

**ON THE BONDAGE  
OF THE WILL**

**A TREATISE BY MARTIN LUTHER,  
AGAINST ERASMUS OF ROTTERDAM**

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with an Introduction by Douglas Wilson*



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# INTRODUCTION

Those who come to this book with fairly settled notions of the differences between Lutherans and Calvinists will be surprised—as I certainly was when I first read it—with how rapidly preconceived notions can get discombobulated. As far as the popular definitions go, Luther comes off in this book as a far more exuberant Calvinist than Calvin ever was. There are qualifications from other branches of theology that have to be made, and we *will* in fact make them, but when it comes to the subject that is under discussion in this book—the inability of the human will to do anything worthwhile with regard to salvation—it will have to be admitted that Luther blows through this subject leaning back on his outrigger sailboat, which is itself at a 45 degree angle. But this requires further explanation.

One more caution should be made before we begin. This may be the only classic theological work you ever read which makes you laugh out loud multiple times.

## **Author's Life, Historical and Global Context**

Martin Luther is popularly (and rightly) credited with being the spark that set off the great Protestant Reformation. He was born in 1483 to Hans and Margarete Luther. His parents were of peasant

lineage, but Hans had done well for himself and could afford to send young Martin to school—which resulted in him eventually attending the University of Erfurt, well on his way to the practice of law. But in 1505, Martin was caught in a ferocious thunderstorm, where he thought he was going to die. Given his spiritual condition, he did not think that was a good idea, at least not right then, and he cried out to St. Anne for deliverance. He did this with the promise he would become a monk if spared. He *was* spared, and he did become a monk, to the disappointment of his father. Martin was greatly afflicted by the foreboding prospect of God's wrath, and he believed that becoming a monk would help fix things. It did not.

When he was 27 he had the opportunity to become a delegate to a church conference in Rome, which gave him a front row seat from which to view the immorality and general seediness of the Catholic priests there. *Disillusioned* would be an appropriate word to use. He came back to Germany and threw himself into his studies, and as a consequence earned a doctorate from the University of Wittenberg. He then became a professor of theology there at Wittenberg.

While preparing a lecture on the book of Romans, around 1515, he spent some time pondering the mysterious phrase *the just will live by faith*. As a result, the light broke through and Luther was thoroughly converted.

A short time later, in 1517, he posted his famous 95 theses on the door of the church at Wittenberg, the 500th anniversary of which just passed. This was not bad manners—the church door served as a bulletin board. But in any case the news of this challenge to the papacy roared across Europe like a prairie fire on the Great Plains at the end of a hot summer.

I said a short time ago that Luther is rightly credited with the event that set off the Protestant Reformation. But the nature of that event has to be understood. It was not as though Luther came to this understanding in a vacuum, all by himself, and then by dint of a

# LUTHER'S INTRODUCTION

*Martin Luther, to the venerable D. Erasmus of Rotterdam, wishing Grace  
and Peace in Christ*

That I have been so long answering your Diatribe on Free-will, venerable Erasmus, has happened contrary to the expectation of all, and contrary to my own custom also. For hitherto, I have not only appeared to embrace willingly opportunities of this kind for writing, but even to seek them of my own accord. Someone may perhaps wonder at this new and unusual thing, this forbearance or fear in Luther, who could not be roused up by so many boasting taunts and letters of adversaries, congratulating Erasmus on his victory, and singing to him the song of triumph. What! That Maccabee, that obstinate assertor then has at last found an Antagonist a match for him, against whom he dares not open his mouth!

But so far from accusing them, I myself openly concede that to you, which I never did to anyone before, that you not only by far surpass me in the powers of eloquence and in genius (which we all concede to you as your desert, and the more so, as I am but a barbarian and do all things barbarously) but that you have damped my spirit and impetus, and rendered me languid before the battle, and that by two news.

First, by art, because you conduct this discussion with a most specious and uniform modesty, by which you have met and prevented me from being incensed against you. And next, by fortune, or chance, or fate, because on so great a subject you say nothing but what has been said before. Therefore, you say less about, and attribute more unto Free-will than the sophists have hitherto said and attributed (of which I shall speak more fully hereafter), so that it seems even superfluous to reply to these your arguments, which have been indeed often refuted by me, but trodden down, and trampled underfoot, by the incontrovertible book of Philip Melanchthon, *Concerning Theological Questions*, a book, in my judgment, worthy not only of being immortalized, but of being included in the ecclesiastical canon, in comparison of which, your book is, in my estimation, so mean and vile that I greatly feel for you for having defiled your most beautiful and ingenious language with such vile trash, and I feel an indignation against the matter also, that such unworthy stuff should be borne about in ornaments of eloquence so rare, which is as if rubbish or dung should be carried in vessels of gold and silver.

And this you yourself seem to have felt who were so unwilling to undertake this work of writing, because your conscience told you that you would of necessity have to try the point with all the powers of eloquence, and that after all you not be able so to blind me by your coloring but that I should, having torn off the deceptions of language, discover the real dregs beneath. For although I am rude in speech, yet, by the grace of God, I am not in understanding. And with Paul, I dare arrogate to myself understanding, and with confidence derogate it from you, although I willingly and deservedly arrogate eloquence and genius to you and derogate it from myself.

Wherefore, I thought thus: if there be any who have not drank more deeply into and more firmly held my doctrines, which are supported by such weighty Scriptures than to be moved by these light and trivial arguments of Erasmus, though so highly ornamented, they are not worthy of being healed by my answer. Because for such men nothing



could be spoken or written of enough, even though it should be in many thousands of volumes a thousand times repeated, for it is as if one should plough the seashore, and sow seed in the sand, or attempt to fill a cask, full of holes, with water. For as to those who have drank into the teaching of the Spirit in my books, to them, enough and an abundance has been administered, and they at once condemn your writings. But, as to those who read without the Spirit, it is no wonder if they be driven to and fro like a reed, with every wind. To such, God would not have said enough, even if all his creatures should be converted into tongues. Therefore it would perhaps have been wisdom to have left these offended at your book, along with those who glory in you and decree to you the triumph.

Hence, it was not from a multitude of engagements, nor from the difficulty of the undertaking, nor from the greatness of your eloquence, nor from a fear of yourself, but from mere irksomeness, indignation, and contempt, or (so to speak) from my judgment of your Diatribe, that my impetus to answer you was damped. Not to observe in the meantime that, being ever like yourself, you take the most diligent care to be on every occasion slippery and pliant of speech, and while you wish to appear to assert nothing and yet at the same time, to assert something, more cautious than Ulysses, you seem to be steering your course between Scylla and Charybdis. To any of such a sort, what, I would ask, can be brought forward or composed, unless anyone knew how to catch Proteus himself? But what I may be able to do in this matter, and what profit your art will be to you, I wish, Christ co-operating with me, hereafter to shew.

This my reply to you, therefore, is not wholly without cause. My brethren in Christ press me to it. setting before me the expectation of all, seeing that the authority of Erasmus is not to be despised, and the truth of the Christian doctrine is endangered in the hearts of many. And indeed, I felt a persuasion in my own mind that my silence would not be altogether right, and that I was deceived by the prudence or

malice of the flesh, and not sufficiently mindful of my office, in which I am a debtor, both to the wise and to the unwise, especially since I was called to it by the entreaties of so many brethren.

For although our cause is such that it requires more than the external teacher, and, just as he that planteth and he that watereth outwardly has need of the Spirit of God to give the increase and as a living teacher to teach us inwardly living things (all which I was led to consider), yet since that Spirit is free and bloweth, not where we will, but where he willeth, it was needful to observe that rule of Paul, "Be instant, in season, and out of season." For we know not at what hour the Lord cometh. Be it, therefore, that those who have not yet felt the teaching of the Spirit in my writings, have been overthrown by that Diatribe—perhaps their hour was not yet come.

And who knows but that God may even condescend to visit you, my friend Erasmus, by me his poor weak vessel, and that I may (which from my heart I desire of the Father of mercies through Jesus Christ our Lord) come unto you by this book in a happy hour and gain over a dearest brother. For although you think and write wrong concerning Free-will, yet no small thanks are due unto you from me, in that you have rendered my own sentiments far more strongly confirmed from my seeing the cause of Free-will handled by all the powers of such and so great talents, and so far from being bettered, left worse than it was before, which leaves an evident proof that Free-will is a mere lie, and that, like the woman in the gospel, the more it is taken in hand by physicians, the worse it is made. Therefore the greater thanks will be rendered to you by me if you by me gain more information, as I have gained by you more confirmation. But each is the gift of God, and not the work of our own endeavors. Wherefore, prayer must be made unto God that He would open the mouth in me, and the heart in you and in all, and that he would be the teacher in the midst of us, who may in us speak and hear.

But from you, my friend Erasmus, suffer me to obtain the grant of this request: as I in these matters bear with your ignorance, so you in return would bear with my want of eloquent utterance. God giveth not all things to each; nor can we each do all things. Or, as Paul saith, "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:4). It remains, therefore, that these gifts render a mutual service—that the one with his gift sustain the burden and what is lacking in the other; so shall we fulfil the law of Christ.



## THE NECESSITY OF KNOWING GOD AND HIS POWER

But I will set your theology before your eyes by a few similitudes. What if anyone, intending to compose a poem or an oration should never think about, nor inquire into his abilities what he could do, and what he could not do, nor what the subject undertaken required, and should utterly disregard that precept of Horace, “What the shoulders can sustain, and what they must sink under,” but should precipitately dash upon the undertaking and think thus: I must strive to get the work done; to inquire whether the learning I have, the eloquence I have, the force of genius I have, be equal to it, is curious and superfluous; or, if anyone desiring to have a plentiful crop from his land should not be so curious as to take the superfluous care of examining the nature of the soil (as Virgil curiously and in vain teaches in his *Georgics*) but should rush on at once, thinking of nothing but the work, and plough the seashore, and cast in the seed wherever the soil was turned up, whether sand or mud; or if anyone about to make war, and desiring a glorious victory or intending to render any other service to the state should not be so curious as to deliberate upon what it was in his power to do, whether the treasury could furnish money, whether the soldiers were fit, whether any opportunity offered, and should pay no regard whatever to

that of the historian, "Before you act, there must be deliberation, and when you have deliberated, speedy execution," but should rush forward with his eyes blinded, and his ears stopped, only exclaiming war! war! and should be determined on the undertaking: what, I ask you, Erasmus, would you think of such poets, such husbandmen, such generals, and such heads of affairs? I will add also that of the Gospel: if anyone going to build a tower sits not down first and counts the cost, whether he has enough to finish it, what does Christ say of such a one? (cf. Luke 14:28-30).

Thus you also enjoin us works only. But you forbid us to examine, weigh, and know, first, our ability, what we can do, and what we cannot do, as being curious, superfluous, and irreligious. Thus, while with your overcautious prudence you pretend to detest temerity and make a show of sobriety, you go so far that you even teach the greatest of all temerity. For although the sophists are rash and mad in reality while they pursue their curious inquiries, yet their sin is less enormous than yours, for you even teach and enjoin men to be mad and to rush on with temerity. And to make your madness still greater, you persuade us that this temerity is the most exalted and Christian piety, sobriety, religious gravity, and even salvation. And you assert that if we exercise it not, we are irreligious, curious, and vain; although you are so great an enemy to assertions. Thus, in steering clear of Charybdis, you have, with excellent grace, escaped Scylla also. But into this state you are driven by your confidence in your own talents. You believe that you can by your eloquence so impose upon the understandings of all that no one shall discover the design which you secretly hug in your heart, and what you aim at in all those your pliant writings. But God is not mocked (Gal. 6:7), upon whom it is not safe to run.

Moreover, had you enjoined us this temerity in composing poems, in preparing for fruits, in conducting wars or other undertakings, or in building houses, although it would have been intolerable,

especially in so great a man, yet you might have been deserving of some pardon, at least from Christians, for they pay no regard to these temporal things. But when you enjoin Christians themselves to become rash workers, and charge them not to be curious about what they can do and what they cannot do in obtaining eternal salvation, this evidently and in reality, is the sin unpardonable. For while they know not what or how much they can do, they will not know what to do, and if they know not what to do, they cannot repent when they do wrong, and impenitence is the unpardonable sin, and to this does that moderate and skeptical theology of yours lead us.

Therefore, it is not irreligious, curious, or superfluous, but essentially wholesome and necessary for a Christian to know whether or not the will does anything in those things which pertain unto salvation. Nay, let me tell you, this is the very hinge upon which our discussion turns. It is the very heart of our subject. For our object is this: to inquire what "Free-will" can do in what it is passive, and how it stands with reference to the grace of God. If we know nothing of these things, we shall know nothing whatever of Christian matters, and shall be far behind all people upon the earth. He that does not feel this, let him confess that he is no Christian. And he that despises and laughs at it, let him know that he is the Christian's greatest enemy. For if I know not how much I can do myself, how far my ability extends, and what I can do God-wards, I shall be equally uncertain and ignorant how much God is to do, how far His ability is to extend, and what He is to do toward me, whereas it is "God that worketh all in all" (1 Cor. 12:6). But if I know not the distinction between our working and the power of God, I know not God Himself. And if I know not God, I cannot worship Him, praise Him, give Him thanks, nor serve Him, for I shall not know how much I ought to ascribe unto myself, and how much unto God. It is necessary, therefore, to hold the most certain distinction between the

power of God and our power, the working of God and our working, if we would live in His fear.

Hence, you see this point forms another part of the whole sum of Christianity, on which depends and in which is at stake, the knowledge of ourselves and the knowledge and glory of God. Wherefore, friend Erasmus, your calling the knowledge of this point irreligious, curious, and vain is not to be borne in you. We owe much to you, but we owe all to the fear of God. Nay, you yourself see that all our good is to be ascribed unto God, and you assert that in your Form of Christianity, and in asserting this, you certainly, at the same time assert also that the mercy of God alone does all things, and that our own will does nothing, but is rather acted upon, and so it must be, otherwise the whole is not ascribed unto God. And yet, immediately afterwards, you say that to assert these things and to know them is irreligious, impious, and vain. But at this rate a mind, which is unstable in itself and unsettled and inexperienced in the things of godliness, cannot but talk.

VIII. Another part of the sum of Christianity is to know whether God foreknows anything by contingency, or whether we do all things from necessity. This part also you make to be irreligious, curious, and vain, as all the wicked do. The devils and the damned also make it detestable and execrable. And you show your wisdom in keeping yourself clear from such questions, wherever you can do it. However, you are but a very poor rhetorician and theologian if you pretend to speak of “Free-will” without these essential parts of it. I will therefore act as a whetstone, and though no rhetorician myself, will tell a famed rhetorician what he ought to do. If then Quintilian, purposing to write on Oratory, should say, “In my judgment, all that superfluous nonsense about invention, arrangement, elocution, memory, pronunciation need not be mentioned; it is enough to know that Oratory is the art of speaking well”—would you not laugh at such a writer? But you act exactly like this: for pretending



to write on “Free-will,” you first throw aside and cast away the grand substance and all the parts of the subject on which you undertake to write, whereas it is impossible that you should know what “Free-will” is unless you know what the human will does and what God does or foreknows.

Do not your rhetoricians teach that he who undertakes to speak upon any subject ought first to show whether the thing exists, and then what it is, what its parts are, what is contrary to it, connected with it, and like unto it, and so forth? But you rob that miserable subject in itself, “Free will,” of all these things, and define no one question concerning it except this first, viz., whether it exist, and even this with such arguments as we shall presently see, and so worthless a book on “Free-will” I never saw, excepting the elegance of the language. The sophists, in reality, at least argue upon this point better than you, though those of them who have attempted the subject of “Free-will” are no rhetoricians, for they define all the questions connected with it—whether it exists, what it does, and how it stands with reference to, and so forth—although they do not effect what they attempt. In this book, therefore, I will push you, and the sophists together, until you shall define to me the power of “Free-will,” and what it can do, and I hope I shall so push you, Christ willing, as to make you heartily repent that you ever published your Diatribe.



## THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

This, therefore, is also essentially necessary and wholesome for Christians to know: that God foreknows nothing by contingency, but that He foresees, purposes, and does all things according to His immutable, eternal, and infallible will. By this thunderbolt, “Free-will” is thrown prostrate and utterly dashed to pieces. Those, therefore, who would assert “Free-will” must either deny this thunderbolt, or pretend not to see it, or push it from them. However, before I establish this point by any arguments of my own and by the authority of Scripture, I will first set it forth in your words.

Are you not then the person, friend Erasmus, who just now asserted that God is by nature just and by nature most merciful? If this be true, does it not follow that He is immutably just and merciful? That, as His nature is not changed to all eternity, so neither His justice nor His mercy? And what is said concerning His justice and His mercy must be said also concerning His knowledge, His wisdom, His goodness, His will, and His other Attributes. If, therefore, these things are asserted religiously, piously, and wholesomely concerning God, as you say yourself, what has come to you that, contrary to your own self, you now assert that it is irreligious, curious, and vain to say that God foreknows of necessity? You openly declare that the immutable will of God is to be known, but you forbid the knowledge of His immutable

prescience. Do you believe that He foreknows against His will, or that He wills in ignorance? If then, He foreknows, willing, His will is eternal and immovable, because His nature is so, and if He wills, foreknowing, His knowledge is eternal and immovable because His nature is so.

From which it follows unalterably that all things which we do, although they may appear to us to be done mutably and contingently, and even may be done thus contingently by us, are yet in reality done necessarily and immutably with respect to the will of God. For the will of God is effective and cannot be hindered because the very power of God is natural to Him, and His wisdom is such that He cannot be deceived. And as His will cannot be hindered, the work itself cannot be hindered from being done in the place, at the time, in the measure, and by whom He foresees and wills. If the will of God were such that, when the work was done, the work remained but the will ceased (as is the case with the will of men, which, when the house is built which they wished to build, ceases to will, as though it ended by death) then, indeed, it might be said that things are done by contingency and mutability. But here, the case is the contrary: 'the work ceases' and 'the will remains.' So far is it from possibility that the doing of the work or its remaining can be said to be from contingency or mutability. But (that we may not be deceived in terms) 'being done by contingency' does not in the Latin language signify that the work itself which is done is contingent, but that it is done according to a contingent and mutable will—such a will as is not to be found in God! Moreover, a work cannot be called contingent, unless it be done by us unawares, by contingency, and, as it were, by chance, that is, by our will or hand catching at it, as presented by chance, we thinking nothing of it, nor willing anything about it before.

X. I could wish, indeed, that we were furnished with some better term for this discussion than this commonly used term, 'necessity,' which cannot rightly be used, either with reference to the human will,

or the divine. It is of a signification too harsh and ill-suited for this subject, forcing upon the mind an idea of compulsion, and that which is altogether contrary to will, whereas the subject which we are discussing does not require such an idea, for Will, whether divine or human, does what it does, be it good or evil, not by any compulsion but by mere willingness or desire, as it were, totally free. The will of God, nevertheless, which rules over our mutable will, is immutable and infallible, as Boethius sings, "Immovable Thyself, Thou movement giv'st to all." And our own will, especially our corrupt will, cannot of itself do good; therefore, where the term fails to express the idea required, the understanding of the reader must make up the deficiency, knowing what is wished to be expressed: the immutable will of God, and the impotency of our depraved will, or, as some have expressed it, the necessity of immutability, though neither is that sufficiently grammatical or sufficiently theological.

Upon this point, the sophists have now labored hard for many years, and being at last conquered, have been compelled to retreat. All things take place from the necessity of the consequence (say they) but not from the necessity of the thing consequent. What nothingness this amounts to I will not take the trouble to show. By the necessity of the consequence (to give a general idea of it) they mean this: if God wills anything, that same thing must of necessity be done, but it is not necessary that the thing done should be necessary, for God alone is necessary; all other things cannot be so, if it is God that wills. Therefore (say they) the action of God is necessary where He wills, but the act itself is not necessary, that is (they mean) it has not essential necessity. But what do they effect by this playing upon words? Only this: that the act itself is not necessary, that is, it has not essential necessity. This is no more than saying the act is not God Himself. This, nevertheless, remains certain: if the action of God is necessary, or if there is a necessity of the consequence, everything takes place of necessity, how much soever the act be not necessary, that is, be not God

Himself or have not essential necessity. For if I be not made of necessity, it is of little moment with me, whether my existence and being be mutable or not, if nevertheless I, that contingent and mutable being who am not the necessary God, am made.

Wherefore, their ridiculous play upon words—that all things take place from the necessity of the consequence but not from the necessity of the thing consequent—amounts to nothing more than this: all things take place of necessity, but all the things that do take place are not God Himself. But what need was there to tell us this? As though there were any fear of our asserting that the things done were God Himself or possessed divine or necessary nature. This asserted truth, therefore, stands and remains invincible: that all things take place according to the immutable will of God, which they call the necessity of the consequence. Nor is there here any obscurity or ambiguity. In Isaiah he saith, “My counsel shall stand, and My will shall be done” (Is. 46:10). And what schoolboy does not understand the meaning of these expressions “Counsel,” “will,” “shall be done,” “shall stand?”

XI. But why should these things be abstruse to us Christians so that it should be considered irreligious, curious, and vain to discuss and know them, when heathen poets and the very commonalty have them in their mouths in the most frequent use? How often does Virgil alone make mention of Fate? “All things stand fixed by law immutable.” Again: “Fixed is the day of every man.” Again: “If the Fates summon you.” And again: “If thou shalt break the binding chain of Fate.” All this poet aims at is to show that in the destruction of Troy and in raising the Roman empire, Fate did more than all the devoted efforts of men: in a word, he makes even their immortal gods subject to Fate. To this, even Jupiter and Juno must, of necessity, yield. Hence they made the three Parcae immutable, implacable, and irrevocable in decree.

Those men of wisdom knew that which the event itself, with experience, proves: that no man’s own counsels ever succeeded but that the

event happened to all contrary to what they thought. Virgil's Hector says, "Could Troy have stood by human arm, it should have stood by mine." Hence that common saying was on everyone's tongue: "God's will be done." Again: "If God will, we will do it." Again: "Such was the will of God," "Such was the will of those above." "Such was your will," says Virgil. Whence we may see that the knowledge of predestination and of the prescience of God was no less left in the world than the notion of the divinity itself. And those who wished to appear wise went in their disputations so far that, their hearts being darkened, they became fools" (Rom. 1:21-22) and denied or pretended not to know those things which their poets, and the commonalty, and even their own consciences held to be universally known, most certain, and most true.

XII. I observe further, not only how true these things are (concerning which I shall speak more at large hereafter out of the Scriptures) but also how religious, pious, and necessary it is to know them. For if these things be not known there can be neither faith, nor any worship of God, nay, not to know them is to be in reality ignorant of God, with which ignorance salvation, it is well known, cannot consist. For if you doubt or disdain to know that God foreknows and wills all things, not contingently, but necessarily and immutably, how can you believe confidently, trust to, and depend upon His promises? For when He promises, it is necessary that you should be certain that He knows, is able, and willing to perform what He promises; otherwise, you will neither hold Him true nor faithful, which is unbelief, the greatest of wickedness, and a denying of the Most High God!

And how can you be certain and secure, unless you are persuaded that He knows and wills certainly, infallibly, immutably, and necessarily, and will perform what He promises? Nor ought we to be certain only that God wills necessarily and immutably, and will perform, but also to glory in the same, as Paul, "Let God be true, but every man a liar" (Rom. 3:4). And again: "For the Word of God is not without

effect” (Rom. 9:6). And in another place: “The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are His” (2 Tim. 2:19). And: “Which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began” (Titus 1:2). And: “He that cometh, must believe that God is and that He is a rewarder of them that hope in Him” (Heb. 11:6).

If, therefore, we are taught, and if we believe that we ought not to know the necessary prescience of God and the necessity of the things that are to take place, Christian faith is utterly destroyed and the promises of God and the whole Gospel entirely fall to the ground. For the greatest and only consolation of Christians in their adversities is the knowing that God lies not, but does all things immutably, and that His will cannot be resisted, changed, or hindered.

XIII. Do you now, then, only observe, friend Erasmus, to what that most moderate and most peace-loving theology of yours would lead us. You call us off, and forbid our endeavoring to know the prescience of God, and the necessity that lies on men and things, and counsel us to leave such things, and to avoid and disregard them, and in so doing, you at the same time teach us your rash sentiments: that we should seek after an ignorance of God (which comes upon us of its own accord, and is engendered in us), disregard faith, leave the promises of God, and account the consolations of the Spirit and the assurances of conscience nothing at all! Such counsel scarcely any Epicure himself would give!

Moreover, not content with this, you call him who should desire to know such things irreligious, curious, and vain, but him who should disregard them, religious, pious, and sober. What else do these words imply than that Christians are irreligious, curious, and vain? And that Christianity is a thing of naught, vain, foolish, and plainly impious? Here again, therefore, while you wish by all means to deter us from temerity, running, as fools always do, directly into the contrary, you teach nothing but the greatest temerity, impiety, and perdition. Do



you not see, then, that in this part your book is so impious, blasphemous, and sacrilegious that its like is not anywhere to be found.

I do not, as I have observed before, speak of your heart; nor can I think that you are so lost that from your heart you wish these things to be taught and practiced. But I would show you what enormities that man must be compelled unknowingly to broach who undertakes to support a bad cause, and moreover, what it is to run against divine things and truths, when, in mere compliance with others and against our own conscience, we assume a strange character and act upon a strange stage. It is neither a game nor a jest to undertake to teach the sacred truths and godliness: for it is very easy here to meet with that fall which James speaks of: "he that offendeth in one point is guilty of all" (James 2:10). For when we begin to be in the least degree disposed to trifle and not to hold the sacred truths in due reverence, we are soon involved in impieties and overwhelmed with blasphemies, as it has happened to you here, Erasmus. May the Lord pardon and have mercy upon you!

That the sophists have given birth to such numbers of reasoning questions upon these subjects, and have intermingled with them many unprofitable things, many of which you mention, I know and confess, as well as you, and I have inveighed against them much more than you have. But you act with imprudence and rashness when you liken the purity of the sacred truths unto the profane and foolish questions of the impious, and mingle and confound it with them. "They have defiled the gold with dung, and changed the good color," as Jeremiah sayeth (Lam. 4:1). But the gold is not to be compared unto and cast away with the dung as you do it. The gold must be wrested from them, and the pure Scripture separated from their dregs and filth, which it has ever been my aim to do that the divine truths may be looked upon in one light and the trifles of these men in another. But it ought not to be considered of any service to us that nothing has been effected by these questions, but their causing us to favor them less with the whole