

To Consentius, Against Lying

By Saint Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430)

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Translated by the Rev. H. Browne

From the *Retractions*, Book II, Chapter 60: " Then also I wrote a Book against Lying, the occasion of which work was this. In order to discover the Priscillianist [heretics](#), who think it right to conceal their [heresy](#) not only by denial and lies, but even by [perjury](#), it seemed to certain [Catholics](#) that they ought to pretend themselves Priscillianists, in order that they might penetrate their lurking places. In prohibition of which thing, I composed this book. It begins: *Multa mihi legenda misisti.*"

1. A great deal for me to read have you sent, my dearest brother Consentius: a great deal for me to read: to the which while I am preparing an answer, and am drawn off first by one, then by another, more urgent occupation, the year has measured out its course, and has thrust me into such straits, that I must answer in what sort I may, lest the time for sailing being now favorable, and the bearer desirous to return, I should too long detain him. Having therefore unrolled and read through all that Leonas, servant of [God](#), brought me from you, both soon after I received it, and afterwards when about to dictate this reply, and having weighed it with all the consideration in my power, I am greatly delighted with your eloquence, and memory of the [holy](#) Scripture, and cleverness of wit, and the resentment with which you bite negligent [Catholics](#), and the [zeal](#) with which you gnash against even latent [heretics](#). But I am not persuaded that it is right to unearth them out of their hiding places by our telling lies. For to what end do we take such pains in tracking them out and running them down, but that having taken them and brought them forth into open day, we may either teach them the [truth](#), or at least having convicted them by the [truth](#), may not allow them to hurt others? to this end, therefore, that their lie may be blotted out, or shunned, and God's [truth](#) increased. How then by a lie shall I rightly be able to prosecute lies? Or is it by [robbery](#) that robberies and by sacrilege that sacrileges, and by [adultery](#) that adulteries, are to be prosecuted? "But if the [truth](#) of God shall abound by my lie," are we too to say, "Let us do [evil](#) that good may come?" A thing which you see how the Apostle detests. For what else is, "Let us lie, that we may bring [heretic](#) liars to the [truth](#)," but, "Let us do [evil](#) that good may come?" Or, is a lie sometimes good, or sometimes a lie not [evil](#)? Why then is it written, "Thou hatest, Lord, all that work iniquity; You will destroy all that speak leasing." For he has not excepted some, or said indefinitely, "You will destroy them that speak leasing;" so as to permit some, not all, to be understood: but it is an universal sentence that he has passed, saying, "You will destroy all who speak leasing." Or, [because](#) it is not said, You will destroy all who speak all leasing, or, who speak any leasing whatsoever; is it therefore to be thought that there is place allowed for some lie; to wit, that there should be some leasing, and them who speak it, God should not destroy, but destroy them all which speak [unjust](#)

leasing, not what lie soever, because there is found also a just lie, which as such ought to be matter of praise, not of crime?

2. Do you not perceive how much this reasoning aids the very [persons](#) whom as great game we make ado to catch by our lies? For, as yourself hast shown, this is the sentiment of the Priscillianists to prove which, they apply testimonies from the [Scriptures](#) exhorting their followers to lie, as though by the examples of Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, Angels; not hesitating to add even the Lord Christ Himself; and deeming that they cannot otherwise prove their [falsehood](#) truthful, unless they pronounce Truth to be a liar. It must be refuted, this; not imitated: nor ought we to be partners with the Priscillianists in that [evil](#) in which they are convicted to be worse than other [heretics](#). For they alone, or at least they in the greatest degree, are found to make a dogma of lying for the purpose of hiding their [truth](#), as they call it: and this so great [evil](#) therefore to esteem just, because they say that in the heart must be held that which is [true](#), but with the mouth to utter unto aliens a false thing, is no [sin](#); and that this is written, "Who speaks the [truth](#) in his heart:" as though this were enough for righteousness, even though a person do with his mouth speak a lie, when not his neighbor but a stranger is he that hears it. On this account they think the [Apostle Paul](#), when he had said, "Putting away lying, speak ye [truth](#)," to have immediately added, "Every man with his neighbor, for we are members one of another." Meaning, that with them who are not our neighbors in society of the [truth](#), nor, so to say, our co-members, it is lawful and right to speak a lie.

3. Which sentence dishonors the [holy](#) Martyrs, nay rather takes away [holy martyrdoms](#) altogether. For they would do more [justly](#) and wisely, according to these men, not to confess to their persecutors that they were [Christians](#), and by confessing make them murderers: but rather by telling a lie, and denying what they were, should both themselves keep safe the convenience of the flesh and purpose of the heart, and not allow those to accomplish the [wickedness](#) which they had conceived in their mind. For they were not their neighbors in the [Christian faith](#), that with them it should be their duty to speak the [truth](#) in their mouth which they spoke in their heart; but moreover enemies of Truth itself. For if Jehu (whom it seems they do prudently to single out unto themselves to look unto as an example of lying) [falsely](#) gave himself out for a servant of [Baal](#), that he might slay [Baal's](#) servants: how much more [justly](#), according to their perversity, might, in time of [persecution](#), the servants of Christ [falsely](#) give themselves out, for servants of [demons](#), that the servants of [demons](#) might not slay servants of Christ; and [sacrifice](#) to [idols](#) that men might not be killed, if Jehu [sacrificed](#) to [Baal](#) that he might kill men? For what harm would it do them, according to the egregious doctrine of these speakers of lies, if they should lyingly pretend a worship of the [Devil](#) in the body, when the worship of God was preserved in the heart? But not so have the Martyrs understood the Apostle, the [true](#), the [holy](#) Martyrs. They saw and held that which is written, "With the heart man [believes](#) unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto [salvation](#);" and, "In their mouth was found no lie:" and so they departed irreproachable, to that place where to be tempted by liars any further they will not [fear](#); because they will not have liars any more in their heavenly assemblies, either for strangers or neighbors. As for that Jehu, by an impious lie and a sacrilegious [sacrifice](#) making inquisition for impious and sacrilegious men for to kill them, they would not imitate him, no, not though the

[Scripture](#) had said nothing concerning him, what manner of man he was. But, seeing it is written that he had not his heart right with [God](#); what profited it him, that for some [obedience](#) which, concerning the utter destruction of the house of Ahab, he exhibited for the [lust](#) of his own domination. he received some amount of transitory wages in a temporal kingdom? Let, rather, the [truth](#)-telling sentence of the Martyrs be thine to defend: to this I exhort you, my brother, that you may be against liars, not a teacher of lying, but an asserter of [truth](#). For, I pray you, attend diligently to what I say, that you may find how needful to be shunned is that which, with laudable [zeal](#) indeed towards impious men, that they may be caught and corrected, or avoided, but yet too incautiously, is thought fit to be taught.

4. Of lies are many sorts, which indeed all, universally, we ought to [hate](#). For there is no lie that is not contrary to [truth](#). For, as light and darkness, [piety](#) and impiety, [justice](#) and iniquity, [sin](#) and right-doing, health and weakness, life and death, so are [truth](#) and a lie contrary the one to the other. Whence by how much we [love](#) the former, by so much ought we to [hate](#) the latter. Yet in [truth](#) there be some lies which to [believe](#) does no harm: although even by such sort of lie to wish to deceive, is hurtful to him that tells it, not to him that believes it. As though, if that brother, the servant of [God](#), Fronto, in the information which he gave you, should (though far be the thought!) say some things [falsely](#); he would have hurt himself assuredly, not you, although you, without iniquity of yours, had [believed](#) all, upon his telling it. Because, whether those things did so take place or not so, yet they have not any thing, which if a person [believe](#) to have been so, though it were not so, he by the rule of [truth](#) and doctrine of [eternal salvation](#) should be judged worthy of blame. Whereas, if a person tell a lie which if any [believe](#) he will be an [heretic](#) against the doctrine of [Christ](#), by so much is he who tells the lie more hurtful, by how much he that believes it is more miserable. See then, what manner of thing it is, if against the doctrine of Christ we shall tell a lie which whoso believes shall perish, in order that we may catch the enemies of the same doctrine, to the end we may bring them to the [truth](#), while we recede from it; nay rather, when we catch liars by lying, teach worse lies. For it is one thing what they say when they lie, another when they are deceived. For, when they teach their [heresy](#), they speak the things in which they are deceived; but when they say that they think what they do not think, or that they do not think what they do think, they say the things in which they lie. In that any [believes](#) them, what though he do not find them out, himself perishes not. For it is no receding from the catholic rule, if, when a [heretic](#) lyingly professes the catholic doctrines, one believes him to be a catholic: and therefore it is not pernicious to him; because he is mistaken in the mind of a [man](#), of which, when latent, he cannot judge, not in the [faith](#) of God which it is his duty to keep safe planted within him. Moreover, when they teach their [heresy](#), whoso shall [believe](#) them, in thinking it [truth](#), will be partaker, as of their [error](#), so of their damnation. So it comes to pass, that when they fable their nefarious dogmas in which they are with deadly [error](#) deceived, then whoso [believes](#) them is lost: whereas when we preach catholic dogmas, in which we hold the [right faith](#), then if he shall [believe](#), that man is found, whoso was lost. But when, they being Priscillianists, do, in order that they may not betray their venom, lyingly give themselves out to be of us; whoever of us believes them, even while they escape detection, himself perseveres a [Catholic](#): we on the other hand, if, in order to attain to the discovery of them, we [falsely](#) give ourselves out for

Priscillianists, because we shall praise their dogmas as though they were our own, whoso shall [believe](#) the same, will either be confirmed among them, or will be transferred to them in the meantime straightway: but what the coming hour may bring forth, whether they shall be afterwards set free therefrom by us when speaking [true](#) things, who were deceived by us when speaking false; and whether they will be willing to hear one teaching whom they have thus experienced telling a lie, who can [know](#) for certain? who can be [ignorant](#) that this is uncertain? Whence it is gathered, that it is more pernicious, or to speak more mildly, that it is more perilous for [Catholics](#) to lie that they may catch [heretics](#), than for [heretics](#) to lie that they may not be found out by [Catholics](#). Because, whoso believes [Catholics](#) when they tell a lie to tempt people, is either made or confirmed a [heretic](#); but whoso believes [heretics](#) when they tell a lie to conceal themselves, does not cease to be a [Catholic](#). But that this may become more plain, let us propose some cases by way of example, and from those writings in preference which you have sent me to read.

5. Well then, let us set before our eyes a cunning spy as he makes up to the person whom he has already perceived to be a Priscillianist; he begins with Dictinius the [bishop](#), and lyingly bepraises either his life, if he [knew](#) him, or his fame, if he [knew](#) him not; this is more tolerable thus far, because Dictinius is accounted to have been a [Catholic](#), and to have been corrected of that [error](#). Then, passing on to Priscillian, (for this comes next in the art of lying,) he shall make reverend mention of him, of an impious and detestable person, condemned for his nefarious [wickedness](#) and crimes! In which reverend mention, if haply the person for whom this sort of net is spread, had not been a firm Priscillianist, by this preaching of him, he will be confirmed. But when the spy shall go on to discourse of the other matters, and saying that he pities them whom the author of darkness has invoked in such darkness of [error](#), that they acknowledge not the [honor](#) of their own [soul](#), and the brightness of their divine ancestry: then speaking of Dictinius's Book, which is called "the Pound," because it treats, first and last, of a dozen questions, being as the ounces which go to the pound, shall extol it with such praise, as to protest that such a "Pound" (in which awful [blasphemies](#) are contained) is more precious than many thousands of pounds of gold; [truly](#), this astuteness of him who tells the lie slays the [soul](#) of him who believes it, or, that being slain already, does in the same death sink, and hold it down. But, you will say, "afterwards it shall be set at liberty." What if it come not to pass, either upon something intervening that prevents what was begun from being completed, or through obstinacy of an [heretical](#) mind denying the same things over again, although of some it had already begun to make confession? especially because, if he shall find out that he has been tampered with by a stranger, he will just the more boldly study to conceal his sentiments by a lie, when he shall have learned much more certainly that this is done without blame, even by the example of the very person who tampered with him. This, [truly](#), in a man who thinks it right to hide the [truth](#) by telling a lie, with what face can we blame, and dare to condemn what we teach?

6. It remains, then, that what the Priscillianists think, according to the nefarious falsity of their [heresy](#), of [God](#), of the [soul](#), of the body, and the rest, we hesitate not with truthful pity to condemn; but what they think of the right of telling a lie to hide the [truth](#) is to be to us and them (which God forbid!) a common dogma. This is so great an [evil](#), that even

though this attempt of ours, whereby we desire by means of a lie to catch them and change them, should so prosper that we do catch and change them, there is no gain that can compensate the damage of making ourselves wrong with them in order to set them right. For through this lie shall both we be in that respect perverse, and they but half corrected; seeing that their thinking it right to tell a lie on behalf of the [truth](#) is a fault which we do not correct in them, because we have learned and do teach the same thing, and lay it down that it is fit to be done, in order that we may be able to attain to the amending of them. Whom yet we amend not, for their fault, with which they think right to hide the [truth](#), we take not away, rather we make ourselves faulty when by such a fault we seek them; nor do we find how we can [believe](#) them, when converted, to whom, while perverted, we have lied; lest haply what was done to them that they might be caught, they do to us when caught; not only because to do it has been their wont, but because in us also, to whom they come, they find the same.

7. And, what is more miserable, even they, already made as it were our own, cannot find how they may [believe](#) us. For if they suspect that even in the catholic doctrines themselves we speak lyingly, that we may conceal I [know](#) not what other thing which we think [true](#); of course to one suspecting the like you shall say, I did this then only to catch you: but what will you answer when he says, Whence then do I [know](#) whether you are not doing it even now, lest you be caught by me? Or indeed, can any man be made to [believe](#) that a man does not lie not to be caught, who lies to catch? Do you see whither this [evil](#) tends? that is, that not only we to them, and they to us, but every brother to every brother shall not undeservedly become suspected? And so while that which is aimed at by means of the lie, is that [faith](#) may be taught, the thing which is brought about is, rather, that there shall be no having [faith](#) in any man. For if we speak even against God when we tell a lie, what so great [evil](#) will people be able to discover in any lie, that, as though it were a most wretched thing, we should be bound in every way to eschew it?

8. But now observe how more tolerable in comparison with us is the lying of the Priscillianists, when they [know](#) that they speak deceitfully: whom by our own lying we think right to deliver from those false things in which they by erring are decayed. A Priscillianist says, that the [soul](#) is a part of [God](#), and of the same nature and substance with Him. This is a great and detestable [blasphemy](#). For it follows that the [nature](#) of God may be taken captive, deceived, cheated, disturbed, and defiled, condemned and tortured. But if that man also says this, who from so great an [evil](#) desires to deliver a man by a lie, let us see what is the difference between the one blasphemer and the other. "Very much," do you say: "for this the Priscillianist says, also believing it so: but the catholic not so believing, though so speaking." The one, then, blasphemes without [knowing](#), the other with [knowledge](#): the one against science, the other against [conscience](#); the one has the blindness of thinking false things, but in them has at least the [will](#) of saying [true](#) things; the other in secret sees [truth](#), and willingly speaks false. "But the one;" you will say, "teaches this, that he may make men partakers of his [error](#) and [madness](#): the latter says it that from that [error](#) and [madness](#) he may deliver men." Now I have already shown above how hurtful is this very thing which people [believe](#) will do good: but meanwhile if we weigh in these two the present [evils](#), (for the future good which a catholic seeks from correcting a [heretic](#) is uncertain,) who [sins](#) worse? who deceives a man without [knowing](#)

it, or he who blasphemes [God](#), [knowing](#) it? Assuredly which is the worse, that man understands, who with solicitous [piety](#) prefers God to man. Add to this, that, if God may be [blasphemed](#) in order that we may bring men to praise Him, without [doubt](#) we do by our example and doctrine invite men not only to praise, but also to [blaspheme](#) God: because they whom through [blasphemies](#) against God we plot to bring to the praises of [God](#), verily, if we do bring them, will learn not only to praise, but also to [blaspheme](#). These be the benefits we confer on them whom, by blaspheming not [ignorantly](#) but with [knowledge](#), we deliver from [heretics](#)! And whereas the Apostle delivered men to [Satan](#) himself that they might learn not to [blaspheme](#), we endeavor to rescue men from [Satan](#), that they may learn to [blaspheme](#) not with [ignorance](#), but with [knowledge](#). And upon ourselves, their masters, we bring this so great bane, that, for the sake of catching [heretics](#), we first become, which is certain, blasphemers of [God](#), in order that we may for the sake of delivering them, which is uncertain, be able to be teachers of His [truth](#).

9. When therefore we teach ours to [blaspheme](#) God that the Priscillianists may [believe](#) them theirs, let us see what [evil](#) themselves say when they therefore lie that we may [believe](#) them ours. They [anathematize](#) Priscillian, and detest him according to our mind; they say that the [soul](#) is a creature of [God](#), not a part; they execrate the Priscillianists' false [martyrdoms](#); the catholic [bishops](#) by whom that [heresy](#) has been stripped, attacked, prostrated, they extol with great praises, and so forth. Behold, themselves speak [truth](#) when they lie: not that the very thing which is a lie can be [true](#) at the same time; but when in one thing they lie, in another they speak [truth](#): for when, in saying they are of us, they lie, of the catholic [faith](#) they speak [truth](#). And therefore they, that they may not be found out for Priscillianists, speak in lying manner the [truth](#): but we, that we may find them out, not only speak lyingly, that we may be [believed](#) to belong to them; but we also speak false things which we [know](#) to belong to their [error](#). Therefore as for them, when they wish to be thought of us, it is both false in part, and [true](#) in part, what they say; for it is false that they are of us, but [true](#) that the [soul](#) is not a part of God: but as for us, when we wish to be thought to belong to them, it is false, both the one and the other that we say, both that we are Priscillianists, and that the [soul](#) is a part of [God](#). They, then, praise [God](#), not [blaspheme](#), when they conceal themselves; and when they do not so, but utter their own sentiments, they [know](#) not that they [blaspheme](#). So that if they be converted to the catholic [faith](#), they console themselves, because they can say what the Apostle said: who when among other things he had said, "I was before a blasphemer; but," says he, "I obtained mercy, because I did it [ignorantly](#)." We on the contrary, in order that they may open themselves to us, if we utter this as if it were a just lie for deceiving and catching them, do assuredly both say that we belong to the blaspheming Priscillianists, and that they may [believe](#) us, do without excuse of [ignorance](#) [blaspheme](#). For a catholic, who by blaspheming wishes to be thought a [heretic](#), cannot say, "I did it [ignorantly](#)."

10. Ever, my brother, in such cases, it behoves with [fear](#) to recollect, "Whoso shall deny Me before men, I will deny him before My Father which is in heaven." Or [truly](#) is it no denying of Christ before men, to deny Him before Priscillianists, that when they hide themselves, one may by a [blasphemous](#) lie strip them and catch them? But who doubts, I pray you, that [Christ](#) is denied, when so as He is in [truth](#), we say that He is not; and so as the Priscillianist believes Him, we say that He is?

11. "But, hidden wolves," you will say, "clad in sheep's clothing, and privily and grievously wasting the Lord's flock, can we no otherwise find out." Whence then have the Priscillianists become [known](#), ere this way of hunting for them with lies was excogitated? Whence was their very author, more cunning doubtless, and therefore more covert, got at in his bed? Whence so many and so great [persons](#) made manifest and condemned, and the others innumerable partly corrected, partly as if corrected, and in the Church's compassion gathered into her fold? For many ways gives the Lord, when He has compassion, whereby we may come to the discovery of them: two of which are more [happy](#) than others; namely, that either they whom they have wished to seduce, or they whom they had already seduced, shall, when they repent and are converted, point them out. Which is more easily effected, if their nefarious [error](#), not by lying tricks, but by truthful reasonings be overthrown. In the writing of which it behoves you to bestow your pains, since God has bestowed the gift that you can do this: which wholesome writings whereby their insane perversity is destroyed, becoming more and more [known](#), and being by catholics, whether prelates who speak in the congregations, or any studious men full of [zeal](#) for [God](#), every where diffused, these will be [holy](#) nets in which they may be caught [truthfully](#), not with lies hunted after. For so being taken, either, of their own accord, they will confess what they have been, and others whom they [know](#) to be of the [evil](#) fellowship they will either kindly correct, or mercifully betray. Or else, if they shall be ashamed to confess what with long-continued simulation they have concealed, by the hidden hand of God healing them shall they be made whole.

12. "But," you will say, "we more easily penetrate their concealment if we pretend to be ourselves what they are." If this were lawful or expedient, Christ might have instructed his sheep that they should come clad in wolves' clothing to the wolves, and by the cheat of this artifice discover them: which He has not said, no, not when He foretold that He would send them forth in the midst of wolves. But you will say: "They needed not at that time to have inquisition made for them, being most manifest wolves; but their bite and savageness were to be endured." What, when foretelling later times, He said that ravening wolves would come in sheep's clothing? Was there not room there to give this advice and say, And do ye, that you may find them out, assume wolves' clothing, but within be ye sheep still? Not this says He: but when he had said, "Many will come to you in sheep's clothing, but within are ravening wolves;" He went on to say, not, By your lies, but, "By their fruits you shall [know](#) them." By [truth](#) must we beware of, by [truth](#) must we take, by [truth](#) must we kill, lies. Be it far from us, that the [blasphemies](#) of the [ignorant](#) we by wittingly blaspheming should overcome: far from us, that the [evils](#) of deceitful men we by imitating should guard against. For how shall we guard against them if in order to guard against them we shall have them? For if in order that he may be caught who blasphemes unwittingly, I shall [blaspheme](#) wittingly, worse is the thing I do than that which I catch. If in order that he may be found who denies Christ unwittingly, I shall deny Him wittingly, to his undoing will he follow me whom I shall so find, since in order that I may find him out, I first am undone.

13. Or haply is it so, that he who plots in this way to find out Priscillianists, denies not Christ, forasmuch as with his mouth he utters what with his heart he believes not? As if [truly](#) (which I also said a little above) when it was said, "With the heart man [believes](#)

unto righteousness," it was added to no purpose, "with the mouth confession is made unto [salvation](#)?" Is it not so that almost all who have denied Christ before the persecutors, held in their heart what they [believed](#) of Him? And yet, by not confessing with the mouth unto [salvation](#), they perished, save they which through penitence have lived again? Who can be so vain, as to think that the Apostle Peter had that in his heart which he had on his lips when he denied Christ? Surely in that denial he held the [truth](#) within and uttered the lie without. Why then did he wash away with tears the denial which he uttered with his mouth, if that sufficed for [salvation](#) that with the heart he [believed](#)? Why, speaking the [truth](#) in his heart, did he punish with so bitter weeping the lie which he brought forth with his mouth, unless because he saw it to be a great and deadly [evil](#), that while with his heart he [believed](#) unto righteousness, with his mouth he made not confession unto [salvation](#)?

14. Wherefore, that which is written, "Who speaks the [truth](#) in his heart," is not so to be taken, as if, [truth](#) being retained in the heart, in the mouth one may speak a lie. But the reason why it is said, is, because it is possible that a man may speak with his mouth a [truth](#) which profits him nothing, if he hold it not in his heart, that is, if what he speaks, himself [believe](#) not; as the [heretics](#), and, above all, these same Priscillianists do, when they do, not indeed [believe](#) the catholic [faith](#), but yet speak it, that they may be [believed](#) to be of us. They speak therefore the [truth](#) in their mouth, not in their heart. On this account were they to be distinguished from him of whom it is written, "He that speaks [truth](#) in his heart." Now this [truth](#) the catholic as in his heart he speaks, because so he [believes](#), so also in his mouth ought he, that so he may preach it; but against it, neither in heart nor in mouth have [falsehood](#), that both with the heart he may [believe](#) unto righteousness, and with the mouth may make confession unto [salvation](#). For also in that psalm, after it had been said, "Who speaks [truth](#) in his heart," presently this is added, "Who has used no deceit in his tongue."

>15. And as for that saying of the Apostle, "Putting away lying, speak every man [truth](#) with his neighbor, for we are members one of another," far be it that we should so understand it, as though he had permitted to speak a lie with those who are not yet with us members of the body of [Christ](#). But the reason why it is said, is, because each one of us ought to account every man to be that which he wishes him to become, although he be not yet become such; as the Lord showed the alien [Samaritan](#) to be neighbor to him unto whom he showed mercy." A neighbor then, and not an alien, is that man to be accounted, with whom our concern is that he remain not an alien; and if on the score of his not being yet made partaker of our Faith and Sacrament, there be some truths that must be concealed from him, yet is that no reason why false things should be told him.

16. For there were even in the Apostles' times some who preached the [truth](#) not in [truth](#), that is, not with truthful mind: of whom the Apostle says that they preached Christ not chastely, but of [envy](#) and strife. And on this account even at that time some were tolerated while preaching [truth](#) not with a chaste mind: yet not any have been praised as preaching [falsehood](#) with a chaste mind. Lastly, he says of those, "Whether in pretence or in [truth](#) Christ be preached:" but in no wise would he say, In order that Christ may after be preached, let Him be first denied.

17. Wherefore, though there be indeed many ways in which latent [heretics](#) may be sought out, without vituperating the catholic [faith](#) or praising [heretical](#) impiety, yet if there were no other way at all of drawing out [heretical](#) impiety from its caverns, but that the catholic tongue should deviate from the straight path of [truth](#); more tolerable were it that that should be hid, than that this should be precipitated; more tolerable that the foxes should lurk in their pits unseen, than for the sake of catching them the huntsmen should fall into the pit of [blasphemy](#); more tolerable that the perfidy of Priscillianists should be covered with the veil of [truth](#), than that the [faith](#) of catholics, lest it should of lying Priscillianists be praised, should of believing catholics be denied. For if lies, not of whatsoever kind, but [blasphemous](#) lies, are therefore just because they are committed with intent to detect hidden [heretics](#); it will be possible at that rate, if they be commuted with the same intention, that there should be chaste adulteries. For put the case that of a number of lewd Priscillianists, some [woman](#) should cast her eye upon a catholic Joseph, and promise him that she will betray their hidden retreats if she obtain from him that he lie with her, and it be certain that if he consent unto her she will make good her promise: shall we judge that it ought to be done? Or shall we understand that by no means must such a price be paid in purchase of that kind of merchandise? Why then do we not rout out [heretics](#), in order to their being caught, by the flesh committing lasciviousness in [adultery](#), and yet think right to rout them out by a mouth committing fornication in [blasphemy](#)? For either it will be lawful to defend both the one and the other with equal reason, that these things be therefore said to be not [unjust](#), because they were done with intention of finding out the [unjust](#): or if sound doctrine will not even for the sake of finding out [heretics](#) that we should have to do with unchaste [women](#), albeit only in body, not in [mind](#), assuredly not even for the sake of finding out [heretics](#) will it that by us, albeit only in voice not in [mind](#), either unclean [heresy](#) were preached, or the chaste [Catholic Church blasphemed](#). Because even the very sovereignty of the [mind](#), to which every inferior motion of the man ought to be [obedient](#), will not lack deserved opprobrium, when a thing is done that ought not to be done, whether by member or by word. Although even when it is done by word, it is done by member: because the tongue is a member, by which the word is made; nor is any deed of ours by any member brought to the birth unless it is first conceived in the heart; or rather being by our inwardly thinking upon and consenting unto it already brought to the birth, it is brought forth abroad in our doing of it, by a member. It is therefore no excusing the mind from the deed, when any thing is said to be done not after the purpose of the [mind](#), which yet were not done, unless the mind decreed it to be done.

18. It does indeed make very much difference, for what [cause](#), with what end, with what intention a thing be done: but those things which are clearly [sins](#), are upon no plea of a good [cause](#), with no seeming good end, no alleged good intention, to be done. Those works, namely of [men](#), which are not in themselves [sins](#), are now good, now [evil](#), according as their causes are good or [evil](#); as, to give food to a [poor](#) man is a good work, if it be done because of pity, with [right faith](#); as to lie with a wife, when it is done for the sake of generation, if it be done with [faith](#) to beget subjects for regeneration. These and the like works according to their causes are good or [evil](#), because the self-same, if they have [evil](#) causes, are turned into [sins](#): as, if for boasting sake a [poor](#) man is fed; or for lasciviousness a man lies with his wife; or children are begotten, not that they may be nurtured for [God](#), but for the [devil](#). When, however, the works in themselves are [evil](#),

such as thefts, fornications, [blasphemies](#), or other such; who is there that will say, that upon good causes they may be done, so as either to be no [sins](#), or, what is more absurd, just [sins](#)? Who is there that would say, That we may have to give to the [poor](#), let us commit thefts upon the rich: or, Let us sell false [witness](#), especially if innocent men are not hurt thereby, but rather guilty men are rescued from the judges who would condemn them? For two [good](#) things are done by selling of this lie, that money may be taken wherewith a [poor](#) man may be fed, and a judge deceived that a man be not punished. Even in the matter of wills, if we can, why not suppress the [true](#), and forge false wills that inheritances or legacies may not come to unworthy [persons](#), who do no good with them; but rather to those by whom the hungry are fed, the naked clothed, strangers entertained, captives redeemed, Churches built? For why should not those [evil](#) things be done for the sake of these [good](#) things, if, for the sake of these [good](#) things, those are not [evil](#) at all? Nay, further, if lewd and rich [women](#) are likely to enrich moreover their lovers and paramours, why should not even these parts and arts be undertaken by a man of merciful heart, to use them for so good a [cause](#) as that he may have whence to bestow upon the needy; and not hear the Apostle saying, "Let him that stole steal no more, but rather let him labor, working with his hands that which is [good](#), that he may have to give to him that needs?" If indeed not only theft itself, but also false [witness](#) and [adultery](#) and every [evil](#) work will be not [evil](#) but good, if it be done for the sake of being the means of doing good. Who can say these things, except one who endeavors to subvert human affairs and all manners and [laws](#)? For of what most heinous deed, what most foul crime, what most impious sacrilege, may it not be said that it is possible for it to be done rightly and [justly](#); and not only with impunity, but even [gloriously](#), that in perpetrating thereof not only no punishments should be feared, but there should be hope even of rewards: if once we shall concede in all [evil](#) works of [men](#), that not what is done, but wherefore done, must be the question; and this, to the end that whatever are found to have been done for good causes, not even they should be judged to be [evil](#)? But if [justice](#) deservedly punishes a thief, albeit he shall say and show that he therefore withdrew superfluities from a rich that he might afford necessaries to a [poor](#) man; if deservedly she punishes a forger, albeit he prove that he therefore corrupted another's will, that he might be heir, who should thence make large [alms](#), not he who should make none; if deservedly she punishes an adulterer yea, though he shall demonstrate that of mercy he did commit [adultery](#), that through her with whom he did it he might deliver a man from death; lastly, to draw nearer to the matter in question, if deservedly she punishment him who has with that intent mixed in adulterous embrace with some [woman](#), privy to the turpitude of the Priscillianists, that he might enter into their concealments; I pray you, when the Apostle says, "Neither yield ye your members instruments of unrighteousness unto [sin](#);" and therefore neither hands, nor members of generation, nor other members, can it be right to yield unto flagitious deeds with intent that we may be able to find out Priscillianists; what has our tongue, what our whole mouth, what the organ of the voice, offended us, that we should yield these as instruments to [sin](#), and to so great a [sin](#), in which, that we may apprehend and rescue Priscillianists from blaspheming in [ignorance](#), we, without excuse of [ignorance](#), are to [blaspheme](#) our God?

19. Some man will say, "So then any thief whatever is to be accounted equal with that thief who steals with will of mercy?" Who would say this? But of these two it does not

follow that any is [good](#), because one is worse. He is worse who steals through [coveting](#), than he who steals through pity: but if all theft be [sin](#), from all theft we must abstain. For who can say that people may [sin](#), even though one [sin](#) be damnable, another venial? but now we are asking, if a man shall do this or that, who will not [sin](#) or will [sin](#)? not, who will [sin](#) more heavily or lightly. For even thefts themselves are more lightly punished by law than crimes of [lust](#): they are, however, both [sins](#), albeit the one lighter, the other heavier; so that a theft which is committed of concupiscence is held to be lighter than an act of [lust](#) which is committed for doing a good turn. Namely, in their own kind these become lighter than other [sins](#) of the same kind, which appear to be committed with a good intention; when yet the same compared with [sins](#) of another kind lighter in respect of the kind itself, are found to be heavier. It is a heavier [sin](#) to commit theft of [avarice](#) than of mercy; and likewise it is a heavier [sin](#) to perpetrate lewdness of luxury, than of mercy; and yet is it a heavier [sin](#) to commit [adultery](#) of mercy, than to commit theft of [avarice](#). Nor is it our concern now, what is lighter or what heavier, but what are [sins](#) or are not. For no man can say that it was a duty for a [sin](#) to be done, where it is clearly a [sin](#); but we say that it is a duty, if the [sin](#) were done so or so, to forgive or not to forgive.

20. But, what must be confessed, to human minds certain compensative [sins](#) do [cause](#) such embarrassment, that they are even thought meet to be praised, and rather to be called right deeds. For who can [doubt](#) it to be a great [sin](#), if a father prostitute his own daughters to the fornications of the impious? And yet has there arisen a case in which a just man thought it his duty to do this, when the Sodomites with nefarious onset of [lust](#) were rushing upon his guests. For he said, "I have two daughters which have not [known](#) man; I will bring them out to you, and do ye to them as is [good](#) in your eyes: only unto these men do ye no wrong, for that they have come under covering of my roof." What shall we say here? Do we not so abhor the [wickedness](#) which the Sodomites were attempting to do to the guests of the just man, that, whatever were done so this were not done, he should deem right to be done? Very much also moves us the person of the doer, which by merit of righteousness was obtaining deliverance from [Sodom](#), to say that, since it is a less [evil](#) for [women](#) to suffer lewdness than for men, it even pertained to the righteousness of that just man, that to his daughters he chose this rather to be done, than to his guests; not only willing this in his [mind](#), but also offering it in word, and, if they should assent, ready to fulfill it in deed. But then, if we shall open this way to [sins](#), that we are to commit less [sins](#), in order that others may not commit greater; by a broad boundary, nay rather, with no boundary at all, but with a tearing up and removing of all bounds, in [infinite](#) space, will all [sins](#) enter in and reign. For, when it shall be defined, that a man is to [sin](#) less, that another may not [sin](#) more; then, of course, by our committing thefts shall other men's committing of lewdness be guarded against, and incest by lewdness; and if any impiety shall seem even worse than incest, even incest shall be pronounced meet to be done by us, if in such wise it can be wrought that that impiety be not committed by others: and in each several kind of [sins](#), both thefts for thefts, and lewdness for lewdness, and incest for incest, shall be accounted meet to be done: our own [sins](#) for other men's, not only less for greater, but even if it come to the very highest and worst, fewer for more; if the stress of affairs so turns, that otherwise other men would not abstain from [sin](#) unless by our sinning, somewhat less indeed, but still sinning; so that in every case where an enemy who shall have power of this sort shall say, "Unless you be [wicked](#), I will be more

[wicked](#), or unless you do this [wickedness](#), I will do more such," we must seem to admit [wickedness](#) in ourselves, if we wish to refrain (others) from [wickedness](#). To be wise in this sort, what is it but to lose one's wits, or rather, to be downright mad? My own iniquity, not another's, whether perpetrated upon me or upon others, is that from which I must beware of damnation. For "the [soul](#) that [it shall die.](#)"

21. If then to [sin](#), that others may not commit a worse [sin](#), either against us or against any, without [doubt](#) we ought not; it is to be considered in that which [Lot](#) did, whether it be an example which we ought to imitate, or rather one which we ought to avoid. For it seems meet to be more looked into and noted, that, when so horrible an [evil](#) from the most flagitious impiety of the Sodomites was impending over his guests, which he wished to ward off and was not able, to such a degree may even that just man's mind have been disturbed, that he was willing to do that which, not man's [fear](#) with its misty temper, but God's Law in its tranquil serenity, if it be consulted by us, will cry aloud, must not be done, and will command rather that we be so cautious not to [sin](#) ourselves, that we [sin](#) not through [fear](#) of any [sins](#) whatever of other men. For that just man, by fearing other men's [sins](#), which cannot defile except such as consent thereto, was so perturbed that he did not attend to his own [sin](#), in that he was willing to subject his daughters to the [lusts](#) of impious men. These things, when we read in [holy Scriptures](#), we must not, for that we [believe](#) them done, therefore [believe](#) them meet to be done; lest we violate precepts while we indiscriminately follow precedents. Or, [truly](#), because David swore to put Nabal to death, and, upon more considerate clemency, did it not, shall we therefore say that he is to be imitated, so that we may [swear](#) to do a thing which afterwards we may see to be not meet to be done? But as [fear](#) perturbed the one, so that he was willing to prostitute his daughters, so did [anger](#) the other, that he swore rashly. In short, if it were allowed us to inquire of them both, by asking them to tell us why they did these things, the one might answer, "Fearfulness and trembling came upon me, and darkness covered me;" the other too might say, "My eye was troubled through [wrath](#):" so that we should not marvel either that the one in the darkness of [fear](#), or the other with troubled eye, saw not what was meet to have been seen, that they might not do what was not meet to have been done.

22. And to [holy](#) David indeed it might more [justly](#) be said, that he ought not to have been [angry](#); no, not with one however ungrateful and rendering [evil](#) for good; yet if, as man, [anger](#) did steal over him, he ought not to have let it so prevail, that he should [swear](#) to do a thing which either by giving way to his rage he should do, or by breaking his [oath](#) leave undone. But to the other, set as he was amid the libidinous frenzy of the Sodomites, who would dare to say, "Although your guests in your own house, whither to enter in you by most violent humanity have compelled them, be laid hold upon by lewd men, and being deforced be carnally [known](#) as [women](#), [fear](#) not a whit, care for it not a whir, have no dread, no horror, no trembling?" What man, even a companion of those wretches, would dare to say this to the [pious](#) host? But assuredly it would be most rightly said, "Do what you can, that the thing be not done which you deservedly [fear](#): but let not this [fear](#) of yours drive you to do a thing which if your daughters be willing that it be done unto them, they will through you do [wickedness](#) with the Sodomites, if unwilling, will through you from the Sodomites suffer [violence](#). Commit not a great crime of your own, while you dread a greater crime of other men; for be the difference as great as you will between

your own and that of others, this will be your own, that other men's." Unless perchance in defending this man one should so crowd himself into a corner, as to say, "Since to receive a wrong is better than to do one, and those guests were not about to do but to suffer a wrong, that just man chose that his daughters should suffer wrong rather than his guests, acting upon his rights as his daughters' lord; and he [knew](#) that it would be no [sin](#) in them if the thing were done, because they would but bear them which did the [sin](#), not consenting unto them, and so without [sin](#) of their own. In fine, they did not offer themselves (albeit better [females](#) than males) to be carnally [known](#) instead of those guests, lest they should be rendered guilty, not by the suffering of others' [lust](#), but by consenting of their own will: nor yet did their father permit it to be done unto himself, when they essayed to do it, because he would not betray his guests to them, (albeit there had been less of [evil](#), if it were done to one man than to two;) but as much as he could he resisted, lest himself also should be defiled by any assent of his own, though even if the frenzy of others' [lust](#) had prevailed by strength of body, it would not have defiled him so long as he consented not. Now as the daughters [sinned](#) not, neither did he [sin](#) in their [persons](#), because he was not making them to [sin](#), if they should be deforced against their will, but only to bear them that did the [sin](#). Just as if he should offer his slaves to be beaten by ruffians, that his guests might not suffer the wrong of beating." Of which matter I shall not dispute, because it would take long to argue, whether even a master may [justly](#) use his right of power over his slave, so as to [cause](#) an unoffending slave to be smitten, that his unoffending friend may not be beaten in his house by violent bad men. But certainly, as concerning David, it is no wise right to say that he ought to have [sworn](#) to do a thing which afterwards he would perceive that he ought not to do. Whence it is clear that we ought not to take all that we read to have been done by [holy](#) or just men, and transfer the same to morals, but hence too we must learn how widely that saying of the Apostle extends, and even to what [persons](#) it reaches: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, you which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering yourself also, lest you be tempted." The being overtaken in a fault happens, either while one does not see at the time what is right to be done, or while, seeing it, one is overcome; that is, that a [sin](#) is done, either for that the [truth](#) is hidden, or for that infirmity compels.

23. But in all our doings, even good men are very greatly embarrassed in the matter of compensative [sins](#); so that these are not esteemed to be [sins](#), if they have such causes for the which they be done, and in the which it may seem to be rather [sin](#), if they be left undone. And chiefly as concerning lies has it come to this pass in the opinion of men that those lies are not accounted [sins](#), nay rather are [believed](#) to be rightly done, when one tells a lie for the benefit of him for whom it is expedient to be deceived, or lest a person should hurt others, who seems likely to hurt unless he be got rid of by lies. In defense of these kinds of lies, very many examples from [holy](#) Scripture are accounted to lend their support. It is not, however, the same thing to hide the [truth](#) as it is to utter a lie. For although every one who lies wishes to hide what is [true](#), yet not every one who wishes to hide what is [true](#), tells a lie. For in general we hide truths not by telling a lie, but by holding our peace. For the Lord lied not when He said, "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." He held His peace from [true](#) things, not spoke false things; for the hearing of which truths He judged them to be less fit. But if He had not indicated this same to them, that is, that they were not able to bear the things which He

was unwilling to speak, He would indeed hide nevertheless somewhat of [truth](#) but that this may be rightly done we should peradventure not [know](#), or not have so great an example to confirm us. Whence, they who assert that it is sometimes meet to lie, do not conveniently mention that [Abraham](#) did this concerning Sarah, whom he said to be his sister. For he did not say, She is not my wife, but he said, "She is my sister;" because she was in [truth](#) so near akin, that she might without a lie be called a sister. Which also afterwards he confirmed, after she had been given back by him who had taken her, answering him and saying, "And indeed she is my sister, by father, not by mother;" that is, by the father's kindred, not the mother's. Somewhat therefore of [truth](#) he left untold, not told anything of [falsehood](#), when he left wife untold, and told of sister. This also did his son Isaac: for him too we [know](#) to have gotten a wife near of kin. It is not then a lie, when by silence a [true](#) thing is kept back, but when by speech a false thing is put forward.

24. Touching Jacob, however, that which he did at his mother's bidding, so as to seem to deceive his father, if with diligence and in [faith](#) it be attended to, is no lie, but a [mystery](#). The which if we shall call lies, all [parables](#) also, and figures designed for the signifying of any things soever, which are not to be taken according to their proper meaning, but in them is one thing to be understood from another, shall be said to be lies: which be far from us altogether. For he who thinks this, may also in regard of tropical expressions of which there are so many, bring in upon all of them this [calumny](#); so that even metaphor, as it is called, that is, the usurped transferring of any word from its proper object to an object not proper, may at this rate be called a lie. For when he speaks of waving corn-fields, of vines putting forth gems, of the bloom of youth, of snowy hairs; without [doubt](#) the waves, the gems, the bloom, the snow, for that we find them not in those objects to which we have from other transferred these words, shall by these [persons](#) be accounted lies. And Christ a Rock, and the stony heart of the [Jews](#); also, Christ a Lion, and the [devil](#) a lion, and innumerable such like, shall be said to be lies. Nay, this tropical expression reaches even to what is called antiphrasis, as when a thing is said to abound which does not exist, a thing said to be sweet which is sour; "*lucus quod non luceat, Parca quod non parcant.*" Of which kind is that in [holy](#) Scripture, "If he will not bless You to Your face;" which the [devil](#) says to the Lord concerning [holy](#) Job, and the meaning is "curse." By which word also the feigned crime of Naboth is named by his calumniators; for it is said that he "blessed the king," that is, cursed. All these modes of speaking shall be accounted lies, if figurative speech or action shall be set down as lying. But if it be no lie, when things which signify one thing by another are referred to the understanding of a [truth](#), assuredly not only that which Jacob did or said to his father that he might be blessed, but that too which Joseph spoke as if in mockery of his brothers, and David's feigning of [madness](#), must be judged to be no lies, but prophetic speeches and actions, to be referred to the understanding of those things which are [true](#); which are covered as it were with a garb of figure on purpose to exercise the sense of the [pious](#) inquirer, and that they may not become cheap by lying bare and on the surface. Though even the things which we have learned from other places, where they are spoken openly and manifestly, these, when they are brought out from their hidden retreats, do, by our (in some sort) discovering of them, become renewed, and by renewal sweet. Nor is it that they are begrudged to the learners, in that they are in these ways obscured; but are presented in a more winning manner, that being as it were withdrawn, they may be desired more

ardently, and being desired may with more pleasure be found. Yet [true](#) things, not false, are spoken; because [true](#) things, not false, are signified, whether by word or by deed; the things that are signified namely, those are the things spoken. They are accounted lies only because people do not understand that the [true](#) things which are signified are the things said, but [believe](#) that false things are the things said. To make this plainer by examples, attend to this very thing that Jacob did. With skins of the kids, no [doubt](#), he did cover his limbs; if we seek the immediate [cause](#), we shall account him to have lied; for he did this, that he might be thought to be the man he was not: but if this deed be referred to that for the signifying of which it was really done, by skins of the kids are signified [sins](#); by him who covered himself therewith, He who bare not His own, but others' [sins](#). The truthful signification, therefore, can in no wise be rightly called a lie. And as in deed, so also in word. Namely, when his father said to him, "Who are you my son?" he answered, "I am Esau, your [first-born](#)." This, if it be referred to those two twins, will seem a lie; but if to that for the signifying of which those deeds and words are written, He is here to be understood, in His body, which is His Church, Who, speaking of this thing, says, "When you shall see [Abraham](#), and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the [prophets](#) in the [kingdom of God](#), and yourselves cast out. And they shall come from the east and from the west and from the north and from the south, and shall sit down in the [kingdom of God](#); and, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last." For so in a certain sort the younger brother did bear off the primacy of the elder brother, and transfer it to himself. Since then things so [true](#), and so [truthfully](#), be signified, what is there here that ought to be accounted to have been done or said lyingly? For when the things which are signified are not in [truth](#) things which are not, but which are, whether past or present or future, without [doubt](#) it is a [true](#) signification, and no lie. But it takes too long in the matter of this prophetic signification by stripping off the shell to search out all, wherein [truth](#) has the palm, because as by being signified they were fore-announced, so by ensuing have they become clear.

25. Nor have I undertaken that in the present discourse, as it more pertains to you, who hast laid open the hiding-places of the Priscillianists, so far as relates to their false and perverse dogmas; that they may not seem to have been in such sort investigated as if they were meet to be taught, not to be argued against. Make it therefore more your work that they be beaten down and laid low, as you have made it, that they should be betrayed and laid open; lest while we wish to get at the discovery of men practising [falsehood](#), we allow the falsehoods themselves, as if insuperable, to stand their ground; when we ought rather even in the hearts of latent [heretics](#) to destroy falsehoods, than by sparing falsehoods to find out the deceivers who practise [falsehood](#). Moreover, among those dogmas of theirs which are to be subverted, is this which they dogmatize, namely, that in order to hide religion religious people ought to lie, to that degree that not only concerning other matters, not pertaining to doctrine of religion, but concerning religion itself, it is meet to lie, that it may not become exposed to aliens; to wit, that one may deny Christ, in order that one may in the midst of His enemies be in secret a [Christian](#). This impious and nefarious dogma likewise, I beseech you, overthrow; to bolster up which they in their argumentations do gather from the [Scriptures](#) testimonies to make it appear that lies are not only to be pardoned and tolerated, but even [honored](#). To you therefore it pertains, in refuting that detestable [sect](#), to show that those testimonies of Scripture are so to be

received, that either you shall teach those to be no lies which are accounted to be such, if they be understood in that manner in which they ought to be understood; or, that those are not to be imitated which be manifestly lies; or in any wise at last, that concerning those matters at least which pertain to doctrine of religion, it is in no wise meet to tell a lie. For thus are they [truly](#) from the very foundation overthrown, while that is overthrown wherein they lurk: that in that very matter they be judged least fit for us to follow, most fit to be shunned, in that they, for the hiding of their [heresy](#), do profess themselves liars. This it is in them that must from the very first be assaulted, this which is, as it were, their fitting bulwark must with blows of Truth be battered and cast down. Nor must we afford them another lurking-place, which they had not, wherein they may take refuge, to wit, that being perhaps betrayed of them whom they have essayed to seduce but could not, they should say, "We only wanted to try them, because [prudent Catholics](#) have taught that to find out [heretics](#) it is right to do this." But it is necessary with somewhat more earnest be-speaking of your favor to say why this seems to me a tripartite method of disputing against those who want to apply the [divine Scriptures](#) as advocates of their lies; to wit, by showing that some which are there accounted to be lies, are not what they are accounted, if rightly understood; next, that if there be there any manifest lies, they are not meet to be imitated; thirdly, contrary to all opinions of all [persons](#) who think it pertains to the duty of a [good](#) man sometimes to lie, that it must in every way be held that in doctrine of religion there must in no wise a lie be told. For these are the three things to follow up which I shortly before recommended, and in some sort enjoined you.

26. To show then that some things in the [Scriptures](#) which are thought to be lies are not what they are thought, if they be rightly understood, let it not seem to you to tell little against them, that it is not from Apostolic but from Prophetical books that they find as it were precedents of lying. For all those which they mention by name, in which each lied, are read in those books in which not only words but many deeds of a figurative meaning are recorded, because it was also in a figurative sense that they were done. But in figures that which is spoken as a seeming lie, being well understood, is found to be a [truth](#). The Apostles, however, in their Epistles spoke in another sort, and in another sort are written the Acts of the Apostles, to wit, because now the [New Testament](#) was revealed, which was veiled in those prophetic figures. In short, in all those Apostolic Epistles, and in that large book in which their acts are narrated with canonical [truth](#), we do not find any person lying, such that from him a precedent can be set forth by these men for license of lying. For that simulation of Peter and Barnabas with which they were compelling the [Gentiles](#) to [Judaize](#), was deservedly reprehended and set right, both that it might not do harm at the time, and that it might not weigh with posterity as a thing to be imitated. For when the [Apostle Paul](#) saw that they walked not uprightly according to the [truth](#) of the [Gospel](#), he said to Peter in the presence of them all, "If you, being a Jew, livest as the [Gentiles](#); and not as do the [Jews](#), how do you compel the [Gentiles](#) to [Judaize](#)?" But in that which himself did, to the intent that by retaining and acting upon certain observances of the law after the Jewish custom he might show that he was no enemy to the Law and to the Prophets, far be it from us to [believe](#) that he did so as a liar. As indeed concerning this matter his sentence is sufficiently well known, whereby it was settled that neither [Jews](#) who then [believed](#) in Christ were to be prohibited from the traditions of their fathers, nor [Gentiles](#) when they became [Christians](#) to be compelled thereunto: in order that those

sacred [rites](#) which were well known to have been of God enjoined, should not be shunned as sacrileges; nor yet accounted so necessary, now that the [New Testament](#) was revealed, as though without them whoso should be converted unto [God](#), could not be saved. For there were some who thought so and preached, albeit after Christ's [Gospel](#) received; and to these had feignedly consented both Peter and Barnabas, and so were compelling the [Gentiles](#) to [Judaize](#). For it was a compelling, to preach them to be so necessary as if, even after the [Gospel](#) received, without them were no [salvation](#) in [Christ](#). This the [error](#) of certain did suppose, this Peter's [fear](#) did feign, this [Paul's](#) liberty did beat down. What therefore he says, "I am made all things to all, that I might gain all," that did he, by suffering with others, not by lying. For each becomes as though he were that person whom he would fain succor, when he succors with the same pity wherewith he would wish himself to be succored, if himself were set in the same misery. Therefore he becomes as though he were that person, not for that he deceives him, but for that he thinks himself as him. Whence is that of the Apostle, which I have before rehearsed, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, you which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted." For if, because he said, "To the [Jews](#) became I as a Jew, and to them which were under the law as under the law," he is therefore to be accounted to have in a lying manner taken up the [sacraments](#) of the old law, he ought in the same manner to have taken up, in a lying way, the [idolatry](#) of the [Gentiles](#), because he has said that to them which were without law he became as without law; which thing in any wise he did not. For he did not any where [sacrifice](#) to [idols](#) or adore those figments and not rather freely as a [martyr](#) of Christ show that they were to be detested and eschewed. From no apostolic acts or speeches, therefore, do these men allege things meet for imitation as examples of lying. From prophetic deeds or words, then, the reason why they seem to themselves to have what they may allege, is only for that they take figures preunciative to be lies, because they are sometimes like lies. But when they are referred to those things for the signifying of which they were so done or said, they are found to be significations full of [truth](#), and therefore in no wise to be lies. A lie, namely, is a false signification with will of deceiving. But that is no false signification, where, although one thing is signified by another, yet the thing signified is a [true](#) thing, if it be rightly understood.

27. There are some things of this sort even of our Saviour in the [Gospel](#), because the Lord of the Prophets deigned to be Himself also a Prophet. Such are those where, concerning the [woman](#) which had an issue of blood, He said, "Who touched Me?" and of Lazarus. "Where have ye laid him?" He asked, namely, as if not [knowing](#) that which in any wise He [knew](#). And He did on this account feign that He [knew](#) not, that He might signify somewhat else by that His seeming [ignorance](#): and since this signification was truthful, it was assuredly not a lie. For those were signified, whether by her which had the issue, or by him which had been four days dead, whom even He Who [knew](#) all things did in a certain sort [know](#) not. For both she bore the type of the people of the [Gentiles](#), whereof the [prophecy](#) had gone before, "A people whom I have not [known](#) has served Me:" and Lazarus, removed from the living, did as it were in that place lie in significative similitude where He lay, Whose voice that is, "I am cast out of the sight of your eyes." And with that intent, as though it were not [known](#) by Christ, both who she was and where

he was laid, by His words of interrogating a figure was enacted and by truthful signification all lying left apart.

28. Hence is also that which you have mentioned that they speak of, that the [Lord Jesus](#), after He was risen, walked in the way with two [disciples](#); and upon their drawing near to the village whither they were going, He made as though He would have gone farther: where the Evangelist, saying, "But He Himself feigned that He would go further," has put that very word in which liars too greatly delight, that they may with impunity lie: as if every thing that is feigned is a lie, whereas in a truthful way, for the sake of signifying one thing by another, so many things use to be feigned. If then there had been no other thing that Jesus signified, in that He feigned to be going further, with reason might it be judged to be a lie: but then if it be rightly understood and referred to that which He willed to signify, it is a [mystery](#). Else will all things be lies which, on account of a certain similitude of things to be signified, although they never were done, are related to have been done. Of which sort is that concerning the two sons of one man, the elder who tarried with his father, and the younger who went into a far country, which is narrated so much at length. In which sort of fiction, men have put even human deeds or words to irrational animals and things without sense, that by this sort of feigned narrations but [true](#) significations, they might in more winning manner intimate the things which they wished. Nor is it only in authors of secular letters, as in Horace, that mouse speaks to mouse, and weasel to fox, that through a fictitious narration a [true](#) signification may be referred to the matter in hand; whence the like fables of Æsop being referred to the same end, there is no man so untaught as to think they ought to be called lies: but in Holy Writ also, as in the book of Judges, the trees seek them a king, and speak to the olive, to the fig and to the vine and to the bramble. Which, in any wise, is all feigned, with intent that one may get to the thing which is intended, by a feigned narration indeed, yet not a lying one, but with a truthful signification. This I have said on account of that which is written concerning Jesus, "And Himself feigned to be going further:" lest any from this word, like the Priscillianists, wishing to have license of lying, should contend that beside others even Christ did lie. But whoso would understand what He by feigning that did prefigure, let him attend to that which He by acting did effect. For when afterwards He did go further, above all heavens, yet deserted He not His [disciples](#). In order to signify this which in the future He did as [God](#), at the present He feigned to do that as Man. And therefore was a veritable signification caused in that feigning to go before, because in this departure the verity of that signification did follow after. Let him therefore contend that Christ did lie by feigning, who denies that He fulfilled by doing that which He signified.

29. Because, therefore, lying [heretics](#) find not in the books of the [New Testament](#) any precedents of lying which are meet to be imitated, they esteem themselves to be most copious in their disputation wherein they opine that it is right to lie, when from the old prophetic books, because it does not appear therein, save to the few who understand, to what must be referred the significative sayings and doings which as such be [true](#), they seem to themselves to find out and allege many that be lies. But desiring to have, wherewith they may defend themselves, precedents of deceit seemingly meet to be imitated, they deceive themselves, and "their iniquity lies unto itself." Those [persons](#), however, of whom it is not there to be [believed](#) that they wished to prophesy, if in doing

or saying they feigned anything with will of deceiving, however it may be that from the very things also which they did or said somewhat prophetic may be shapen out, being by His omnipotence afore deposited therein as a seed and pre-disposed, Who [knows](#) how to turn to good account even the ill-deeds of [men](#), yet as far as regards the [persons](#) themselves, without [doubt](#) they lied. But they ought not to be esteemed meet for imitation simply for that they are found in those books which are deservedly called [holy](#) and divine: for those books contain the record of both the ill deeds and the good deeds of men; the one to be eschewed, the other to be followed after: and some are so put, that upon them is also sentence passed; some, with no judgment there expressed, are left permitted for us to judge of: because it was meet that we should not only be nourished by that which is plain, but exercised by that which is obscure.

30. But why do these [persons](#) think they may imitate Tamar telling a lie, and not think they may imitate Judah committing fornication? For there they have read both, and nought of these has that Scripture either blamed or praised, but has merely narrated both, and to our judgment dismissed both: but it is marvellous if it has permitted anything of these to be imitated with impunity. For, that Tamar not through [lust](#) of playing the harlot, but through wish of conceiving seed, did tell the lie, we [know](#). But fornication also, howbeit Judah's was not such, yet some man's may be such whereby to procure that a man may be delivered, just as her lie was in order that a man might be conceived; is it right then to commit fornication on this account, if on that account it is thought that it was right to lie? Not therefore concerning lying only, but concerning all works of men in which there arise as it were compensative [sins](#), must we consider what sentence we ought to pass; lest we open a way not only to small [sins](#) whatsoever, but even to all wickednesses, and there remain no outrageous, flagitious, sacrilegious deed, in which there may not arise a [cause](#) upon which it may rightly seem a thing meet to be done, and so universal probity of life be by that opinion subverted.

31. But he who says that some lies are just, must be judged to say no other than that some [sins](#) are just, and therefore some things are just which are [unjust](#): than which what can be more absurd? For whence is a thing a [sin](#), but for that it is contrary to [justice](#)? Be it said then that some [sins](#) are great, some small, because it is [true](#); and let us not listen to the [Stoics](#) who maintain all to be equal: but to say that some [sins](#) are [unjust](#), some just, what else is it than to say that there be some [unjust](#), some just iniquities? When the Apostle John says, "Every man who does [sin](#), does also iniquity and [sin](#) is iniquity." It is impossible therefore that a [sin](#) should be just, unless when we put the name of [sin](#) upon another thing in which one does not [sin](#), but either does or suffers anything for [sin](#). Namely, both [sacrifices](#) for [sins](#) are named "[sins](#)," and the punishments of [sins](#) are sometimes called [sins](#). These doubtless can be understood to be just [sins](#), when just [sacrifices](#) are spoken of, or just punishments. But those things which are done against God's law cannot be just. It is said unto [God](#), "Your law is [truth](#):" and consequently, what is against [truth](#) cannot be just. Now who can [doubt](#) that every lie is against [truth](#)? Therefore there can be no just lie. Again, what man does not see clearly that every thing which is just is of the [truth](#)? And John cries out, "No lie is of the [truth](#)." No lie therefore is just. Wherefore, when from [holy Scriptures](#) are proposed to us examples of lying,

either they are not lies, but are thought to be so while they are not understood; or, if lies they be, they are not meet to be imitated, because they cannot be just.

32. But, as for that which is written, that God did good to the Hebrew midwives, and to Rahab the harlot of [Jericho](#), this was not because they lied, but because they were merciful to God's people. That therefore which was rewarded in them was, not their deceit, but their benevolence; benignity of [mind](#), not iniquity of lying. For, as it would not be marvellous and absurd if God on account of good works after done by them should be willing to forgive some [evil](#) works at another time before committed, so it is not to be marvelled at that God beholding at one time, in one [cause](#), both these, that is, the thing done of mercy and the thing done of deceit, did both reward the good, and for the sake of this good forgive that [evil](#). For if [sins](#) which are done of carnal concupiscence, not of mercy, are for the sake of after works of mercy remitted, why are not those through merit of mercy remitted which of mercy itself are committed? For more grievous is a [sin](#) which with purpose of hurting, than that which with purpose of helping, is wrought. And consequently if that is blotted out by a work of mercy thereafter following, why is this, which is less heinous, not blotted out by the mercy itself of the man, both going before that he may [sin](#), and going along with him while he [sins](#)? So indeed it may seem: but in [truth](#) it is one thing to say, "I ought not to have [sinned](#), but I will do works of mercy whereby I may blot out the [sin](#) which I did before;" and another to say, "I ought to [sin](#), because I cannot else show mercy." It is, I say, one thing to say, "Because we have already [sinned](#), let us do good," and another to say, "Let us [sin](#), that we may do good." There it is said, "Let us do good, because we have done [evil](#);" but here, "Let us do [evil](#) that good may come." And, consequently, there we have to drain off the sink of [sin](#), here to beware of a doctrine which teaches to [sin](#).

33. It remains then that we understand as concerning those [women](#), whether in [Egypt](#) or in [Jericho](#), that for their humanity and mercy they received a reward, in any wise temporal, which indeed itself, while they wist not of it, should by prophetic signification prefigure somewhat [eternal](#). But whether it be ever right, even for the saving of a man's life, to tell a lie, as it is a question in resolving which even the most learned do weary themselves, it did vastly surpass the capacity of those poor [women](#), set in the midst of those nations, and accustomed to those manners. Therefore their [ignorance](#) in this as well as in those other things of which they were alike unknowing, but which are to be [known](#) by the children not of this world but of that which is to come, the patience of God did bear withal: Who yet, for their human kindness which they had shown to His servants, rendered unto them rewards of an earthly sort, albeit signifying somewhat of an heavenly. And Rahab, indeed, delivered out of [Jericho](#), made transition into the people of [God](#), where, being proficient, she might attain to [eternal](#) and [immortal](#) prizes which are not to be sought by any lie. Yet at that time when she did for the Israelite spies that good, and, for her condition of life, laudable work, she was not as yet such that it should be required of her, "In your mouth let Yea be yea, Nay nay." But as for those midwives, albeit Hebrewesses, if they savored only after the flesh, what or how great is the good they got of their temporal reward in that they made them houses, unless by making proficiency they attained unto that house of which is sung unto [God](#), "Blessed are they that dwell in your house; for ever and ever they will praise you?" It must be confessed,

however, that it approaches much unto righteousness, and though not yet in reality, even now in respect of helpfulness and disposition that mind is to be praised, which never lies except with intention and will to do good to some man, but to hurt no man. But as for us, when we ask whether it be the part of a [good](#) man sometimes to lie, we ask not concerning a person pertaining to [Egypt](#), or to [Jericho](#), or to [Babylon](#), or still to Jerusalem itself, the earthly, which is in bondage with her children; but concerning a citizen of that city which is above and free, our mother, [eternal](#) in the heavens. And to our asking it is answered, "No lie is of the [truth](#)." The sons of that city, are sons of the Truth. That city's sons are they of whom it is written, "In their mouth was found no lie:" son of that city is he of whom is also written, "A son receiving the word shall be far from destruction: but receiving, he has received that for himself, and nothing false proceeds out of his mouth." These sons of Jerusalem on high, and of the [holy](#) city [eternal](#), if ever, as they be men, a lie of what kind soever does worm itself into them, they ask humbly for pardon, not therefrom seek moreover [glory](#).

34. But some man will say, Would then those midwives and Rahab have done better if they had shown no mercy, by refusing to lie? Nay verily, those Hebrew [women](#), if they were such as that sort of [persons](#) of whom we ask whether they ought ever to tell a lie, would both eschew to say anything false, and would most frankly refuse that foul service of killing the babes. But, you will say, themselves would die. Yea, but see what follows. They would die with an heavenly habitation for their incomparably more ample reward than those houses which they made them on earth could be: they would die, to be in [eternal](#) felicity, after enduring of death for most innocent [truth](#). What of her in [Jericho](#)? Could she do this? Would she not, if she did not by telling a lie deceive the inquiring citizens, by speaking [truth](#) betray the lurking guests? Or could she say to their questionings, I [know](#) where they are; but I [fear God](#), I will not betray them? She could indeed say this, were she already a [true](#) Israelitess in whom was no guile: which thing she was about to be, when through the [mercy](#) of God passing over into the city of [God](#). But they, hearing this (you will say), would slay her, would search the house. But did it follow that they would also find them, whom she had diligently concealed? For in the foresight of this, that most cautious [woman](#) had placed them where they would have been able to remain undiscovered if she, telling a lie, should not be [believed](#). So both she, if after all she had been slain by her countrymen for the work of mercy, would have ended this life, which must needs come to an end, by a death precious in the sight of the Lord, and towards them her benefit had not been in vain. But, you will say, "What if the men who sought them, in their thorough-going search had come to the place where she had concealed them?" In this fashion it may be said: What if a most vile and base [woman](#), not only telling, but swearing a lie, had not got them to [believe](#) her? Of course even so would the things have been like to come to pass, through [fear](#) of which she lied. And where do we put the will and power of God? or haply was He not able to keep both her, neither telling a lie to her own townsmen, nor betraying men of [God](#), and them, being His, safe from all harm? For by Whom also after the [woman's](#) lie they were guarded, by Him could they, even if she had not lied, have in any wise been guarded. Unless perchance we have forgotten that this did come to pass in [Sodom](#), where males burning towards males with hideous [lust](#) could not so much as find the door of the house in which were the men they sought; when that just man, in a case altogether most similar, would not tell a lie for his

guests, whom he [knew](#) not to be Angels, and feared lest they should suffer a [violence](#) worse than death. And doubtless, he might have given the seekers the like answer as that [woman](#) gave in [Jericho](#). For it was in precisely the like manner that they sought by interrogating. But that just person was not willing that for the bodies of his guests his [soul](#) should be spotted by his own telling of a lie, for which bodies he was willing that the bodies of his daughters by iniquity of others' [lust](#) should be deforced. Let then a man do even for the temporal safety of men what he can; but when it comes to that point that to consult for such saving of them except by sinning is not in his power, thenceforth let him esteem himself not to have what he may do, when he shall perceive that only to be left him which he may not rightly do. Therefore, touching Rahab in [Jericho](#), because she entertained strangers, men of [God](#), because in entertaining of them she put herself in peril, because she [believed](#) on their [God](#), because she diligently hid them where she could, because she gave them most faithful counsel of returning by another way, let her be praised as meet to be imitated even by the citizens of Jerusalem on high. But in that she lied, although somewhat therein as prophetic be intelligently expounded, yet not as meet to be imitated is it wisely propounded: albeit that God has those [good](#) things memorably [honored](#), this [evil](#) thing mercifully overlooked.

35. Since these things are so, because it were too long to treat thoroughly of all that in that "Pound" of Dictinius are set down as precedents of lying, meet to be imitated, it seems to me that this is the rule to which not only these, but whatever such there be, must be reduced. Namely, either what is [believed](#) to be a lie must be shown not to be such; whether it be where a [truth](#) is left untold, and yet no [falsehood](#) told; or where a [true](#) signification wills one thing to be understood of another, which kind of figurative either sayings or doings abounds in the prophetic writings. Or, those which are convicted to be lies, must be [proved](#) to be not meet to be imitated: and if any (as other [sins](#)) should stealthily creep in upon us, we are not to attribute righteousness to them, but to ask pardon for them. So indeed it seems to me, and to this sentence the things above disputed do compel me.

36. But for that we are men and among [men](#) do live, and I confess that I am not yet in the number of them whom compensative [sins](#) embarrass not, it oft befalls me in human affairs to be overcome by human feeling, nor am I able to resist when it is said to me, "Lo, here is a sick man in peril of his life with a grievous disease, whose strength will no more be able to bear it, if the death of his only and most dear son be announced to him; he asks of you whether his son lives, and you know that he is departed this life; what will you reply, when, whatever you shall say beside one of these three; either, He is dead; or, He lives; or, I [know](#) not; he believes no other than that he is dead; which thing he perceives you to be afraid to tell, and unwilling to tell a lie?" It comes to the same thing, if you altogether hold your peace. But of those three, two are false, He lives, and, I [know](#) not; and they cannot be said by you but by telling a lie. Whereas if you shall say that one thing which is [true](#), that is, that he is dead, and the man be so perturbed that death follow, people will cry out that you have killed him. And who can bear men casting up to him what a mischief it is to shun a lie that might save life, and to choose [truth](#) which murders a man? I am moved by these objections exceedingly, but it were marvelous whether also wisely. For, when I shall set before the eyes of my heart (such as they be) the intellectual

beauty of Him out of Whose mouth nothing false proceeds, albeit where [truth](#) in her radiance does more and more brighten upon me, there my weak and throbbing sense is beaten back: yet I am with [love](#) of that surpassing comeliness so set on fire, that I despise all human regards which would thence recall me. But it is much that this affection persevere to that degree, that in [temptation](#) it lack not its effect. Nor does it move me while contemplating that luminous Good in which is no darkness of a lie, that, when we refuse to lie, and men through hearing of a [truth](#) do die, [truth](#) is called a murderer. For if a lewd [woman](#) crave of you the gratification of her [lust](#), and, when you consent not, she perturbed with the fierceness of her [love](#) should die, will [chastity](#) also be a murderer? Or, [truly](#), because we read, "We are a sweet savor of Christ in every place, both in them which are saved and in them which perish;" to the one, indeed, a savor of life unto life, to others a savor of death unto death; shall we pronounce even the savor of Christ to be a murderer? But, for that we, being men, are in questions and contradictions of this sort for the most part overcome or wearied out by our feeling as men, for that very reason has the Apostle also presently subjoined, "And who is sufficient for these things?"

37. Add to this, (and here is [cause](#) to cry out more piteously,) that, if once we grant it to have been right for the saving of that sick man's life to tell him the lie, that his son was alive, then, by little and little and by minute degrees, the [evil](#) so grows upon us, and by slight accesses to such a heap of [wicked](#) lies does it, in its almost imperceptible encroachments, at last come, that no place can ever be any where found on which this huge mischief, by smallest additions rising into boundless strength, might be resisted. Wherefore, most providently is it written, "He that despises small things shall fall by little and little." Nay more: for these [persons](#) who are so enamored of this life, that they hesitate not to prefer it to [truth](#), that a man may not die, say rather, that a man who must some time die may die somewhat later, would have us not only to lie, but even to [swear](#) fasely; to wit, that, lest the vain health of man should somewhat more quickly pass away, we should take the name of the Lord our God in vain! And there are among them learned men who even fix rules, and set bounds when it is a duty, when not a duty, to commit [perjury](#)! O, where are you, fountains of tears? And what shall we do? whither go? where hide us from the ire of [truth](#), if we not only neglect to shun lies, but dare moreover to teach [perjuries](#)? For look they well to it, who uphold and defend lying, what kind, or what kinds, of lying they shall delight to justify: at least in the worship of God let them grant that there must be no lying; at least let them keep themselves from [perjuries](#) and [blasphemies](#); at least there, where God's name, where God as [witness](#), where God's [oath](#) is interposed, where God's religion is the matter of discourse or colloquy, let none lie, none praise, none teach and enjoin, none justify a lie: of the other kinds of lies let him choose him out that which he accounts to be the mildest and most innocent kind of lying, he who will have it to be right to lie. This I [know](#), that even he who teaches that it is meet to tell lies, wishes to be thought to teach a [truth](#). For if it be false which he teaches, who would care to give heed to [false doctrine](#), in which both he deceives that teaches and he is deceived that learns? But if, in order that he may be able to find some [disciple](#), he upholds that he teaches a [truth](#) when he teaches that it is meet to lie, how will that lie be of the [truth](#), when the Apostle John reclaims, "No lie is of the [truth](#)?" It is therefore not [true](#), that it is sometimes right to lie; and that which is not [true](#) to no man is at all to be persuaded.

38. But infirmity pleads its part, and with favor of the crowds proclaims itself to have a [cause](#) invincible. Where it contradicts, and says, "What way is there among [men](#), who without [doubt](#) by being deceived are turned aside from a deadly harm to others or themselves, to succor men in peril, if our affection as men may not incline us to lie?" If it will hear me patiently, this crowd of mortality, crowd of infirmity, I will say somewhat in answer on the behalf of [truth](#). Surely at the least [pious](#), [true](#), [holy chastity](#) is not otherwise than of the [truth](#): and whoso acts against it, acts against [truth](#). Why then, if otherwise it be not possible to succor men in peril, do I not also commit whoredom, which is therefore contrary to [truth](#), for that it is contrary to [chastity](#), and yet, to succor men in peril, do speak a lie which most openly is contrary to [truth](#) itself? Wherein has [chastity](#) so highly deserved at our hands, and [truth](#) offended us? When all [chastity](#) is of the [truth](#), and not the body's but the mind's [chastity](#) is [truth](#), yea, in the mind dwells even the body's [chastity](#). Lastly, as I shortly before said, and say again, whoever for the recommending and defending of any lie speaks against me, what speaks he, if he speaks not [truth](#)? Now if he is therefore to be heard because he speaks [truth](#), how wishes he to make me, by speaking [truth](#), a liar? How does lying take unto itself [truth](#) as its patroness? Or, is it for her own adversary that she conquers, that by herself she may be conquered? Who can bear this absurdity? In no wise therefore may we say, that they who assert that it is sometimes right to lie, in asserting that are truthful; lest, what is most absurd and foolish to [believe](#), [truth](#) should teach us to be liars. For what sort of thing is it, that no man learns of [chastity](#) that we may commit [adultery](#); that we may offend God none learns of [piety](#); that we may do any man harm, none learns of kindness; and that we may tell lies, we are to learn of [truth](#)! But then if this thing [truth](#) teaches not, it is not [true](#); if not [true](#), it is not meet to be learned; if not meet to be learned, never therefore is it meet to tell a lie.

39. But, some man will say, "Strong meat is for them that are perfect." For in many things a relaxation by way of indulgence is allowed to infirmity, although in her utmost sincerity the things be nowise pleasing to [truth](#). Let him say this, whoever dreads not the consequences which are to be dreaded, if once there shall be in any way any lies permitted. In nowise, however, must they be permitted to climb up to such a height as to reach to [perjuries](#) and [blasphemies](#): nor must any plea whatever be held out, for which it should be right that [perjury](#) should be committed, or, what is more execrable, that [God](#) should be [blasphemed](#). For it does not follow that because the blaspheming is only in pretence and a lie, therefore He is not [blasphemed](#). For at this rate it might be said that [perjury](#) is not committed, because it is by a lie that it is committed: for who can be by [truth](#) a [perjurer](#)? So also by [truth](#) can no man be a blasphemer. Doubtless it is a milder kind of false swearing, when a person does not [know](#) that thing to be false and believes it to be [true](#), which he swears: like as also Saul [blasphemed](#) more excusably, because he did it [ignorantly](#). But the reason why it is worse to [blaspheme](#) than to [perjure](#) one's self, is, that in false swearing God is taken to [witness](#) a false thing, but in blaspheming false things are spoken of God Himself. Now by so much is a man more inexcusable, whether [perjurer](#) or blasphemer, by how much the more, while asserting the things wherein they [perjure](#) or [blaspheme](#), they [know](#) or [believe](#) them to be false. Whoever therefore says that for an imperilled man's temporal safety or life a lie may be told, does too much himself swerve from the path of [eternal](#) safety and life, if he says that on that behalf one may even [swear](#) by [God](#), or even [blaspheme](#) God.

40. But sometimes a peril to [eternal salvation](#) itself is put forth against us; which peril, they cry out, we by telling a lie, if otherwise it cannot be, must ward off. As, for instance, if a person who is to be [baptized](#) be in the power of impious and infidel men, and cannot be got at that he may be washed with the laver of regeneration, but by deceiving his keepers with a lie. From this most invidious cry, by which we are compelled, not for a man's [wealth](#) or [honors](#) in this world which are fleeting by, not for the life itself of this present time, but for the [eternal salvation](#) of a human being, to tell a lie, whither shall I betake me for refuge but unto you, O [truth](#)? And by you is put forth before me, Chastity. For why, if those keepers may be enticed to admit us to [baptize](#) the man, by our committing lewdness, do we refuse to do things contrary to [chastity](#), and yet, if by a lie they may be deceived, consent to do things contrary to [truth](#)? when without [doubt](#) no man would faithfully think [chastity](#) amiable, but because it is enjoined of [truth](#)? So then, to get at a man to [baptize](#) him, let the keepers be deceived by lying, if [truth](#) bid it. But how can [truth](#) bid in order that a man may be [baptized](#), that we should tell a lie, if [chastity](#) bids not, in order that a man be [baptized](#), that we should commit whoredom? Now why does [chastity](#) not bid this, but because this [truth](#) teaches not? If then, save what [truth](#) teaches, we ought not to do, when [truth](#) teaches not even for the sake of [baptizing](#) a man to do what is contrary to [chastity](#), how shall she teach us to do for the sake of [baptizing](#) a man what is contrary to herself, the [truth](#)? But like as eyes not strong enough to look upon the sun yet do gladly look upon the objects which are by the sun enlightened, so, [souls](#) which have already strength to delight in the beauty of [chastity](#) are yet not straightway able to consider in her very self that [truth](#) whence charity has her light, insomuch that when it comes to the doing of somewhat that is adverse to [truth](#), they should so start back in horror as they do start back in horror if anything be proposed to be done that is adverse to [chastity](#). But that son, who, receiving the word shall be far from perdition, and nothing false comes forth of his mouth, accounts it as much debarred from him if, to the succoring of his fellow man he be urged to pass through a lie, as if it were through the deed of lewdness. And the Father hears and grants his [prayer](#) that he may avail without a lie to succor whom the Father Himself, Whose judgments are unsearchable, wills to be succored. Such a son therefore so keeps watch against a lie, as he does against [sin](#). For indeed sometimes the name of lie is put for the name of [sin](#): whence is that saying, "All men are liars." For it is so said, as if it were said, "All men are sinners." And that: "But if the [truth](#) of God has abounded through my lie." And therefore, when he lies as a man he [sins](#) as a [man](#), and will be held by that sentence in which it is said, "All men are liars;" and, "If we say that we have no [sin](#), we deceive ourselves, and the [truth](#) is not in us." But when nothing false comes forth of his mouth, according to that [grace](#) will it so be, of which is said: "He that is born of [God](#), [not](#)." [For were this nativity by itself alone in us, no man would sin](#): and when it shall be alone, no man will [sin](#). But now, we as yet drag on that which we were born corruptible: although, according to that which we are new-born, if we walk aright, from day to day we are renewed inwardly. But when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, life will swallow it up wholly, and not a sting of death will remain. Now this sting of death is [sin](#).

41. Either then we are to eschew lies by right doing, or to confess them by repenting: but not, while they unhappily abound in our living, to make them more by teaching also. But let him who thinks this, choose out whereby he may help his fellow man being in peril, to

what safety he will, what kinds soever of lies; provided yet even of such men we obtain our demand, that upon no [cause](#) must we be carried on to false-swearing and to blaspheming. These wickednesses at least let us judge either greater than deeds of lewdness, or certainly not smaller. For indeed it is worth thinking of, that very often men, where they suspect them of [adultery](#), challenge their wives to an [oath](#): which surely they would not do, unless they [believed](#) that even they who were not afraid to perpetrate [adultery](#), might be afraid of [perjury](#). Because in fact also some lewd [women](#) who were not afraid by unlawful embraces to deceive their husbands, have been afraid to call God deceitfully to [witness](#) unto those same husbands whom they had deceived. What [cause](#) then can there be, that a chaste and religious person should be unwilling by [adultery](#) to help a man to [baptism](#), yet be willing to help him by [perjury](#), which even adulterers are wont to dread? And then, if it be shocking to do this by [perjuring](#) one's self, how much rather by blaspheming? Far be it then from a [Christian](#) to deny and [blaspheme](#) Christ, that he may make another man a [Christian](#); and by losing himself seek to find one, whom, if he teach him such things, he may [cause](#) to be lost when found. The book then which is called "the Pound," you must in this method refute and destroy; namely, that head of it in which they dogmatize that for the purpose of concealing religion a lie may be told, this you shall understand must be the first to be amputated; in such manner, that their testimonies by which they labor to advance the Holy Books as patrons of their lies, you must demonstrate partly not to be lies, partly, even those which are such, to be not meet to be imitated: and if infirmity usurps to herself thus much, that somewhat shall be venially permitted unto her which [truth](#) approve not, yet that you unshakenly hold and defend, that in divine religion it is at no time whatever right to tell a lie. And, as for concealed [heretics](#), that, as we are not to find out concealed adulterers by committing of adulteries, nor murderers by committing of murders, nor practisers of black arts by practising of black arts, so neither must we seek to find out liars by telling lies or blasphemers by blaspheming: according to the reasonings which we have in this volume so copiously set forth, that unto the goal of the same, which we fixed to be in this place, we have with difficulty come at last.