personages—like kings, princes, lords, and noblemen, high and low—ought to be shrewd and devout, everyone according to his station. This is why they have a high and noble title, a shield and helmet ahead of others. They have the power, wealth, and honor of the world, so that they ought to rule well alone. But what is missing is the fact that our Lord God makes up His own mind. He regards us all as one dough, one like another, and does with us as He pleases. Therefore to a noble He often gives wisdom and virtue such as He does not give to three princes, and to a commoner such as He does not give to six nobles. As a real God, He wants to be free and unbound and not subordinate to the human creature, as St. Peter calls it ([1 Peter 2:13](#)), even though it be pretty and fair. Who would not wish that the higher the standing by birth, the higher the wisdom and virtue might be? But it cannot be and never will be thus. This is our Lord God's fault, not ours. He could do it that way if He wanted to; we cannot do it that way, no matter how anxious we might be to do so. For it is written ([Ps. 100:3](#)): "He makes us, and we do not make ourselves."

They say of Emperor Maximilian that it annoyed his lords at court when he used his clerk or cleric, as they say, for such honorable and imperial actions, communications, and advices.⁷⁵ But he retorted with the complaint that he had to use whomever he could, because they did not want to do it, nor let themselves be used. Aye, they were greatly pleased to have the honor, dignity, power, and rank of the court; but they did not want to touch the toil and trouble at the court, even with their little finger. Busying oneself with letters, with writing and reading in the chancellery—that is secretarial work. To work with official acts, advices, and communications is servile, and not just a peasant's job but a mule's job. Yes, but a court cannot dispense with such court mules. Either the prince himself must do it,⁷⁶ or someone must do

it for him. The government does not want you to lie on the couch and rest, or to sit behind the stove like a lazy, sleepy, ravenous hound. It wants you to work! Thus necessity compelled Maximilian to do as David did. He looked around in the land to find people who would work diligently and faithfully and help carry the responsibility of government, whether they were noblemen, clerks, clerics, or whatever they may have been. For it is pleasant to be a court steed and a court mouth; but to be a court mule is toil and trouble, aversion and disgust. Yet if there were no court mule, the court steed and the court mouth would not have so very much to eat and drink or so much time to loaf and play.

It may well be, too, that Maximilian recognized not only their unwillingness but also their incompetence for this. For the nobility at court and elsewhere corrupt themselves from youth on with carousing, playing, and peasant excesses. They grow up undisciplined, unbridled, inexperienced, and self-willed. This is why the nobility produces so few competent men, especially in the winelands. As St. Paul says ([Eph. 5:18](#)), carousing brings forth rude, wild, coarse, inconsiderate, and intolerable people. Such people cannot apply themselves properly to anything, but want to go right through headlong, just as though government were as easy a thing as carousing. They will only make good things bad and are more likely to make bad things worse than to improve them. It has often grieved me to see what fine fellows there were among the young nobility, well built in body and soul, like beautiful young saplings. And because there was no gardener to train them and to take care of them, they were uprooted by the swine, were left in their sap, and withered. They say themselves: “Court life, swine life.” But it is always a pity that such fine people should be trampled upon among such swine. It harms the entire realm, both land and people, if the youth is corrupted.

But every land must have its own devil—Italy hers, France hers. Our German devil would be a good wineskin and would bear the name Guzzle, because he is so thirsty and parched that he cannot be cooled even by all this great guzzling of wine and beer. And such an eternal thirst, I am afraid, will remain as Germany’s plague until the Last Day. Preachers have tried to check it with God’s Word, authorities with prohibition; some of the noblemen have exchanged mutual pledges. Restraint has also been furnished and is still being furnished daily by the great and fearful damage, the disgrace and murder and other misfortunes that come to body and soul before our eyes, which easily ought to scare us away. But Guzzle remains

an almighty idol among us Germans, and he acts like the sea and like dropsy: the sea does not become full from the many waters that flow into it, dropsy becomes thirstier and worse from drinking. Sirach says ([Ecclus. 31:25; 40:20](#)) that wine was made (as [Ps. 104:15](#) also says) that man might become happy through it and strengthen his life. But guzzling makes us mad and foolish, giving us death and all kinds of plagues and sins along with it. Well, there is not enough time or space here to speak of that swinish idol Guzzle. Finally he also rewards his faithful servants very fairly, so that they feel it.⁷⁷

We come back to David, who wants to be an elector-king and decide who among his people are capable and who are not. This, moreover, was the custom and law among the people of Israel. They did this in the matter of taking wives, and a king often took the daughter of a commoner. The Turk also follows such a principle for the selection and choice of officials in his kingdom. But whether a king or prince ought to undertake such a thing now, this I will not, and cannot, advise, except on the condition that emperor, kings, and princes in the entire realm participate. Before such a thing happens, we expect to see the highest Lord of all lords coming in the clouds, and to depart with Him. In the meantime the government, the bad fur, may remain a faltering government, and, with the personnel unmingled, may leave it up to God which one He will draw out and exalt. Similarly, I also would not want to have the imperial laws tampered with or changed, even though both lords and subjects, judges and jurists not only live contrary to them but also boldly abuse them. The heathen also say that change of government and laws do not take place without great bloodshed, as all the histories attest.⁷⁸ And before one could establish a new kind of empire in the German land, it would be thrice devastated.

Therefore I have no sympathy for Master Smart Aleck, who wants to correct secular laws, or for all those who want to do it better. Sometimes it seems to me that the government and jurists may well be in need of a Luther, but I am worried that they might get a Münzer.⁷⁹ God does not esteem the secular government as highly as His own eternal government in the church; therefore I cannot and will not hope that they may get a Luther. Because there is no hope of getting another government in the Roman Empire, as Daniel also indicates ([Dan. 2:40](#)), it is not advisable to change it. Rather, let him who is able darn and patch it up as long as we live; let him punish the abuse and put bandages and ointment on the smallpox. But if someone is going to tear out the pox unmercifully, then no one will feel the pain and the

damage more than those clever barbers who would rather tear out the sores than heal them. Very well, Germany is perhaps ripe and, I fear, worthy of stout punishment. God be gracious to us! I know very well that I am not like a Münzer (praise God). Whoever is able to do it better, to him I yield my poor Pater Noster with a glad heart. Just let me have the chance to add the Amen at the end. For I have often said—but who wants to believe me until he experiences it?—that changing and improving are two different things. One is in men’s hands and God’s decree, the other is in God’s hands and grace.

7. Deceitful people shall not dwell within my house, liars shall not prosper with me.

There is a general complaint in all walks of life concerning false, lying people. As they say: “There is no longer any fidelity or faith”; again: “Good words, nothing behind them”; and “what is called white, is black.” The old Romans criticized the Greeks for such vices, as Cicero himself says: “I concede to the Greeks that they are learned, wise, artistic, skilled, fluent folk; but this people pays no attention to fidelity and faith.”⁸⁰ And before Cicero, Plautus, from the lips of one character says: “Dear fellow, I may not pay for water, air, earth, heaven. But whatever else I need in the house, this I must buy according to Greek fidelity and faith; that is, I must pay cash for it.”⁸¹ Very well. For a long time now this untrue, false people has suffered its punishment at the hands of the Turks, who also pay them in cash. Afterwards Italy also learned that it was possible to give one’s word and to swear to anything one pleased, and then to laugh when one was supposed to live up to it. Therefore the Italians, too, come by their punishment honestly. Both of them, Greeks and Italians, must be an example of the Second Commandment of God ([Ex. 20:7](#)), in which He says that whoever takes the name of God in vain will not be held guiltless.

No virtue has been praised so highly in us Germans and, I believe, has elevated us to such a height and kept us there, as the fact that men have considered us to be faithful, truthful, and trustworthy people, who have let yes be yes and no be no, as many histories and books will testify.⁸² I do not know much about the laws at court, but I have found out how very hostile Duke Frederick was toward liars. From his brother, Duke John, I myself once heard that he said: “How now? So and so told me this, so and so told me that. One of them must be lying!” This I know for a fact: that the seriousness and wrath of that devout prince against lies made me smile.

There have been many other princes like him. We Germans still have a little spark—may God preserve it and fan it—of that same ancient virtue. We still have some sense of shame, and we do not like to be called liars. We do not laugh about it the way the Italians and the Greeks do, or make a joke of it. Although the Italian and Greek misconduct is spreading—God have mercy!—at least this still remains among us: no one can speak or hear a more serious or shameful word of rebuke than to call a person “a liar” or to be called one himself.

I think—and it should be called thinking—that there is no more harmful vice upon earth than lying and being untruthful, which disrupts all communion among men. First of all, lying and untruthfulness drive hearts apart. Once the hearts are apart, the hands also go apart. If the hands are apart, what can be done or accomplished then? When merchants do not keep faith with one another, then the market crashes. If husband and wife are not faithful to each other, then the wife runs out of the back door and the husband out of the front; and you have him saying: “Beware, dear Elsie, beware that we do not become rich. If you break jugs, I will break pitchers.” If a mayor, prince, or king does not maintain faithful leadership, then the city must perish; land and people must be destroyed. For this reason there is such shameful cleavage, dissension, and misfortune in the land of Italy. For where fidelity and faith cease, there government must also come to an end. Christ help us Germans!

If there are such vices at court or in offices, as David here acknowledges, then things must also proceed accordingly. If the farmer and the townsman deceive, belie, cheat, and despoil one another, that is not yet the worst devil; for they are not in the government. But when it involves people in high positions, who do harm to land and people, that is Beelzebub. This is what Pope Julius, and then Pope Clement, did against the emperors; in fact, that is what many of the popes have done. And if princes also act that way toward one another, and if finally the officials or court personnel also act thus toward the subjects, then there is much promising, pledging, comforting, swearing, and taking of oaths going on, until the rafters creak. Everyone is buddy-buddy. Pope Julius also let the Sacrament be divided into three parts and made an eternal treaty with Emperor Maximilian and the king of France: “Even as God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost is one God, so firm shall this unity be.” But very soon thereafter the letter proved to be sealed with filth. For the Most Holy Father became alienated from the Son and the Spirit.⁸³ They tell about a man from Switzerland who was often present when

people had dealt, pledged, and sworn firmly in various cases, and yet had lived up to nothing. “I wish,” he said, “that we would swear one day to keep no more oaths. Then it would come to an end.”

Well, things are bad, Solomon says ([Prov. 17:7](#)), when the elders lie, that is, the high, honorable, powerful rulers. People praise the Turks because they keep trust and faith; perhaps this is also what makes them so mighty. If it is true, then let it be true. But this certainly is true: if people kept trust and faith or were trustworthy and reliable the way they would like to see other people be, then David would not have had so much trouble with false, faithless people and liars at his court. It certainly is extraordinary that among such a holy people, under such a pious, holy king, there should have been false people and liars. For if he did not have them under him, why should he praise his royal virtue in this matter so highly? Such toil and trouble became his lot for the sake of the faithful, devout servants. If matters stood thus at the royal court of such an excellent king, then certainly no king or prince among us Gentiles ought to regard his court as much better or consider it holier; everyone ought to let this psalm be painted on the walls.

8. I will early destroy all the godless in the land, that I may cut off all evildoers from the city of the Lord.

This means: “I cannot list all the vices, but this is the summary of them: I will tolerate none of them.” He has listed some, as St. Paul lists some of the works of the flesh in [Galatians 5:19–21](#) and says: “These and similar ones will not possess the kingdom of God.” Thus David also lists a number of things here: transgressors, wicked, false, slanderers, proud, conceited tyrants, deceitful liars; and then he says: “In other words, I will eradicate them all, all the godless, all the transgressors. That is, I will tolerate neither godless people in the spiritual government nor evildoers in the secular.” He could also have mentioned greed, usury, theft, robbery, oppression, murder, carousal, unchastity, and the like, which are not exactly rare among the young noblemen either. And who has ever accomplished, or could ever accomplish, the crossing out of all wickedness piece by piece in one book, to say nothing of one psalm? To say nothing of ancient times, it is evident in our time that, in order to check such vices, they make one law after another, one rule after another, one order after another, one way after another; and there is, as Solomon correctly says, no end of making books ([Eccl. 12:12](#)). By “books” he does not mean paper and ink but rather

teachings and ordinances, which are set up in the world ever and anew and yet scarcely do any checking or restraining.

But is it not annoying that David so shamefully and publicly rebukes all of us on earth and sings about us this way in all the churches? He says almost nothing but bad things about all walks of life: kings are not pious, princes are not pious, lords and noblemen are not pious, commoners are not pious, preachers and prophets are not pious. This is the way he deals with us all throughout the psalm, letting no one be any good but saying bluntly that he must destroy and eradicate evil teachers and false rulers. There must still be some pious kings, princes, lords, townsmen, farmers, servants, and maids left, as well as preachers and parsons. Otherwise let us go along with David wherever he wants to go, because he himself is also a king and a prophet. But our Lord God's suggestion is the best. He proposes knocking over heaven and earth onto one heap and making another, a new world. For this world is no good. There are too many rascals and too few pious people in it. It will not, and cannot, continue anywhere. This is what the Our Father teaches us to pray; for if things proceeded properly, and could proceed properly, on earth, there would have been no necessity of bidding us to pray: "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done." Had this been possible for nature, the high kings and shrewd princes would probably have been able to do it by their own power. They certainly have tried their very hardest.

If a prophet or a preacher had written so vehemently about or against false teachers and wicked rulers, he would probably have been rebuked and condemned as a rebel. But now this is a king, and he is doing it himself. He might have spared the honors, ignoring and overlooking at least some things, as many other kings and princes have undoubtedly done and perhaps are still doing. Just as women are reluctant to hear someone call them whores when that is just what they are, so kings and lords are reluctant, and courtiers are even more reluctant, to hear someone rebuke them and punish them as the unrighteous and wicked ones, because such a thing strikes too close to home. But David goes right ahead and minces no words. He does it rudely and indiscreetly enough, and he wants to suppress nothing. In fact, he boasts of it as a good deed that he rebukes his own people at court so shamefully and even destroys them. If he made it successfully and was not considered a stupid fool like all other prophets by his smart alecks, then it is a miracle to me; and I dare say he realized it. For at that time certainly Ahithophel, Joab, Abishai, and others of his princes and noblemen or officials were unwilling to own up to any unrighteousness but wanted to have all their doings

considered praiseworthy and honorable; so it has happened in other kingdoms, as well as among us Germans, past and present. No one does wrong, everyone does right. I myself once heard a big fellow say that no man on earth is or ever was hostile toward the Gospel. Therefore David must have been not only a brave hero with his fist but also an independent fellow with his tongue. It certainly was the same David who tore up the bear, slew the lion, and smote Goliath. Follow his example!

He also prides himself on the fact that he does such miracles early. Here “early” does not mean early in the day but early in his regime; that is, he destroyed such vices soon and betimes, before they developed half or even all of the heat of midday. If one permits a vice to spread and to become a habit, then there is no remedy. As Seneca says: “There is no room for a cure when what was a vice becomes a habit. If vices become your habit, then it is all over.”⁸⁴ And the poet Ovid says very well: “Resist the beginnings. Check the evil when it begins; for once it gains the upper hand, help will come too slowly.”⁸⁵ But at play, the best way is to overlook, they say. And it takes a David, one who is forthright and sharp. Indeed, he must be especially illuminated, to note the early hour and to recognize the beginning of the vice and then quickly to destroy the eggs of the insect in the nest before the noonday sun makes caterpillars out of them. Otherwise, if he sleeps through the early hour, the operations will get too involved and too big for him, before he becomes aware of the fact that his hands are tied and that he is helpless.

They say: “One should bend the tree while it is young; if it becomes old, it will not want to be bent, or will break.” Tell me, who is willing to check the usury and the guzzling in the German lands at present? Had they checked idolatry at the right time in the papacy, then, I dare say, the Gospel would have remained pure. At present Italian virtues are also spreading in Germany, especially in governmental circles. No one notices it; no one restrains it. Afterwards, when we no longer want to put up with it and wish we had checked it, the caterpillars will be sitting on all the leaves, and it will be said that we slept too long. My dear Doctor Staupitz used to say: “When God wants to punish someone, He first makes him blind so that he may not see where his danger and misfortune begin.”⁸⁶ Thus it is also written in Matthew’s Gospel ([Matt. 13:25](#)), that while the people were sleeping—and that surely means having their eyes closed and not seeing or noticing—the enemy came. When the grass, tares, or weeds grew tall, then they saw for the first time the damage that had been done during their sleep. And when

they wanted to tear it out, “Too late!” Christ said, “you might tear the wheat out along with it. Let it grow until the harvest.” Therefore my little David must really have been no small rascal himself, as the saying goes,⁸⁷ to be able to recognize great rascals so soon. What a very mistrustful king he must have been! How carefully he must have had to consider every word and action of his staff, while remaining a gracious, humble, friendly, and comforting lord.

Friend, here at the conclusion, let us question the proud, boastful king why he may boast so gloriously about his government, as though there never were any troubled waters at his time. First one should note how miserably and wretchedly his kingdom began, when he had to be insecure for so long under Saul. Even after Saul’s death, how he had to patch around before he was accepted as king! Then he himself fell into adultery, murder, and great sin against God. As a result and a punishment, his son Amnon defiled his own sister Tamar and was in turn slain by his brother Absalom. Then the same Absalom drove David, his father, into exile, ravishing all his wives; and he was gruesomely pierced, as he deserved. Joab, his field general, traitorously thrust through two of the best princes and advisers. Ahithophel, his secretary, and all Israel fell away from him and opposed him. Finally the sedition in Sichri⁸⁸ troubled him sorely. I do not mention the plague with which God punished his sin. Who knows what additional misfortune he suffered, which is not recorded? So come now, dear David, and extol for us your good regime, and praise God for it. The regime of unhappy Herod is surely not much worse to look at, or that of the heathen in Greece. What shall we say about this? I propose that we refer it to the sharp men in the papacy, who are able to harmonize all the ways in which they contradict themselves in their laws. Therefore they themselves call their book “Concordance of the Discordant.”⁸⁹ Verily, well christened and named.

Well, I am going to let David stay here and consider that in his trouble he undoubtedly needs neither my advice and help nor that of any man. For he has such a gracious God—a God who thinks so gloriously and highly of him that He lets it be said to his credit that David is His faithful servant who has done all His will; a God who, in addition, was born of his seed and did not despise or consider it a shame to be born the Son of such a king. What harm would it do, if, in order not to call God a liar, we simply believed that his government was the very highest and best and dearest before God, although in the eyes of us men, who will certainly not judge more severely than God Himself, it appears to be most disgraceful? Yet if I wanted to do it, I could harmonize such contradictory things fairly well and say briefly: David’s rule

took its course, as he here extols it. But that he encountered much misfortune, this he had to suffer precisely because he ruled them well and earnestly. Moreover, when he also sinned, he did not defend the sin, as Saul and many other kings did. He even ceased and desisted. Anyone who wants to, or is supposed to, rule well, will have to have the devil as his godfather. Thus it was also said above that a king or prince cannot punish secret malicious wickedness until God makes it manifest. It is enough that he does not leave unpunished the vices that have been exposed or have otherwise become public.

Here I shall close. I hope I have done a good job. I shall call it good if it is well-pleasing to a few people and quite disgusting to many people. That should be almost as certain a sign as the manger and the swaddling clothes were a certain sign for the shepherds ([Luke 2:12](#)). But if it pleases everyone, then it certainly is a bad and disgraceful job that I have done. Yet I hope that I have not exposed myself to this danger. But if it pleases everyone, as God may see fit, then in God's name may it be a labor lost and no one be served thereby. But whoever lets it be noticed that he is not pleased with it will certainly feel smitten and know that he is guilty. Even by this he will acknowledge that he is, or would like to be, one of those whom David here describes. As Christ says ([Luke 19:22](#); [Matt. 12:37](#)): “Out of your own mouth you will be condemned.” And the heathen like Cicero also say: “If no one is mentioned when vices are denounced, then whoever becomes angry betrays himself and shows that he is guilty.”⁹⁰ Christ, our Lord, be gracious to all of us and remain (in firm faith) our dear Savior. Amen.