

On Lying

By Saint Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430)

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[De Mendacio.]

Translated by Rev. H. Browne

This book appears from its place in the *Retractations* to have been written about A.D. 395, as it is the last work named in the first book, which contains those which he wrote before he was Bishop. Some editions represent it as addressed to Consentius, but not the manuscripts. The latter are probably right, as his other work on the subject was written in answer to the inquiries of Consentius on the case of the Priscillianists many years later.—*Bened. Ed.*

From *Retractations*, Book I, last Chapter

"I have also written a Book on Lying, which though it takes some pains to understand, contains much that is useful for the exercise of the [mind](#), and more that is profitable to morals, in inculcating the [love](#) of speaking the [truth](#). This also I was minded to remove from my works, because it seemed to me obscure, and intricate, and altogether troublesome; for which reason I had not sent it abroad. And when I had afterwards written another book, under this title, *Against Lying*, much more had I determined and ordered that the former should cease to exist; which however was not done. Therefore in this retraction of my works, as I have found this still in being, I have ordered that it should remain; chiefly because therein are to be found some necessary things which in the other are not. Why the other has for its title, *Against Lying*, but this, *Of Lying*, the reason is this, that throughout the one is an open assault upon lying, whereas great part of this is taken up with the discussion of the question for and against. Both, however, are directed to the same object. This book begins thus: "*Magna quaestio est de Mendacio.*"

1. There is a great question about Lying, which often arises in the midst of our every day business, and gives us much trouble, that we may not either rashly call that a lie which is not such, or decide that it is sometimes right to tell a lie, that is, a kind of honest, well-meant, charitable lie. This question we will painfully discuss by seeking with them that seek: whether to any good purpose, we need not take upon ourselves to affirm, for the attentive reader will sufficiently gather from the course of the discussion. It is, indeed, very full of dark corners, and has many cavern-like windings, whereby it oft eludes the eagerness of the seeker; so that at one moment what was found seems to slip out of one's hands, and anon comes to light again, and then is once more lost to sight. At last, however, the chase will bear down more surely, and will overtake our sentence. Wherein

if there is any [error](#), yet as Truth is that which sets free from all [error](#), and Falsehood that which entangles in all [error](#), one never [errs](#) more safely, methinks, than when one [errs](#) by too much loving the [truth](#), and too much rejecting of [falsehood](#). For they who find great fault say it is too much, whereas peradventure Truth would say after all, it is not yet enough. But whoso readest, you will do well to find no fault until you have read the whole; so will you have less fault to find. Eloquence you must not look for: we have been intent upon things, and upon dispatch in putting out of hand a matter which nearly concerns our every day life, and therefore have had small pains, or almost none, to bestow upon words.

2. Setting aside, therefore, jokes, which have never been accounted lies, seeing they bear with them in the tone of voice, and in the very mood of the joker a most evident indication that he means no deceit, although the thing he utters be not [true](#): touching which kind of discourse, whether it be meet to be used by perfect minds, is another question which we have not at this time taken in hand to clear; but setting jokes apart, the first point to be attended to, is, that a person should not be thought to lie, who lies not.

3. For which purpose we must see what a lie is. For not every one who says a false thing lies, if he believes or opines that to be [true](#) which he says. Now between believing and opining there is this difference, that sometimes he who believes feels that he does not [know](#) that which he believes, (although he may [know](#) himself to be [ignorant](#) of a thing, and yet have no [doubt](#) at all concerning it, if he most firmly believes it:) whereas he who opines, thinks he [knows](#) that which he does not [know](#). Now whoever utters that which he holds in his mind either as belief or as opinion, even though it be false, he lies not. For this he owes to the [faith](#) of his utterance, that he thereby produce that which he holds in his [mind](#), and has in that way in which he produces it. Not that he is without fault, although he lie not, if either he believes what he ought not to [believe](#), or thinks he [knows](#) what he [knows](#) not, even though it should be [true](#): for he accounts an unknown thing for a [known](#). Wherefore, that man lies, who has one thing in his mind and utters another in words, or by signs of whatever kind. Whence also the heart of him who lies is said to be double; that is, there is a double thought: the one, of that thing which he either [knows](#) or thinks to be [true](#) and does not produce; the other, of that thing which he produces instead thereof, [knowing](#) or thinking it to be false. Whence it comes to pass, that he may say a false thing and yet not lie, if he thinks it to be so as he says although it be not so; and, that he may say a [true](#) thing, and yet lie, if he thinks it to be false and utters it for [true](#), although in reality it be so as he utters it. For from the sense of his own [mind](#), not from the verity or falsity of the things themselves, is he to be judged to lie or not to lie. Therefore he who utters a false thing for a [true](#), which however he opines to be [true](#), may be called erring and rash: but he is not rightly said to lie; because he has not a double heart when he utters it, neither does he wish to deceive, but is deceived. But the fault of him who lies, is, the desire of deceiving in the uttering of his mind; whether he do deceive, in that he is [believed](#) when uttering the false thing; or whether he do not deceive, either in that he is not [believed](#), or in that he utters a [true](#) thing with will to deceive, which he does not think to be [true](#): wherein being [believed](#), he does not deceive though it was his will to deceive: except that he deceives in so far as he is thought to [know](#) or think as he utters.

4. But it may be a very nice question whether in the absence of all will to deceive, lying is altogether absent. Thus, put the case that a person shall speak a false thing, which he esteems to be false, on the ground that he thinks he is not [believed](#), to the intent, that in that way falsifying his [faith](#) he may deter the person to whom he speaks, which person he perceives does not choose to [believe](#) him. For here is a person who tells a lie with studied purpose of not deceiving, if to tell a lie is to utter any thing otherwise than you [know](#) or think it to be. But if it be no lie, unless when something is uttered with wish to deceive, that person lies not, who says a false thing, [knowing](#) or thinking it to be false, but says it on purpose that the person to whom he speaks by not believing him may not be deceived, because the speaker either [knows](#) or thinks the other will not [believe](#) him. Whence if it appear to be possible that a person should say a false thing on purpose that he to whom it is said may not be deceived, on the other hand there is this opposite case, the case of a person saying the [truth](#) on purpose that he may deceive. For if a man determines to say a [true](#) thing because he perceives he is not [believed](#), that man speaks [truth](#) on purpose that he may deceive: for he [knows](#) or thinks that what is said may be accounted false, just because it is spoken by him. Wherefore in saying a [true](#) thing on purpose that it may be thought false, he says a [true](#) thing on purpose to deceive. So that it may be inquired, which rather lies: he who says a false thing that he may not deceive, or he who says a [true](#) thing that he may deceive? the one [knowing](#) or thinking that he says a false thing, and the other [knowing](#) or thinking that he says a [true](#) thing? For we have already said that the person who does not [know](#) the thing to be false which he utters, does not lie if he thinks it to be [true](#); and that that person rather lies who utters even a [true](#) thing when he thinks it false: because it is by the sense of their mind that they are to be judged. Concerning these [persons](#) therefore, whom we have set forth, there is no small question. The one, who [knows](#) or thinks he says a false thing, and says it on purpose that he may not deceive: as, if he [knows](#) a certain road to be beset by [robbers](#), and fearing lest some person for whose safety he is anxious should go by that road, which person he [knows](#) does not trust him, should tell him that that road has no [robbers](#), on purpose that he may not go by it, as he will think there are [robbers](#) there precisely because the other has told him there are none, and he is resolved not to [believe](#) him, accounting him a liar. The other, who [knowing](#) or thinking that to be [true](#) which he says, says it on purpose that he may deceive: for instance, if he tells a person who does not [believe](#) him, that there are [robbers](#) in that road where he really [knows](#) them to be, that he to whom he tells it may the rather go by that road and so fall among [robbers](#), because he thinks that to be false, which the other told him. Which then of these lies? the one who has chosen to say a false thing that he may not deceive? or the other who has chosen to say a [true](#) thing that he may deceive? that one, who in saying a false thing aimed that he to whom he spoke should follow the [truth](#)? or this one, who in saying a [true](#) thing aimed that he to whom he spoke should follow a [falsehood](#)? Or haply have both lied? the one, because he wished to say a false thing: the other, because he wished to deceive? Or rather, has neither lied? not the one, because he had the will not to deceive: not the other, because he had the will to speak the [truth](#)? For the question is not now which of them [sinned](#), but which of them lied: as indeed it is presently seen that the latter [sinned](#), because by speaking a [truth](#) he brought it about that a person should fall among [robbers](#), and that the former has not [sinned](#), or even has done good, because by speaking a false thing he has been the means of a person's avoiding destruction. But then these instances may be turned the other way, so that the one should

be supposed to wish some more grievous suffering to the person whom he wishes not to be deceived; for there are many cases of [persons](#) who through [knowing](#) certain things to be [true](#), have brought destruction upon themselves, if the things were such as ought to have continued unknown to them: and the other may be supposed to wish some convenience to result to the person whom he wishes to be deceived; for there have been instances of [persons](#) who would have destroyed themselves had they [known](#) some [evil](#) that had really befallen those who were dear to them, and through deeming it false have spared themselves: and so to be deceived has been a benefit to them, as to others it has been a hurt to [know](#) the [truth](#). The question therefore is not with what purpose of doing a kindness or a hurt, either the one said a false thing that he might not deceive, or the other a [true](#) thing that he might deceive: but, setting apart the convenience or inconvenience of the [persons](#) spoken to, in so far as relates to the very [truth](#) and [falsehood](#), the question is, whether both of them or neither has lied. For if a lie is an utterance with will of uttering a false thing, that man has rather lied who willed to say a false thing, and said what he willed, albeit he said it of set purpose not to deceive. But if a lie is any utterance whatever with will to deceive; then not the former has lied, but the latter, who even in speaking [truth](#) willed to deceive. And if a lie is an utterance with will of any falsity, both have lied; because both the former willed his utterance to be false, and the latter willed a false thing to be [believed](#) concerning his utterance which was [true](#). Further, if a lie is an utterance of a person wishing to utter a false thing that he may deceive, neither has lied; because both the former in saying a false thing had the will to make a [true](#) thing [believed](#), and the latter to say a [true](#) thing in order that he might make a false thing [believed](#). We shall be clear then of all rashness and all lying, if, what we [know](#) to be [true](#) or right to be [believed](#), we utter when need is, and wish to make that thing [believed](#) which we utter. If, however, either thinking that to be [true](#) which is false, or accounting as [known](#) that which is to us unknown, or believing what we ought not to [believe](#), or uttering it when need is not, we yet have no other aim than to make that [believed](#) which we utter; we do not stand clear indeed of the [error](#) of temerity, but we do stand clear of all lying. For there is no need to be afraid of any of those definitions, when the mind has a good [conscience](#), that it utters that which to be [true](#) it either [knows](#), or opines, or believes, and that it has no wish to make any thing [believed](#) but that which it utters.

5. But whether a lie be at some times useful, is a much greater and more concerning question. Whether, as above, it be a lie, when a person has no will to deceive, or even makes it his business that the person to whom he says a thing shall not be deceived although he did wish the thing itself which he uttered to be false, but this on purpose that he might [cause](#) a [truth](#) to be [believed](#); whether, again, it be a lie when a person willingly utters even a [truth](#) for the purpose of deceiving; this may be [doubted](#). But none doubts that it is a lie when a person willingly utters a [falsehood](#) for the purpose of deceiving: wherefore a false utterance put forth with will to deceive is manifestly a lie. But whether this alone be a lie, is another question. Meanwhile, taking this kind of lie, in which all agree, let us inquire, whether it be sometimes useful to utter a [falsehood](#) with will to deceive. They who think it is, advance testimonies to their opinion, by alleging the case of Sarah, who, when she had laughed, denied to the Angels that she laughed: of Jacob questioned by his father, and answering that he was the elder son Esau: likewise that of the [Egyptian](#) midwives, who to save the Hebrew infants from being slain at their birth,

told a lie, and that with God's approbation and reward: and many such like instances they pick out, of lies told by [persons](#) whom you would not dare to blame, and so must own that it may sometimes be not only not blameworthy, but even praiseworthy to tell a lie. They add also a case with which to urge not only those who are devoted to the Divine Books, but all [men](#) and common sense, saying, Suppose a man should take refuge with you, who by your lie might be saved from death, would you not tell it? If a sick man should ask a question which it is not expedient that he should [know](#), and might be more grievously afflicted even by your returning him no answer, will you venture either to tell the [truth](#) to the destruction of the man's life, or rather to hold your peace, than by a [virtuous](#) and merciful lie to be serviceable to his weak health? By these and such like arguments they think they most plentifully prove, that if occasion of doing good require, we may sometimes tell a lie.

6. On the other hand, those who say that we must never lie, plead much more strongly, using first the Divine authority, because in the very Decalogue it is written "You shall not bear false [witness](#);" under which general term it comprises all lying: for whoso utters any thing bears [witness](#) to his own mind. But lest any should contend that not every lie is to be called false [witness](#), what will he say to that which is written, "The mouth that lies slays the [soul](#):" and lest any should suppose that this may be understood with the exception of some liars, let him read in another place, "You will destroy all that speak leasing." Whence with His own lips the Lord says, "Let your communication be yea, yea; nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these comes of [evil](#)." Hence the Apostle also in giving precept for the putting off of the old man, under which name all [sins](#) are understood, says straightway, "Wherefore putting away lying, speak ye [truth](#)."

7. Neither do they confess that they are awed by those citations from the [Old Testament](#) which are alleged as examples of lies: for there, every incident may possibly be taken figuratively, although it really did take place: and when a thing is either done or said figuratively, it is no lie. For every utterance is to be referred to that which it utters. But when any thing is either done or said figuratively, it utters that which it signifies to those for whose understanding it was put forth. Whence we may [believe](#) in regard of those [persons](#) of the prophetic times who are set forth as authoritative, that in all that is written of them they acted and spoke [prophetically](#); and no less, that there is a prophetic meaning in all those incidents of their lives which by the same prophetic Spirit have been accounted worthy of being recorded in writing. As to the midwives, indeed, they cannot say that these [women](#) did through the prophetic Spirit, with purpose of signifying a future [truth](#), tell [Pharaoh](#) one thing instead of another, (albeit that Spirit did signify something, without their [knowing](#) what was doing in their [persons](#);) but, they say that these [women](#) were according to their degree approved and rewarded of [God](#). For if a person who is used to tell lies for harm's sake comes to tell them for the sake of doing good, that person has made great progress. But it is one thing that is set forth as laudable in itself, another that in comparison with a worse is preferred. It is one sort of gratulation that we express when a man is in sound health, another when a sick man is getting better. In the [Scripture](#), even [Sodom](#) is said to be justified in comparison with the crimes of the people [Israel](#). And to this rule they apply all the instances of lying which are produced from the Old Books, and are found not reprehended, or cannot be reprehended: either they are

approved on the score of a progress towards improvement and hope of better things, or in virtue of some hidden signification they are not altogether lies.

8. For this reason, from the books of the [New Testament](#), except the figurative pre-significations used by [our Lord](#), if you consider the life and manners of the Saints, their actions and sayings, nothing of the kind can be produced which should provoke to imitation of lying. For the simulation of Peter and Barnabas is not only recorded, but also reprov'd and corrected. For it was not, as some suppose, out of the same simulation that even [Paul](#) the Apostle either [circumcised](#) Timothy, or himself celebrated certain ceremonies according to the Jewish rite; but he did so, out of that liberty of his mind whereby he preached that neither are the [Gentiles](#) the better for [circumcision](#), nor the [Jews](#) the worse. Wherefore he judged that neither the former should be tied to the custom of the [Jews](#), nor the [Jews](#) deterred from the custom of their fathers. Whence are those words of his: "Is any man called being [circumcised](#) let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be [circumcised](#). Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of [God](#). Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called." How can a man become uncircumcised after [circumcision](#)? but let him not do so, says he: let him not so live as if he had become uncircumcised, that is, as if he had covered again with flesh the part that was bared, and ceased to be a Jew; as in another place he says, "Your [circumcision](#) is become uncircumcision." And this the Apostle said, not as though he would compel either those to remain in uncircumcision, or the [Jews](#) in the custom of their fathers: but that neither these nor those should be forced to the other custom; and, each should have power of abiding in his own custom, not necessity of so doing. For neither if the Jew should wish, where it would disturb no man, to recede from Jewish observances, would he be prohibited by the Apostle, since the object of his counselling to abide therein was that [Jews](#) might not by being troubled about superfluous things be hindered from coming to those things which are necessary to [salvation](#). Neither would it be prohibited by him, if any of the [Gentiles](#) should wish to be [circumcised](#) for the purpose of showing that he does not detest the same as noxious, but holds it indifferently, as a seal, the usefulness of which had already passed away with time; for it did not follow that, if there were now no [salvation](#) to be had from it, there was destruction to be dreaded therefrom. And for this reason, Timothy, having been called in uncircumcision, yet because his mother was a Jewess and he was bound, in order to gain his kindred, to show them that he had not learned in the [Christian](#) discipline to abominate the [sacraments](#) of the old Law, was [circumcised](#) by the Apostle; that in this way they might prove to the [Jews](#), that the reason why the [Gentiles](#) do not receive them, is not that they are [evil](#) and were perniciously observed by the Fathers, but because they are no longer necessary to [salvation](#) after the advent of that so great Sacrament, which through so long times the whole of that ancient Scripture in its prophetic prefigurations did travail in birth withal. For he would circumcise Titus also, when the [Jews](#) urged this, but that false brethren, privily brought in, wished it to be done to the intent they might have it to disseminate concerning [Paul](#) himself as a token that he had given place to the [truth](#) of their preaching, who said that the hope of [Gospel salvation](#) is in [circumcision](#) of the flesh and observances of that kind, and that without these Christ profits no man: whereas on the contrary Christ would nothing profit them, who should be [circumcised](#) because they thought that in it was

[salvation](#); whence that saying, "Behold, I [Paul](#) say unto you, that if you be [circumcised](#), Christ shall profit you nothing." Out of this liberty, therefore, did [Paul](#) keep the observances of his fathers, but with this one precaution and express declaration, that people should not suppose that without these was no [Christian salvation](#). Peter, however, by his making as though [salvation](#) consisted in [Judaism](#), was compelling the [Gentiles](#) to judaize; as is shown by [Paul's](#) words, where he says, "Why do you compel the [Gentiles](#) to live as do the [Jews](#)?" For they would be under no compulsion unless they saw that he observed them in such manner as if beside them could be no [salvation](#). Peter's simulation therefore is not to be compared to [Paul's](#) liberty. And while we ought to [love](#) Peter for that he willingly received correction, we must not bolster up lying even by the authority of [Paul](#), who both recalled Peter to the right path in the presence of them all, lest the [Gentiles](#) through him should be compelled to judaize; and bore witness to his own preaching, that whereas he was accounted hostile to the traditions of the fathers in that he would not impose them on the [Gentiles](#), he did not despise to celebrate them himself according to the custom of his fathers, and therein sufficiently showed that this has remained in them at the Coming of Christ; that neither to the [Jews](#) they are pernicious, nor to the [Gentiles](#) necessary, nor henceforth to any of [mankind](#) means of [salvation](#).

9. But if no authority for lying can be alleged, neither from the ancient Books, be it because that is not a lie which is received to have been done or said in a figurative sense, or be it because good men are not challenged to imitate that which in bad men, beginning to amend, is praised in comparison with the worse; nor yet from the books of the [New Testament](#), because Peter's correction rather than his simulation, even as his tears rather than his denial, is what we must imitate: then, as to those examples which are fetched from common life, they assert much more confidently that there is no trust to be given to these. For first they teach, that a lie is iniquity, by many [proofs](#) of [holy](#) writ, especially by that which is written, "You, Lord, hatest all workers of iniquity, you shall destroy them that speak leasing." For either as the [Scripture](#) is wont, in the following clause it expounds the former; so that, as iniquity is a term of a wider meaning, leasing is named as the particular sort of iniquity intended: or if they think there is any difference between the two, leasing is by so much worse than iniquity as "you will destroy" is heavier than "you hate." For it may be that God [hates](#) a person to that degree more mildly, as not to destroy him, but whom He destroys He [hates](#) the more exceedingly, by how much He punishes more severely. Now He [hates](#) all who work iniquity: but all who speak leasing He also destroys. Which thing being fixed, who of them which assert this will be moved by those examples, when it is said, suppose a man should seek shelter with you who by your lie may be saved from death? For that death which men are foolishly afraid of who are not afraid to [sin](#), kills not the [soul](#) but the body, as the Lord teaches in the [Gospel](#); whence He charges us not to [fear](#) that death: but the mouth which lies kills not the body but the [soul](#). For in these words it is most plainly written, "The mouth that lies slays the [soul](#)." How then can it be said without the greatest perverseness, that to the end one man may have life of the body, it is another man's duty to incur death of the [soul](#)? The [love](#) of our neighbor has its bounds in each man's [love](#) of himself. "You shall [love](#)," says He, "your neighbor as yourself." How can a man be said to [love](#) as himself that man, for whom that he may secure a temporal life, himself loses life [eternal](#)? Since if for his temporal life he lose but his own temporal life, that is not to [love](#) as himself, but more

than himself: which exceeds the rule of sound doctrine. Much less then is he by telling a lie to lose his own [eternal](#) for another's temporal life. His own temporal life, of course, for his neighbor's [eternal](#) life a [Christian](#) man will not hesitate to lose: for this example has gone before, that the Lord died for us. To this point He also says, "This is my commandment, that you [love](#) one another as I have loved you. Greater [love](#) has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." For none is so foolish as to say that the Lord did other than consult for the [eternal salvation](#) of [men](#), whether in doing what He has charged us to do, or in charging us to do what Himself has done. Since then by lying [eternal](#) life is lost, never for any man's temporal life must a lie be told. And as to those who take it ill and are indignant that one should refuse to tell a lie, and thereby slay his own [soul](#) in order that another may grow old in the flesh; what if by our committing theft, what if by committing [adultery](#), a person might be delivered from death: are we therefore to steal, to commit whoredom? They cannot prevail with themselves in a case of this kind: namely, if a person should bring a halter and demand that one should yield to his carnal [lust](#), declaring that he will hang himself unless his request be granted: they cannot prevail with themselves to comply for the sake of, as they say, saving a life. If this is absurd and [wicked](#), why should a man corrupt his own [soul](#) with a lie in order that another may live in the body, when, if he were to give his body to be corrupted with such an object, he would in the judgment of all [men](#) be held guilty of nefarious turpitude? Therefore the only point to be attended to in this question is, whether a lie be iniquity. And since this is asserted by the texts above rehearsed, we must see that to ask, whether a man ought to tell a lie for the safety of another, is just the same as asking whether for another's safety a man ought to commit iniquity. But if the [salvation](#) of the [soul](#) rejects this, seeing it cannot be secured but by equity, and would have us prefer it not only to another's, but even to our own temporal safety: what remains, say they, that should make us [doubt](#) that a lie ought not to be told under any circumstances whatsoever? For it cannot be said that there is anything among temporal goods greater or dearer than the safety and life of the body. Wherefore if not even that is to be preferred to [truth](#), what can be put in our way for the sake of which they who think it is sometimes right to lie, can urge that a lie ought to be told?

10. As concerning purity of body; here indeed a very [honorable](#) regard seems to come in the way, and to demand a lie in its behalf; to wit, that if the assault of the ravisher may be escaped by means of a lie, it is indubitably right to tell it: but to this it may easily be answered, that there is no purity of body except as it depends on integrity of mind; this being broken, the other must needs fall, even though it seem intact; and for this reason it is not to be reckoned among temporal things, as a thing that might be taken away from people against their will. By no means therefore must the mind corrupt itself by a lie for the sake of its body, which it [knows](#) remains incorrupt if from the mind itself incorruptness depart not. For that which by [violence](#), with no [lust](#) foregoing, the body suffers, is rather to be called deforcement than corruption. Or if all deforcement is corruption, then not every corruption has turpitude, but only that which [lust](#) has procured, or to which [lust](#) has consented. Now by how much the mind is more excellent than the body, so much the more heinous is the [wickedness](#) if that be corrupted. There, then, purity can be preserved, because there none but a [voluntary](#) corruption can have place. For assuredly if the ravisher assault the body, and there is no escaping him either by

contrary force, or by any contrivance or lie, we must needs allow that purity cannot be violated by another's [lust](#). Wherefore, since no man doubts that the mind is better than the body, to integrity of body we ought to prefer integrity of [mind](#), which can be preserved for ever. Now who will say that the mind of him who tells a lie has its integrity? Indeed [lust](#) itself is rightly defined, An appetite of the mind by which to [eternal](#) goods any temporal goods whatever are preferred. Therefore no man can prove that it is at any time right to tell a lie, unless he be able to show that any [eternal](#) good can be obtained by a lie. But since each man departs from [eternity](#) just in so far as he departs from [truth](#), it is most absurd to say, that by departing therefrom it is possible for any man to attain to any good. Else if there be any [eternal](#) good which [truth](#) comprises not, it will not be a [true](#) good, therefore neither will it be good, because it will be false. But as the mind to the body, so must also [truth](#) be preferred to the mind itself, so that the mind should desire it not only more than the body, but even more than its own self. So will the mind be more entire and chaste, when it shall enjoy the immutability of [truth](#) rather than its own mutability. Now if [Lot](#), being so righteous a man that he was meet to entertain even Angels, offered his daughters to the [lust](#) of the Sodomites, to the intent, that the bodies of [women](#) rather than of men might be corrupted by them; how much more diligently and constantly ought the mind's chasteness in the [truth](#) to be preserved, seeing it is more [truly](#) preferable to its body, than the body of a man to the body of a [woman](#)?

11. But if any man supposes that the reason why it is right for a person to tell a lie for another is, that he may live the while, or not be offended in those things which he much loves, to the end he may attain unto [eternal truth](#) by being taught: that man does not understand, in the first place, that there is no flagitious thing which he may not upon the same ground be compelled to commit, as has been above demonstrated; and in the next place, that the authority of the doctrine itself is cut off and altogether undone if those whom we essay to bring thereunto, are by our lie made to think that it is somewhiles right to lie. For seeing the doctrine which brings [salvation](#) consists partly in things to be [believed](#), partly in things to be understood; and there is no attaining unto those things which are to be understood, unless first those things are [believed](#), which are to be [believed](#); how can there be any believing one who thinks it is sometimes right to lie, lest haply he lie at the moment when he teaches us to [believe](#)? For how can it be [known](#) whether he have at that moment some [cause](#), as he thinks, for a well-meant lie, deeming that by a false story a man may be frightened and kept from [lust](#), and in this way account that by telling a lie he is doing good even in spiritual things? Which kind of lie once admitted and approved, all discipline of [faith](#) is subverted altogether; and this being subverted, neither is there any attaining to understanding, for the receiving of which that discipline nurtures the babes: and so all the doctrine of [truth](#) is done away, giving place to most licentious [falsehood](#), if a lie, even well-meant, may from any quarter have place opened for it to enter in. For either whoso tells a lie prefers temporal advantages, his own or another's, to [truth](#); than which what can be more perverse? or when by aid of a lie he wishes to make a person fit for gaining the [truth](#), he bars the approach to [truth](#), for by wishing when he lies to be accommodating, it comes to pass that when he speaks the [truth](#), he cannot be depended upon. Wherefore, either we must not [believe](#) good men, or we must [believe](#) those whom we think [obliged](#) sometimes to tell a lie, or we must not

[believe](#) that good men sometimes tell lies: of these three the first is pernicious, the second foolish; it remains therefore that good men should never tell lies.

12. Thus has the question been on both sides considered and treated; and still it is not easy to pass sentence: but we must further lend diligent hearing to those who say, that no deed is so [evil](#), but that in avoidance of a worse it ought to be done; moreover that the deeds of men include not only what they do, but whatever they consent to be done unto them. Wherefore, if [cause](#) have arisen that a [Christian](#) man should choose to burn [incense](#) to [idols](#), that he might not consent to bodily defilement which the persecutor threatened him withal, unless he should do so, they think they have a right to ask why he should not also tell a lie to escape so foul a disgrace. For the consent itself to endure violation of the person rather than to burn [incense](#) to [idols](#), this, they say, is not a passive thing, but a deed; which rather than do, he chose to burn [incense](#). How much more readily then would he have chosen a lie, if by a lie he might ward off from a [holy](#) body so shocking a disgrace?

13. In which proposition these points may well deserve to be questioned: whether such consent is to be accounted as a deed: or whether that is to be called consent which has not approbation: or whether it be approbation, when it is said, "It is expedient to suffer this rather than do that;" and whether the person spoken of did right to burn [incense](#) rather than suffer violation of his body; and whether it would be right rather to tell a lie, if that was the alternative proposed, than to burn [incense](#)? But if such consent is to be accounted as a deed, then are they murderers who have chosen rather to be [put to death](#) than bear false [witness](#), yea, what is worse, they are murderers of themselves. For why, at this rate, should it not be said that they have slain themselves, because they chose that this should be done to them that they might not do what they were urged to do? Or, if it be accounted a worse thing to slay another than himself, what if these terms were offered to a Martyr, that, upon his refusing to bear false [witness](#) of Christ and to [sacrifice](#) to [demons](#), then, before his eyes, not some other man, but his own father should be [put to death](#); his father entreating him that he would not by his persevering permit that to be done? Is it not manifest, that, upon his remaining steadfast in his purpose of most faithful testimony, they alone would be the murderers who should slay his father, and not he a parricide into the bargain? As therefore, in this case, the man would be no party to this so heinous deed, for choosing, rather than violate his [faith](#) by false testimony, that his own father should be [put to death](#) by others, (yea, though that father were a sacrilegious person whose [soul](#) would be snatched away to punishment;) so the like consent, in the former case, would not make him a party to that so foul disgrace, if he refused to do [evil](#) himself, let others do what they might in consequence of his not doing it. For what do such persecutors say, but, "Do [evil](#) that we may not?" If the case were so, that our doing [evil](#) would make them not to have done it, even then it would not be our duty by doing [wickedness](#) ourselves to vote them harmless; but as in fact they are already doing it when they say nothing of the kind, why are they to have us to keep them company in [wickedness](#) rather than be vile and noisome by themselves? For that is not to be called consent; seeing that we do not approve what they do, always wishing that they would not, and, as much as in us lies, hindering them that they should not do it, and, when it is done, not only not committing it with them, but with all possible detestation condemning the same.

14. "How," do you say, "is it not his doing as well as theirs, when they would not do this, if he would do that?" Why, at this rate we go housebreaking with house-breakers, because if we did not shut the door, they would not break it open: and we go and [murder](#) with highwaymen, if it chance we [know](#) that they are going to do it, because if we killed them out of hand, they would not kill others. Or, if a person confess to us that he is going to commit a parricide, we commit it along with him, if, being able, we do not slay him before he can do the deed when we cannot in some other way prevent or thwart him. For it may be said, word for word as before, "You have done it as well as he; for he had not done this, had you done that." With my good will, neither ill should be done; but only the one was in my power, and I could take care that this should not be done; the other rested with another, and when by my good advice I could not quench the purpose, I was not bound by my [evil deed](#) to thwart the doing. It is therefore no approving of a sinner, that one refuses to [sin](#) for him; and neither the one nor the other is liked by him who would that neither were done; but in that which pertains to him, he has the power to do it or not, and with that he perpetrates it not; in that which pertains to another, he has only the will to wish it or not, and with that he condemns. And therefore, on their offering those terms, and saying, "If you burn not [incense](#), this shall you suffer;" if he should answer, "For me, I choose neither, I detest both, I consent unto you in none of these things:" in uttering these and the like words, which certainly, because they would be [true](#), would afford them no consent no approbation of his, let him suffer at their hands what he might, to his account would be set down the receipt of wrongs, to theirs the commission of [sins](#). "Ought he then," it may be asked, "to suffer his person to be violated rather than burn [incense](#)?" If the question be what he ought, he ought to do neither. For should I say that he ought to do any of these things, I shall approve this or that, whereas I reprobate both. But if the question be, which of these he ought in preference to avoid, not being able to avoid both but able to avoid one or other: I will answer, "His own [sin](#), rather than another's; and rather a lighter [sin](#) being his own, than a heavier being another's." For, reserving the point for more diligent inquiry, and granting in the mean while that violation of the person is worse than burning [incense](#), yet the latter is his own, the former another's deed, although he had it done to him; now, whose the deed, his the [sin](#). For though [murder](#) is a greater [sin](#) than stealing, yet it is worse to steal than to suffer [murder](#). Therefore, if it were proposed to any man that, if he would not steal he should be killed, that is, [murder](#) should be committed upon him; being he could not avoid both, he would prefer to avoid that which would be his own [sin](#), rather than that which would be another's. Nor would the latter become his act for being committed upon him, and because he might avoid it if he would commit a [sin](#) of his own.

15. The whole stress, then, of this question comes to this; whether it be [true](#) universally that no [sin](#) of another, committed upon you, is to be imputed to you, if, being able to avoid it by a lighter [sin](#) of your own, you do it not; or whether there be an exception of all bodily defilement. No man says that a person is defiled by being murdered, or cast into prison, or bound in chains, or scourged, or afflicted with other tortures and pains, or proscribed and made to suffer most grievous losses even to utter nakedness, or stripped of [honors](#), and subjected to great disgrace by reproaches of whatsoever kind; whatever of all these a man may have [unjustly](#) suffered, no man is so senseless as to say that he is thereby defiled. But if he have filth poured all over him, or poured into his mouth, or

crammed into him, or if he be carnally used like a [woman](#); then almost all [men](#) regard him with a feeling of horror, and they call him defiled and unclean. One must conclude then that the [sins](#) of others, be they what they may, those always excepted which defile him on whom they are committed, a man must not seek to avoid by [sin](#) of his own, either for himself or for any other, but rather he must put up with them, and suffer bravely; and if by no [sins](#) of his own he ought to avoid them, therefore not by a lie: but those which by being committed upon a man do make him unclean, these we are bound to avoid even by sinning ourselves; and for this reason those things are not to be called [sins](#), which are done for the purpose of avoiding that uncleanness. For whatever is done, in consideration that the not doing it were just [cause](#) of blame, that thing is not [sin](#). Upon the same principle, neither is that to be called uncleanness when there is no way of avoiding it; for even in that extremity he who suffers it has what he may do aright, namely, patiently bear what he cannot avoid. Now no man while acting aright can be defiled by any corporal contagion. For the unclean in the sight of God is every one who is unrighteous; clean therefore is every one who is righteous; if not in the sight of [men](#), yet in the sight of [God](#), Who judges without [error](#). Nay, even in the act of suffering that defilement with power given of avoiding it, it is not by the mere contact that the man is defiled; but by the [sin](#) of refusing to avoid it when he might. For that would be no [sin](#), whatever might be done for the avoiding of it. Whoever therefore, for the avoiding of it, shall tell a lie, [not](#).

[16. Or, are some lies, also, to be excepted, so that it were better to suffer this than to commit those? If so, then not every thing that is done in order to the avoiding of that defilement ceases to be sin](#); seeing there are some lies to commit which is worse than to suffer that foul [violence](#). For, suppose quest be making after a person that his body may be deflowered, and that it be possible to screen him by a lie; who dares to say that even in such a case a lie ought not be told? But, if the lie by which he may be concealed be one which may hurt the fair fame of another, by bringing upon him a false accusation of that very uncleanness, to suffer which the other is sought after; as, if it should be said to the inquirer, "Go to such an one," (naming some chaste man who is a stranger to [vices](#) of this kind,) "and he will procure for you one whom you will find a more willing subject, for he [knows](#) and loves such;" and thereby the person might be diverted from him whom he sought: I [know](#) not whether one man's fair fame ought to be violated by a lie, in order that another's body may not be violated by [lust](#) to which he is a stranger. And in general, it is never right to tell a lie for any man, such as may hurt another, even if the hurt be slighter than would be the hurt to him unless such a lie were told. Because neither must another man's bread be taken from him against his will, though he be in good health, and it is to feed one who is weak; nor must an innocent man, against his will, be beaten with rods, that another may not be killed. Of course, if they are willing, let it be done, because they are not hurt if they be willing that so it should be: but whether, even with his own consent, a man's fair fame ought to be hurt with a false charge of foul [lusts](#), in order that [lust](#) may be averted from another's body, is a great question. And I [know](#) not whether it be easy to find in what way it can be just that a man's fair fame, even with his consent, should be stained with a false charge of [lust](#), any more than a man's body should be polluted by the [lust](#) itself against his will.

17. But yet if the option were proposed to the man who chose to burn [incense](#) to [idols](#) rather than yield his body to abominable [lust](#), that, if he wished to avoid that, he should violate the fame of Christ by some lie; he would be most mad to do it. I say more: that he would be mad, if, to avoid another man's [lust](#), and not to have that done upon his person which he would suffer with no [lust](#) of his own, he should falsify Christ's [Gospel](#) with false praises of Christ; more eschewing that another man should corrupt his body, than himself to corrupt the doctrine of sanctification of [souls](#) and bodies. Wherefore, from the doctrine of religion, and from those utterances universally, which are uttered on behalf of the doctrine of religion, in the teaching and learning of the same, all lies must be utterly kept aloof. Nor can any [cause](#) whatever be found, one should think, why a lie should be told in matters of this kind, when in this doctrine it is not right to tell a lie for the very purpose of bringing a person to it the more easily. For, once break or but slightly diminish the authority of [truth](#), and all things will remain doubtful: which unless they be [believed true](#), cannot be held as certain. It is lawful then either to him that discourses, disputes, and preaches of things [eternal](#), or to him that narrates or speaks of things temporal pertaining to edification of religion and [piety](#), to conceal at fitting time whatever seems fit to be concealed: but to tell a lie is never lawful, therefore neither to conceal by telling a lie.

18. This being from the very first and most firmly established, touching other lies the question proceeds more securely. But by consequence we must also see that all lies must be kept aloof which hurt any man [unjustly](#): because no man is to have a wrong, albeit a lighter one is done to him, that another may have a heavier kept from him. Nor are those lies to be allowed, which, though they hurt not another, yet do nobody any good, and are hurtful to the [persons](#) themselves who gratuitously tell them. Indeed, these are the [persons](#) who are properly to be called liars. For there is a difference between lying and being a liar. A man may tell a lie unwillingly; but a liar loves to lie, and inhabits in his mind in the delight of lying. Next to such are those to be placed who by a lie wish to please men, not that they may do wrong or bring reproach upon any man; for we have already before put away that kind; but that they may be pleasant in conversation. These, differ from the class in which we have placed liars in this respect, that liars delight in lying, rejoicing in deceit for its own sake: but these [lust](#) to please by agreeable talk, and yet would rather please by saying things that were [true](#), but when they do not easily find [true](#) things to say that are pleasant to the hearers, they choose rather to tell lies than to hold their tongues. Yet it is difficult for these sometimes to undertake a story which is the whole of it false; but most commonly they interweave [falsehood](#) with [truth](#), where they are at a loss for something sweet. Now these two sorts of lies do no harm to those who [believe](#) them, because they are not deceived concerning any matter of religion and [truth](#), or concerning any profit or advantage of their own. It suffices them, to judge the thing possible which is told, and to have [faith](#) in a man of whom they ought not rashly to think that he is telling a lie. For where is the harm of believing that such an one's father or grandfather was a [good](#) man, when he was not? or that he has served with the army even in [Persia](#), though he never set foot out of Rome? But to the [persons](#) who tell these lies, they do much harm: to the former sort, because they so desert [truth](#) as to [rejoice](#) in deceit: to the latter, because they want to please people better than the [truth](#).

19. These sorts of lies having been without any hesitation condemned, next follows a sort, as it were by steps rising to something better, which is commonly attributed to well-meaning and good people, when the person who lies not only does no harm to another, but even benefits somebody. Now it is on this sort of lies that the whole dispute turns, whether that person does harm to himself, who benefits another in such sort as to act contrary to the [truth](#). Or, if that alone may be called [truth](#) which illustrates the very [minds](#) of [men](#) with an intimate and incommutable light, at least he acts contrary to some [true](#) thing, because although the bodily senses are deceived, yet he acts contrary to a [true](#) thing who says that a thing is so or not so, whereof neither his mind nor senses nor his opinion or belief gives him any report. Whether therefore he does not hurt himself in so profiting another, or in that compensation not hurt himself in which he profits the other, is a great question. If it be so, it should follow that he ought to profit himself by a lie which damages no man. But these things hang together, and if you concede that point, it necessarily draws in its train some very embarrassing consequences. For should it be asked, what harm it does to a person rolling in superfluous [wealth](#), if from countless thousands of bushels of wheat he lose one bushel, which bushel may be profitable as necessary food to the person stealing it; it will follow that theft also may be committed without blame, and false [witness](#) borne without [sin](#). Than which, what can be mentioned more perverse? Or [truly](#), if another had stolen the bushel, and you saw it done, and were questioned, would you tell a lie with honesty for the poor man, and if you do it for your own poverty will you be blamed? As if it were your duty to [love](#) another more than yourself. Both then are disgraceful, and must be avoided.

20. But haply some may think that there is an exception to be added; that there be some honest lies which not only hurt no man, but profit some man, excepting those by which crimes are screened and defended: so that the reason why the aforesaid lie is disgraceful, is that, although it hurt no man, and profit the [poor](#), it screens a theft; but if it should in such sort hurt nobody and profit somebody as not to screen and defend any [sin](#), it would not be morally wrong. As, put the case that some one should in your sight hide his money that he might not lose it by theft or [violence](#), and thereupon being questioned you should tell a lie; you would hurt no man, and wouldest serve him who had need that his money were hidden, and wouldest not have covered a [sin](#) by telling a lie. For it is no [sin](#) if a man hide his property which he fears to lose. But, if we therefore [sin](#) not in telling a lie, for that, while covering no man's [sin](#), we hurt nobody and do good to somebody, what are we about as concerning the [sin](#) itself of a lie? For where it is laid down, "You shall not steal," there is also this, "You shall not bear false [witness](#)." Since then each is severally prohibited, why is false [witness](#) culpable if it cover a theft or any other [sin](#), but if without any screening of [sin](#) it be done by itself, then not culpable, whereas stealing is culpable in and by itself, and so other [sins](#)? Or is it so that to hide a [sin](#) is not lawful; to do it, lawful?

21. If this be absurd, what shall we say? Is it so, that there is no "false [witness](#)," but when one tells a lie either to invent a crime against some man, or to hide some man's crime, or in any way to oppress any man in judgment? For a [witness](#) seems to be necessary to the judge for cognizance of the [cause](#). But if the [Scripture](#) named a "[witness](#)" only so far as that goes, the Apostle would not say, "Yea, and we are found false witnesses of [God](#);

because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ: whom He raised not up." For so he shows that it is false [witness](#) to tell a lie, yea, in [falsely](#) praising a person.

Or peradventure, does the person who lies then utter false [witness](#) when he either invents or hides any man's [sin](#), or hurts any man in whatever way? For, if a lie spoken against a man's temporal life is detestable, how much more one against [eternal](#) life? as is every lie, if it take place in doctrine of religion. And it is for this reason that the Apostle calls it false [witness](#), if a man tell a lie about Christ, yea, one which may seem to pertain to His praise. Now if it be a lie that neither invents or hides any man's [sin](#), nor is answered to a question of the judge, and hurts no man, and profits some man, are we to say that it is neither false [witness](#), nor a reprehensible lie?

22. What then, if a homicide seek refuge with a [Christian](#), or if he see where the homicide have taken refuge, and be questioned of this matter by him who seeks, in order to bring to punishment a [man](#), the slayer of man? Is he to tell a lie? For how does he not hide a [sin](#) by lying, when he for whom he lies has been guilty of a heinous [sin](#)? Or is it because he is not questioned concerning his [sin](#), but about the place where he is concealed? So then to lie in order to hide a person's [sin](#) is [evil](#); but to lie in order to hide the sinner is not [evil](#)? "Yea, surely:" says some one: "for a [man sins](#) not in avoiding punishment, but in doing something worthy of punishment. Moreover, it pertains to [Christian](#) discipline neither to despair of any man's amendment, nor to bar against any man the way of repentance." What if you be led to the judge, and then questioned concerning the very place where the other is in hiding? Are you prepared to say, either, "He is not there," when you know him to be there; or, "I [know](#) not, and have not seen," what you know and hast seen? Are you then prepared to bear false [witness](#), and to slay your [soul](#) that a manslayer may not be slain? Or, up to the presence of the judge will you lie, but when the judge questions you, then speak [truth](#) that you be not a false [witness](#)? So then you are going to slay a man yourself by betraying him. Surely the betrayer too is one whom the [divine Scripture](#) detests. Or haply is he no betrayer, who in answer to the judge's interrogation gives [true](#) information; but would be a betrayer, if, unasked, he should delate a man to his destruction? Put the case with respect to a just and innocent man, that you [know](#) where he is in hiding, and be questioned by the judge; which man, however, has been ordered to be taken to execution by a higher power, so that he who interrogates is charged with the execution of the law, not the author of the sentence? Will it be no false [witness](#) that you shall lie for an innocent man, because the interrogator is not a judge, but only charged with the execution? What if the author of the law interrogate you, or any [unjust](#) judge, making quest of an innocent man to bring him to punishment? What will you do? will you be false [witness](#), or betrayer? Or will he be a betrayer, who to a just judge shall ultroneously delate a lurking homicide; and he not so, who to an [unjust](#) judge, interrogating him of the hiding-place of an innocent man whom he seeks to slay, shall inform against the person who has thrown himself upon his [honor](#)? Or between the crime of false [witness](#) and that of betrayal, will you remain doubtful and unable to make up your mind? Or by holding your peace or professing that you will not tell, will you make up your mind to avoid both? Then why not do this before you come to the judge, that you may shun the lie also? For, having kept clear of a lie, you will escape all false [witness](#); whether every lie be false [witness](#), or not every: but by keeping clear of all false [witness](#)

in your sense of the word, you will not escape all lying. How much braver then, how much more excellent, to say, "I will neither betray nor lie?"

23. This did a former Bishop of the Church of Thagasta, Firmus by name, and even more firm in will. For, when he was asked by command of the emperor, through officers sent by him, for a man who was taking refuge with him, and whom he kept in hiding with all possible care, he made answer to their questions, that he could neither tell a lie, nor betray a man; and when he had suffered so many torments of body, (for as yet emperors were not [Christian](#).) he stood firm in his purpose. Thereupon being brought before the emperor, his conduct appeared so admirable, that he without any difficulty obtained a pardon for the man whom he was trying to save. What conduct could be more brave and constant? But peradventure some more timid person may say, "I can be prepared to bear any torments, or even to submit to death, that I may not [sin](#); but, since it is no [sin](#) to tell a lie such that you neither hurt any man, nor bear false [witness](#), and benefit some man, it is foolish and a great [sin](#), voluntarily and to no purpose to submit to torments, and, when one's health and life may haply be useful, to fling them away for nothing to people in a rage." Of whom I ask; Why he fears that which is written, "You shall not bear false [witness](#)," and fears not that which is said unto [God](#), "You will destroy all them that speak leasing?" Says he, "It is not written, Every lie: but I understand it as if it were written, You will destroy all that speak false [witness](#)." But neither there is it said, All false [witness](#). "Yes, but it is set there," says he, "where the other things are set down which are in every sort [evil](#)." What, is this the case with what is set down there, "You shall not kill?" If this be in every sort [evil](#), how shall one clear of this crime even just men, who, upon a law given, have killed many? "But," it is rejoined, "that man does not himself kill, who is the minister of some just command." These men's [fear](#), then, I do accept, that I still think that laudable man who would neither lie, nor betray a [man](#), did both better understand that which is written, and what he understood did bravely put in practice.

24. But one sometimes comes to a case of this kind, that we are not interrogated where the person is who is sought, nor forced to betray him, if he is hidden in such manner, that he cannot easily be found unless betrayed: but we are asked, whether he be in such a place or not. If we [know](#) him to be there, by holding our peace we betray him, or even by saying that we will in no wise tell whether he be there or not: for from this the questioner gathers that he is there, as, if he were not, nothing else would be answered by him who would not lie nor betray a [man](#), but only, that he is not there. So, by our either holding our peace, or saying such words, a man is betrayed, and he who seeks him has but to enter in, if he have the power, and find him: whereas he might have been turned aside from finding him by our telling a lie. Wherefore if you [know](#) not where he is, there is no [cause](#) for hiding the [truth](#), but you must confess that you know not. But, if you [know](#) where he is, whether he be in the place which is named in the question or elsewhere; you must not say, when it is asked whether he be there or not, "I will not tell you what you ask," but you must say, "I [know](#) where he is, but I will never show." For if, touching one place in particular you answer not and profess that you will not betray, it is just as if you should point to that same place with your finger: for a sure suspicion is thereby excited. But if at the first you confess that you [know](#) where he is, but will not tell, haply the inquisitor may be diverted from that place, and begin now to ply you that the place where

he is may be betrayed. For which good [faith](#) and humanity whatever you shall bravely bear, is judged to be not only not culpable, but even laudable; save only these things which if a man suffer he is said to suffer not bravely, but immodestly and foully. For this is the last description of lie, concerning which we must treat more diligently.

25. For first to be eschewed is that capital lie and far to be fled from, which is done in doctrine of religion; to which lie a man ought by no consideration to be induced. The second, that he should hurt some man [unjustly](#): which is such that it profits no man and hurts some man. The third, which so profits one as to hurt another, but not in corporal defilement. The fourth, that which is done through only [lust](#) of lying and deceiving, which is an unmixed lie. The fifth, what is done with desire of pleasing by agreeableness in talk. All these being utterly eschewed and rejected, there follows a sixth sort which at once hurts nobody and helps somebody; as when, if a person's money is to be [unjustly](#) taken from him, one who [knows](#) where the money is, should say that he does not [know](#), by whomsoever the question be put. The seventh, which hurts none and profits some: except if a judge interrogate: as when, not wishing to betray a man who is sought for to be [put to death](#), one should lie; not only a just and innocent, but also a culprit; because it belongs to [Christian](#) discipline neither to despair of any man's amendment, nor to bar the way of repentance against any. Of which two sorts, which are wont to be attended with great controversy, we have sufficiently treated, and have shown what was our judgment; that by taking the consequences, which are honorably and bravely borne, these kinds also should be eschewed by brave and faithful and truthful men and [women](#). The eighth sort of lie is that which hurts no man, and does good in the preserving somebody from corporal defilement, at least that defilement which we have mentioned above. For even to eat with unwashed hands the [Jews](#) thought defilement. Or if a person think this also a defilement, yet not such that a lie ought to be told to avoid it. But if the lie be such as to do an injury to any man, even though it screen a man from that uncleanness which all [men](#) abhor and detest; whether a lie of this kind may be told provided the injury done by the lie be such as consists not in that sort of uncleanness with which we are now concerned, is another question: for here the question is no longer about lying, but it is asked whether an injury ought to be done to any man, even otherwise than by a lie, that the said defilement may be warded off from another. Which I should by no means think: though the case proposed be the slightest wrongs, as that which I mentioned above, about a single measure of wheat; and though it be very embarrassing whether it be our duty not to do even such an injury to any man, if thereby another may be defended or screened from a lustful outrage upon his person. But, as I said, this is another question: at present let us go on with what we have taken in hand: whether a lie ought to be told, if even the inevitable condition be proposed that we either do this, or suffer the deed of [lust](#) or some execrable pollution; even though by lying we do no man harm.

26. Touching which matter, there will be some place open for consideration, if first the divine authorities which forbid a lie be diligently discussed: for if these give no place, we vainly seek a loophole; for we are bound to keep in every way the command of [God](#), and the [will](#) of [God](#) in all that through keeping His command we may suffer, it is our duty with an even mind to follow: but if by some relaxation any outlet be allowed, in such a case we are not to decline a lie. The reason why the [Divine Scriptures](#) contain not only

God's commands, but the life and character of the just, is this: that, if haply it be hidden in what way we are to take that which is enjoined, by the actions of the just it may be understood. With the exception, therefore, of those actions which one may refer to an allegorical significance, although none doubts that they really took place, as is the case with almost all the occurrences in the books of the [Old Testament](#). For who can venture to affirm of any thing there, that it does not pertain to a figurative foretelling? Seeing the Apostle, speaking of the sons of [Abraham](#), of whom of course it is most easily said that they were born and did live in the natural order of propagating the people, (for not monsters and prodigies were born, to lead the mind to some presignification,) nevertheless asserts that they signify the two Testaments; and says of that marvellous benefit which God bestowed upon His people [Israel](#) to rescue them out of the bondage in which they in [Egypt](#) were oppressed, and of the punishment which avenged their [sin](#) on their journey, that these things befell them in a figure: what actions will you find, from which you may set aside that rule, and take upon you to affirm that they are not to be reduced to some figure? Excepting therefore these, the things which in the [New Testament](#) are done by the Saints, where there is a most evident commending of manners to our imitation, may avail as examples for the understanding of the [Scriptures](#), which things are digested in the commands.

27. As, when we read in the [Gospel](#), "You have received a blow in the face, make ready the other cheek." Now as an example of patience can none be found than that of the Lord Himself more potent and excellent; but He, when smitten on the cheek, said not, Behold here is the other cheek, but He said, "If I have spoken ill, bear [witness](#) of the [evil](#); but if well, why do you smite Me?" Where He shows that the preparation of the other cheek is to be done in the heart. Which also the [Apostle Paul knew](#), for he, too, when he was smitten on the face before the [high priest](#), did not say, Smite the other cheek: but, "[God](#)," says he, "shall smite you, you whited wall: and do you sit to judge me according to law, and contrary to law commandest me to be smitten?" with most deep insight beholding that the [priesthood](#) of the [Jews](#) was already become such, that in name it outwardly was clean and fair, but within was foul with muddy [lusts](#); which [priesthood](#) he saw in spirit to be ready to pass away through vengeance of the Lord, when he spoke those words: but yet he had his heart ready not only to receive other blows on the cheek, but also to suffer for the [truth](#) any torments whatever, with [love](#) of them from whom he should suffer the same.

28. It is also written, "But I say unto you, Swear not at all." But the Apostle himself has used oaths in his Epistles. And so he shows how that is to be taken which is said, "I say unto you, Swear not at all:" that is, lest by swearing one come to a facility in swearing, from facility to a custom, and so from a custom there be a downfall into [perjury](#). And therefore he is not found to have [sworn](#) except in writing, where there is more wary forethought, and no precipitate tongue withal. And this indeed came of [evil](#), as it is said, "Whatever is more than these is of [evil](#):" not however from [evil](#) of his own, but from the [evil](#) of infirmity which was in them, in whom he even in this way endeavored to work [faith](#). For that he used an [oath](#) in speaking, while not writing, I [know](#) not that any Scripture has related concerning him. And yet the Lord says, "Swear not at all:" for He has not granted license thereof to [persons](#) writing. Howbeit, because to pronounce [Paul](#)

guilty of violating the commandment, especially in Epistles written and sent forth for the spiritual life and [salvation](#) of the [nations](#), were an impiety, we must understand that word which is set down, "At all," to be set down for this purpose, that as much as in you lies, you affect not, [love](#) not, nor as though it were for a good thing, with any delight desire, an [oath](#).

29. As that, "Take no thought for the morrow," and, "Take therefore no thought what you shall eat, or what you shall drink, or what you shall put on." Now when we see that the Lord Himself had a bag in which was put what was given, that it might be kept for necessary uses as the time should require; and that the Apostles themselves made much provision for the indigence of the brethren, not only for the morrow, but even for the more protracted time of impending dearth, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles; it is sufficiently clear that these precepts are so to be understood, that we are to do nothing of our work as matter of necessity, through [love](#) of obtaining temporal things, or [fear](#) of want.

30. Moreover, it was said to the Apostles that they should take nothing with them for their journey, but should live by the [Gospel](#). And in a certain place too the Lord Himself signified why He said this, when He added, "The laborer is worthy of his hire:" where He sufficiently shows that this is permitted, not ordered; lest haply he who should do this, namely, that in this work of preaching the word he should take anything for the uses of this life from them to whom he preached, should think he was doing any thing unlawful. And yet that it may more laudably not be done is sufficiently [proved](#) in the [Apostle Paul](#): who, while he said, "Let him that is taught in the word, communicate unto him, that teaches in all things," and showed in many places that this is wholesomely done by them to whom he preached the word, "Nevertheless," says he, "I have not used this power." The Lord, therefore, when He spoke those words, gave power, not bound men by a command. So in general, what in words we are not able to understand, in the actions of the Saints we gather how it is meet to be taken, which would easily be drawn to the other side, unless it were recalled by an example.

31. Thus then what is written, "The mouth that lies, slays the [soul](#);" of what mouth it speaks, is the question. For in general when the [Scripture](#) speaks of the mouth, it signifies the very seat of our conception in the heart, where is approved and decreed whatever also by the voice, when we speak the [truth](#), is uttered: so that he lies with the heart who approves a lie; yet that man may possibly not lie with the heart, who utters other than is in his [mind](#), in such sort that he [knows](#) it to be for the sake of avoiding a greater [evil](#) that he admits an [evil](#), disapproving withal both the one and the other. And they who assert this, say that thus also is to be understood that which is written, "He that speaks the [truth](#) in his heart:" because always in the heart [truth](#) must be spoken; but not always in the mouth of the body, if any [cause](#) of avoiding a greater [evil](#) require that other than is in the mind be uttered with the voice. And that there is indeed a mouth of the heart, may be understood even from this, that where there is speech, there a mouth is with no absurdity understood: nor would it be right to say, "Who speaks in his heart," unless it were right to understand that there is also a mouth in the heart. Though in that very place where it is written, "The mouth that lies, slays the [soul](#)," if the context of the lesson be considered, it

may peradventure be taken for no other than the mouth of the heart. For there is an obscure response there, where it is hidden from men, to whom the mouth of the heart, unless the mouth of the body sound therewith, is not audible. But that mouth, the [Scripture](#) in that place says, does reach to the hearing of the [Spirit of the Lord](#), Who has filled the whole earth; at the same time mentioning lips and voice and tongue in that place; yet all these the sense permits not to be taken, but concerning the heart, because it says of the Lord, that what is spoken is not hidden from Him: now that which is spoken with that sound which reaches to our ears, is not hidden from men either. Thus, namely, is it written: "The Spirit of wisdom is loving, and will not acquit an [evil](#)-speaker of his lips: for of his reins God is [witness](#), and of his heart a [true](#) searcher, and of his tongue a hearer. For the [Spirit of the Lord](#) has filled the whole earth, and that which contains all things has [knowledge](#) of the voice. Therefore he that speaks unrighteous things cannot be hid: but neither shall the judgment when it punishes pass by him. For in the thoughts of the ungodly shall there be interrogation; and the hearing of his words shall come from the Lord, to the punishment of his iniquities. For the ear of jealousy hears all things, and the tumult of murmurings will not be hid. Therefore keep yourselves from murmuring, which profits nothing, and from backbiting refrain your tongue: because an obscure response will not go into the void. But the mouth that lies, slays the [soul](#)." It seems then to threaten them who think that to be obscure and secret, which they agitate and turn over in their heart. And this, it would show, is so clear to the ears of [God](#), that it even calls it "tumult."

32. Manifestly also in the [Gospel](#) we find the mouth of the heart: so that in one place the Lord is found to have mentioned the mouth both of the body and of the heart, where he says, "Are ye also yet without understanding? Do ye not yet understand, that whatsoever enters in at the mouth, goes into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? but those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart, and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed [evil](#) thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false [witness](#), [blasphemies](#): these are the things which defile a [man](#)." Here if you understand but one mouth, that of the body, how will you understand, "Those things which proceed out of the mouth, come forth from the heart;" since spitting also and vomiting proceed out of the mouth? Unless peradventure a man is but then defiled when he eats anything unclean, but is defiled when he vomits it up. But if this be most absurd, it remains that we understand the mouth of the heart to have been expounded by the Lord, when He says, "The things which proceed out of the mouth, come forth from the heart." For being that theft also can be, and often is, perpetrated with silence of the bodily voice and mouth; one must be out of his mind so to understand it as then to account a person to be contaminated by the [sin](#) of theft, when he confesses or makes it [known](#), but when he commits it and holds his peace, then to think him undefiled. But, in [truth](#), if we refer what is said to the mouth of the heart, no [sin](#) whatever can be committed tacitly: for it is not committed unless it proceed from that mouth which is within.

33. But, like as it is asked of what mouth the [Scripture](#) says, "The mouth that lies, slays the [soul](#)," so it may be asked, of what lie. For it seems to speak of that lie in particular, which consists in detraction. It says, "Keep yourselves from murmuring, which profits nothing, and from detraction refrain your tongue." Now this detraction takes place through malevolence, when any man not only with mouth and voice of the body does

utter what he forges against any, but even without speaking wishes him to be thought such; which is in [truth](#) to detract with the mouth of the heart; which thing, it says, cannot be obscure and hidden from [God](#).

34. For what is written in another place, "Wish not to use every lie;" they say is not of force for this, that a person is not to use any lie. Therefore, when one man shall say, that according to this testimony of Scripture we must to that degree hold every sort and kind of lie in detestation, that even if a man wish to lie, yea, though he lie not, the very wish is to be condemned; and to this sense interprets, that it is not said, Do not use every lie, but, "Do not wish to use every lie;" that one must not dare not only to tell, but not even to wish to tell, any lie whatever: says another man, "Nay, in that it says, Do not wish to use every lie, it wills that from the mouth of the heart we exterminate and estrange lying: so that while from some lies we must abstain with the mouth of the body, as are those chiefly which pertain to doctrine of religion; from some, we are not to abstain with the mouth of the body, if reason of avoiding a greater [evil](#) require; but with the mouth of the heart we must abstain utterly from every lie." Where it behoves to be understood what is said, "Do not wish:" namely, the will itself is taken as it were the mouth of the heart, so that it concerns not the mouth of the heart when in shunning a greater [evil](#) we lie unwillingly. There is also a third sense in which you may so take this word, "not every," that, except some lies, it gives you leave to lie. Like as if he should say, wish not to [believe](#) every man: he would not mean to advise that none should be [believed](#); but that not all, some however, should be [believed](#). And that which follows, "For assiduity thereof will not profit for good," sounds as if, not lying, but assiduous lying, that is, the custom and [love](#) of lying, should seem to be that which he would prohibit. To which that person will assuredly slide down, who either shall think that every lie may be boldly used (for so he will shun not that even which is committed in the doctrine of [piety](#) and religion; than which what more abominably [wicked](#) thing can you easily find, not among all lies, but among all [sins](#)?) or to some lie (no matter how easy, how harmless,) shall accommodate the inclination of the will; so as to lie, not unwillingly for the sake of escaping a greater [evil](#), but willingly and with liking. So, seeing there be three things which may be understood in this sentence, either "Every lie, not only tell not, but do not even wish to tell:" or, "Do not wish, but even unwillingly tell a lie when anything worse is to be avoided:" or, "Not every," to wit, that except some lies, the rest are admitted: one of these is found to make for those who hold that one is never to lie, two for those who think that sometimes one may tell a lie. But yet what follows, "For assiduity thereof will not profit to good," I [know](#) not whether it can countenance the first sentence of these three; except haply so, that while it is a precept for the perfect not only not to lie, but not even to wish; assiduity of lying is not permitted even to beginners. As if, namely, on laying down the rule at no time whatever not merely to lie but so much as to have a wish to lie, and this being gainsaid by examples, in regard that there are some lies which have been even approved by great authority, it should be rejoined that those indeed are lies of beginners, which have, in regard of this life, some kind of duty of mercy; and yet to that degree is every lie [evil](#), and by perfect and spiritual minds in every way to be eschewed, that not even beginners are permitted to have assiduous custom thereof. For we have already spoken concerning the [Egyptian](#) midwives, that it is in respect of the promise of growth and proficiency to better things that they while lying are spoken of with approval:

because it is some step towards loving the [true](#) and [eternal](#) saving of the [soul](#), when a person does mercifully for the saving of any man's albeit mortal life even tell a lie.

35. Moreover what is written "You will destroy all that speak leasing:" one says that no lie is here excepted, but all condemned. Another says: Yea verily: but they who speak leasing from the heart, as we disputed above; for that man speaks [truth](#) in his heart, who [hates](#) the necessity of lying, which he understands as a penalty of the moral life. Another says: All indeed will God destroy who speak leasing, but not all leasing: for there is some leasing which the Prophet was at that time insinuating, in which none is spared; that is, if refusing to confess each one his [sins](#), he defend them rather, and will not do penance, so that not content to work iniquity, he must needs wish to be thought just, and succumb not to the medicine of confession: as the very distinction of the words may seem to intimate no other, "Thou hatest all that work iniquity;" but will not destroy them if upon repenting they speak the [truth](#) in confession, that by doing that [truth](#) they may come to the light; as is said in the [Gospel](#) according to John, "But he that does [truth](#) comes unto the light. You will destroy all who" not only work what Thou hatest, but also "speak leasing;" in holding out before them false righteousness, and not confessing their [sins](#) in penitence.

36. For, concerning false [witness](#), which is set down in the ten commands of the Law, it can indeed in no wise be contended that [love](#) of [truth](#) may at heart be preserved, and false [witness](#) brought forth to him unto whom the [witness](#) is borne. For, when it is said to God only, then it is only in the heart that the [truth](#) is to be embraced: but when it is said to [man](#), then must we with the mouth also of the body bring forth [truth](#), because man is not an inspector of the heart. But then, touching the [witness](#) itself, it is not unreasonably asked, to whom one is a [witness](#)? For not to whomsoever we speak unto are we witnesses, but to them to whom it is expedient and due that they by our means should come to [know](#) or [believe](#) the [truth](#); as is a judge, that he may not [err](#) in judging; or he who is taught in doctrine of religion, that he may not [err](#) in [faith](#), or by very authority of the teacher waver in [doubt](#). But when the person who interrogates you or wishes to [know](#) anything from you seeks that which concerns him not, or which is not expedient for him to [know](#), he craves not a [witness](#), but a betrayer. Therefore if to him you tell a lie, from false [witness](#) peradventure you will be clear, but from a lie assuredly not. So then with this salvo, that to bear false [witness](#) is never lawful, the question is, whether it be lawful sometimes to tell a lie. Or if it be false [witness](#) to lie at all, it is to be seen whether it admit of compensation, to wit, that it be said for the sake of avoiding a greater [sin](#): as that which is written, "Honor father and mother," under stress of a preferable duty is disregarded; whence the paying of the last [honors](#) of sepulture to a father, is forbidden to that man who by the Lord Himself is called to preach the [kingdom of God](#).

37. Likewise, touching that which is written, "A son which receives the word shall be far from destruction: but receiving, he receives it for himself, and no [falsehood](#) proceeds out of his mouth:" some one may say, that what is here set down, "A son which receives the word," is to be taken for no other than the word of [God](#), which is [truth](#). Therefore, "A son receiving the [truth](#) shall be far from destruction," refers to that which is written, "You will destroy all that speak leasing." But when it follows, "Receiving he receives for himself," what other does this insinuate than what the Apostle says, "But let every man

prove his own work, and then he shall have glorying in himself and not in another?" For he that receives the word, that is, [truth](#), not for himself, but for men-pleasing, keeps it not when he sees they can be pleased by a lie. But whoso receives it for himself, no [falsehood](#) proceeds out of his mouth: because even when the way to please men is to lie, that man lies not, who receiving the [truth](#) not thereby to please them but to please [God](#), has received it for himself. Therefore there is no reason why it should be said here He will destroy all who speak leasing, but not all leasing: because all lies, universally, are cut off in this saying, "And no [falsehood](#) proceeds out of his mouth." But another says, it is to be so taken as the [Apostle Paul](#) took our Lord's saying, "But I say unto you, Swear not at all." For here also all swearing is cut off; but from the mouth of the heart, that it should never be done with approbation of the will, but through necessity of the weakness of another; that is, "from the [evil](#)" of another, when it shows that he cannot otherwise be got to [believe](#) what is said, unless [faith](#) be wrought by an [oath](#); or, from that "[evil](#)" of our own, that while as yet involved in the skins of this mortality we are not able to show our heart: which thing were we able to do, of swearing there were no need. Though moreover in this whole sentence, if the saying, "A son receiving the word shall be far from destruction," be said of none other than that Truth, by Whom all things were made, which remains ever incommutable; then, because the doctrine of Religion strives to bring men to the [contemplation](#) of this Truth, it may seem that the saying, "And no [falsehood](#) proceeds out of his mouth," is said to this purpose, that he speaks no [falsehood](#) that pertains to doctrine. Which sort of lie is upon no compensation whatever to be gone into, and is utterly and before all to be eschewed. Or if the saying, "No [falsehood](#)," is absurdly taken if it be not referred to every lie, the saying, "From his mouth," should, as was argued above, be taken to mean the mouth of the heart, in the opinion of him who accounts that sometimes one may tell a lie.

38. Certain it is, albeit all this disputation go from side to side, some asserting that it is never right to lie, and to this effect reciting divine testimonies: others gainsaying, and even in the midst of the very words of the divine testimonies seeking place for a lie; yet no man can say, that he finds this either in example or in word of the [Scriptures](#), that any lie should seem a thing to be loved, or not had in [hatred](#); howbeit sometimes by telling a lie you must do that you hate, that what is more greatly to be detested may be avoided. But then here it is that people [err](#); they put the precious beneath the vile. For when you have granted that some [evil](#) is to be admitted, that another and more grievous may not be admitted; not by the rule of [truth](#), but by his own cupidity and custom does each measure the [evil](#), accounting that to be the more grievous, which himself more greatly dreads, not which is in reality more greatly to be fled from. All this fault is engendered by perversity of loving. For being there are two lives of ours; the one [eternal](#), which is promised of [God](#); the other temporal, in which we now are: when a man shall have begun to [love](#) this temporal more than that [eternal](#), for the sake of this which he loves he thinks all things right to be done; and there are not any, in his estimation, more grievous [sins](#) than those which do injury to this life, and either take away from it any commodity [unjustly](#) and unlawfully, or by inflicting of death take it utterly away. And so thieves, and [robbers](#), and ruffians, and torturers, and slayers, are more [hated](#) of them than lascivious, drunken, luxurious men, if these molest no man. For they do not understand or at all care, that these do wrong to [God](#); not indeed to any inconvenience of Him, but to their own

pernicious hurt; seeing they corrupt His gifts bestowed upon them, even His temporal gifts, and by their very corruptions turn away from [eternal](#) gifts: above all, if they have already begun to be the Temple of [God](#); which to all [Christians](#) the Apostle says thus: "Do you not [know](#) that you are the temple of [God](#), and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? Whoso shall corrupt God's temple, God will corrupt him. For the temple of God is [holy](#): which temple are you."

39. And all these [sins](#), [truly](#), whether such whereby an injury is done to men in the comforts of this life, or whereby men corrupt themselves and hurt none against his will: all these [sins](#), then, even though they seem to mean well by this temporal life to the procuring of any delight or profit, (for no man commits any of these things with any other purpose and end;) yet in regard of that life which is forever and ever, they do entangle and in all ways hinder. But there are some of these that hinder the doers only, others likewise those on whom they are done. For as to the things which people keep safe for the sake of utility to this life, when these are taken away by injurious [persons](#), they alone [sin](#) and are hindered from [eternal](#) life who do this, not they to whom they do it. Therefore, even if a person consent to the taking of them from him, either that he may not do some [evil](#), or that he may not in these very things suffer some greater inconvenience; not only does he not [sin](#), but in the one case he acts bravely and laudably, in the other usefully and unblameably. But as to those things which are kept for the sake of [sanctity](#) and religion, when injurious [persons](#) wish to violate these, it is right, if the condition be proposed and the means given, to redeem them even by [sins](#) of lesser moment, yet not by wrongs to other men. And then do these things thenceforth cease to be [sins](#), which are undertaken in order to the avoidance of greater [sins](#). For as in things useful, for instance in pecuniary or any other corporal commodity, that is not called a loss which is parted with in order to a greater gain; so in things [holy](#), that is not called [sin](#) which is admitted lest a worse be admitted. Or if that is called loss, which one foregoes that he may not forego more; let this also be called [sin](#), while however the necessity of undertaking it in order to the eschewing of a greater is no more to be [doubted](#), than that, in order to avoid a greater loss, it is right to suffer a smaller one.

40. Now the things which are to be kept safe for [sanctity's](#) sake are these: [pudicity](#) of body, and [chastity](#) of [soul](#), and verity of doctrine. [Pudicity](#) of body, without consent and permission of the [soul](#), does no man violate. For, whatever against our will and without our empowering the same is by greater force done upon our body, is no lewdness. Howbeit, of permitting there may be some reason, but of consenting, none. For we consent, when we approve and wish: but we permit even not willing, because of some greater turpitude to be eschewed. Consent, [truly](#), to corporal lewdness violates also [chastity](#) of mind. For the mind's [chastity](#) consists in a good will and sincere [love](#), which is not corrupted, unless when we [love](#) and desire that which Truth teaches ought not to be loved and desired. We have therefore to guard the sincerity of [love](#) toward God and our neighbor; for in this is [chastity](#) of mind sanctified: and we must endeavor with all the strength in our power, and with [pious](#) supplication, that, when the [pudicity](#) of our body is sought to be violated, not even that outermost sense of the [soul](#), which is entangled with the flesh, may be touched with any delight; but if it cannot this, at least the mind and thought in not consenting may have its [chastity](#) preserved entire. Now what we have to

guard in [chastity](#) of [mind](#), is, as pertaining to the [love](#) of our neighbor, innocence and benevolence; as pertaining to the [love](#) of [God](#), [piety](#). Innocence is that we hurt no man; benevolence, that we also do good to whom we can; [piety](#), that we worship God. But as for verity of doctrine, of religion and [piety](#), that is not violated unless by a lie; whereas the highest and inmost Verity Itself, Whose that doctrine is, can in no wise be violated: which Truth to attain unto, and in It on every wise to remain, and to It thoroughly to cleave, will not be permitted, but when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on [immortality](#). But, because all [piety](#) in this life is practice by which we tend to that life, which practice has a guidance afforded unto it from that doctrine, which in human words and signs of corporal [sacraments](#) does insinuate and intimate Truth herself: for this [cause](#) this also, which by lying is possible to be corrupted, is most of all to be kept incorrupt; that so, if anything in that [chastity](#) of mind be violated, it may have that wherefrom it may be repaired. For once corrupt authority of doctrine, and there can be none either course or recourse to [chastity](#) of mind.

41. There results then from all these this sentence, that a lie which does not violate the doctrine of [piety](#), nor [piety](#) itself, nor innocence, nor benevolence, may on behalf of [pudicity](#) of body be admitted. And yet if any man should propose to himself so to [love truth](#), not only that which consists in [contemplation](#), but also in uttering the [true](#) thing, which each in its own kind of things is [true](#), and no otherwise to bring forth with the mouth of the body his thought than in the mind it is conceived and beheld; so that he should prize the beauty of [truth](#)-telling honesty, not only above gold and silver and jewels and pleasant lands, but above this temporal life itself altogether and every good thing of the body, I [know](#) not whether any could wisely say that that man [errs](#). And if he should prefer this and prize it more than all that himself has of such things; rightly also would he prefer it to the temporal things of other men, whom by his innocence and benevolence he was bound to keep and to help. For he would [love](#) perfect [faith](#), not only of believing aright those things which by an excellent authority and worthy of [faith](#) should to himself be spoken, but also of [faith](#)fully uttering what himself should judge right to be spoken, and should speak. For [faith](#) has its name in the Latin tongue, from that the thing is done which is said: and thus it is manifest that one does not exhibit when telling a lie. And even if this [faith](#) be less violated, when one lies in such sort that he is [believed](#) to no inconvenience and no pernicious hurt, with added intention moreover of guarding either one's life or corporal purity; yet violated it is, and a thing is violated which ought to be kept safe in [chastity](#) and [sanctity](#) of mind. Whence we are constrained, not by opinion of [men](#), which for the most part is in [error](#), but by [truth](#) itself, [truth](#) which is eminent above all, and alone is most invincible, to prefer even to purity of body, perfect [faith](#). For [chastity](#) of mind is, [love](#) well ordered, which does not place the greater below the smaller. Now it is less, whatever in the body than whatever in the mind can be violated. For assuredly when for corporal chasteness a man tells a lie, he sees indeed that his body is threatened with corruption, not from his own, but from another's [lust](#), but is cautious lest by permitting at least, he be a party. That permission, however, where is it but in the mind? So then, even corporal chasteness cannot be corrupted but in the mind; which not consenting nor permitting, it can by no means be rightly said that corporal chasteness is violated whatever in the body be perpetrated by another's [lust](#). Whence it is gathered, that much more must the [chastity](#) of the mind be preserved in the [mind](#), in the which is the

guardianship of the [pudicity](#) of the body. Wherefore, what in us lies, both the one and the other must by [holy](#) manners and conversation be walled and hedged round, lest from another quarter it be violated. But when both cannot be, which is to be slighted in comparison of which, who does not see? when he sees which to which is to be preferred, the mind to the body, or the body to the mind; and which is more to be shunned among [sins](#), the permitting of another's deed, or the committing of the deed yourself.

42. It clearly appears then, all being discussed, that those testimonies of Scripture have none other meaning than that we must never at all tell a lie: seeing that not any examples of lies, worthy of imitation, are found in the manners and actions of the Saints, as regards those Scriptures which are referred to no figurative signification, such as is the history in the Acts of the Apostles. For all those sayings of our Lord in the [Gospel](#), which to more [ignorant](#) minds seem lies, are figurative significations. And as to what the Apostle says: "I am made all things to all [men](#), that I might gain all;" the right understanding is, that he did this not by lying, but by sympathy; so that he dealt with them in liberating them with so great charity, as if he were himself in that [evil](#) from which he wished to make them whole. There must therefore be no lying in the doctrine of [piety](#): it is a heinous [wickedness](#), and the first sort of detestable lie. There must be no lying of the second sort; because no man must have a wrong done to him. There must be no lying of the third sort; because we are not to consult any man's good to the injury of another. There must be no lying of the fourth sort, that is, for the [lust](#) of lying, which of itself is vicious. There must be no lying of the fifth sort, because not even the [truth](#) itself is to be uttered with the aim of men-pleasing, how much less a lie, which of itself, as a lie, is a foul thing? There must be no lying of the sixth sort; for it is not right that even the [truth](#) of testimony be corrupted for any man's temporal convenience and safety. But unto [eternal salvation](#) none is to be led by aid of a lie. For not by the ill manners of them that convert him is he to be converted to good manners: because if it is meet to be done towards him, himself also ought when converted to do it toward others; and so is he converted not to good, but to ill manners, seeing that is held out to be imitated by him when converted, which was done unto him in converting him. Neither in the seventh sort must there be any lying; for it is meet that not any man's commodity or temporal welfare be preferred to the perfecting of [faith](#). Not even if any man is so ill moved by our right deeds as to become worse in his [mind](#), and far more remote from [piety](#), are right deeds therefore to be foregone: since what we are chiefly to hold is that whereunto we ought to call and invite them whom as our own selves we [love](#); and with most courageous mind we must drink in that apostolic sentence: "To some we are a savor of life unto life, to others a savor of death unto death; and who is sufficient for these things?" Nor in the eighth sort must there be lying: because both among [good](#) things [chastity](#) of mind is greater than [pudicity](#) of body; and among [evil](#) things, that which ourselves do, than that which we suffer to be done. In these eight kinds, however, a [man sins](#) less when he tells a lie, in proportion as he emerges to the eighth: more, in proportion as he diverges to the first. But whoso shall think there is any sort of lie that is not [sin](#), will deceive himself foully, while he deems himself honest as a deceiver of other men.

43. So great blindness, moreover, has occupied men's minds, that to them it is too little if we pronounce some lies not to be [sins](#); but they must needs pronounce it to be [sin](#) in some

things if we refuse to lie: and to such a pass have they been brought by defending lying, that even that first kind which is of all the most abominably [wicked](#) they pronounce to have been used by the [Apostle Paul](#). For in the Epistle to the Galatians, written as it was, like the rest, for doctrine of religion and [piety](#), they say that he has told a lie, in the passage where he says concerning Peter and Barnabas, "When I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the [truth](#) of the [Gospel](#)." For, while they wish to defend Peter from [error](#), and from that pravity of way into which he had fallen; the very way of religion in which is [salvation](#) for all [men](#), they by breaking and mincing the authority of the [Scriptures](#) do endeavor themselves to overthrow. In which they do not see that it is not only lying, but [perjury](#) that they lay to the charge of the Apostle in the very doctrine of [piety](#), that is, in an Epistle in which he preaches the [Gospel](#); seeing that he there says, before he relates that matter, "What I write unto you, behold, before [God](#), I lie not." But it is time that we set bounds to this disputation: in the consideration and treatment whereof altogether there is nothing more meet to be, before all else, borne in mind and made our [prayer](#), than that which the same Apostle says: "[God](#) is faithful, Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able to bear, but will with the [temptation](#) make also a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it."