

“On the broad shoulders of William Perkins, epoch-making pioneer, stood the entire school of seventeenth-century Puritan pastors and divines, yet the Puritan reprint industry has steadily bypassed him. Now, however, he begins to reappear, admirably edited, and at last this yawning gap is being filled. Profound thanks to the publisher and heartfelt praise to God have become due.”

—J. I. Packer, Board of Governors’ Professor of Theology,
Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia

“Without a doubt, the Puritans were theological titans. The Puritan theological tradition did not emerge out of a vacuum. It was shaped by leaders and theologians who set the trajectory of the movement and shaped its commitments. William Perkins was one of those men. Perkins’s contribution to Puritan theology is inestimable, and this new reprint of his collected works is a much-awaited addition to all who are still shaped and influenced by the Puritans and their commitment to the centrality of the grace of God found only in Jesus Christ. Even now, every true gospel minister stands in debt to Perkins, and in his shadow.”

—R. Albert Mohler Jr., president, The Southern
Baptist Theological Seminary

“The list of those influenced by the ministry of William Perkins reads like a veritable Who’s Who of the Puritan Brotherhood and far beyond. This reprinting of his works, so long unobtainable except by a few, is therefore a publishing event of the first magnitude.”

—Sinclair B. Ferguson, professor of systematic theology,
Redeemer Theological Seminary, Dallas

“The father of Elizabethan Puritanism, Perkins presided over a dynasty of faith. The scope of his work is wide, yet on every topic he treats one discovers erudition and deep reflection. He was the first in an amazing line of ministers at Cambridge University’s main church. A pastor to pastors, he wrote a best-seller on counseling, was a formative figure in the development of Reformed orthodoxy, and a judicious reformer within the Church of England. I am delighted to see Perkins’s works made available again for a wide audience.”

—Michael Horton, J. Gresham Machen Professor of Theology
and Apologetics, Westminster Seminary California

“William Perkins was a most remarkable Christian. In his relatively short life he was a great preacher, pastor, and theologian. His prolific writings were foundational to the whole English Puritan enterprise and a profound influence beyond his own time and borders. His works have become rare, and their

republishing must be a source of real joy and blessing to all serious Christians. Perkins is the first Puritan we should read.”

—W. Robert Godfrey, president, Westminster Seminary California

“This is a welcome collection of the gospel-saturated writings of William Perkins. A faithful pastor, Puritan leader, prolific author, and lecturer, Perkins defended the doctrines of the Protestant Reformation throughout his life. Giving particular emphasis to *solus Christus* and *sola Scriptura*, these Reformed doctrines drove him as a pastor to preach the unsearchable riches of God’s truth with confidence and assurance. Sadly, Perkins is unknown to the modern Christian. However, throughout the centuries, the writings, meditations, and treatises of this Puritan luminary have influenced Christians around the world. It is my hope that many will be introduced and reintroduced to the writings of this Reformed stalwart. May his zeal for gospel advance awaken a new generation of biblical preachers and teachers to herald the glory of our sovereign God in this present day.”

—Steven J. Lawson, president, OnePassion Ministries, and professor of preaching at The Master’s Seminary

“Relatively few in the church’s history have left a written legacy of enduring value beyond their own time. Perkins is surely among that select group. Reformation Heritage Books is to be commended for its commitment to making his *Works* available in this projected series, beginning with this volume.”

—Richard B. Gaffin Jr., professor of biblical and systematic theology emeritus, Westminster Theological Seminary

“Christians have heard about William Perkins, especially that he was an extraordinary preacher whose sermons made a deep impression on Cambridge and that they were still impacting the town in the decades that followed Perkins’s death at a mere forty-four years of age in 1602. He was at the heart of the revival of truth and holy living that made the Reformation a glorious work of God. He was the outstanding Puritan theologian of his time, but most of us have not had the opportunity to study his works because of their rarity. After more than three hundred years, this ignorance is going to be ended with the remarkable appearance during the next decade of the complete works of this man of God. We are looking forward to their appearance very much. There will be sufficient gaps between their publication to ensure a sincere attempt at imbibing the truths of each volume, and then we face the challenge of translating Perkins’s teaching into flesh-and-blood living.”

—Geoff Thomas, pastor, Alfred Place Baptist Church, Aberystwyth, Wales

The Works of
WILLIAM PERKINS

The Works of WILLIAM PERKINS

VOLUME 8

A Discourse of Conscience

Three Books on Cases of Conscience

*A Treatise Tending unto a Declaration whether a Man is in the
Estate of Damnation or in the Estate of Grace*

The Whole Treatise of the Cases of Conscience

A Grain of Mustard Seed

EDITED BY J. STEPHEN YUILLE

General editors:

Joel R. Beeke and Derek W. H. Thomas



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General Preface



William Perkins (1558–1602), often called “the father of Puritanism,” was a master preacher and teacher of Reformed, experiential theology. He left an indelible mark upon the English Puritan movement, and his writings were translated into Dutch, German, French, Hungarian, and other European languages. Today he is best known for his writings on predestination, but he also wrote prolifically on many doctrinal and practical subjects, including extended expositions of Scripture. The 1631 edition of his English *Works* filled over two thousand large pages of small print in three folio volumes.

It is puzzling why his full *Works* have not been in print since the early seventeenth century, especially given the flood of Puritan works reprinted in the mid-nineteenth and late twentieth centuries. Ian Breward did much to promote the study of Perkins, but Breward’s now rare, single-volume compilation of the *Work of William Perkins* (1970) could only present samplings of Perkins’s writings. We are extremely pleased that this lacuna is being filled, as it has been a dream of many years to see the writings of this Reformed theologian made accessible again to the public, including laymen, pastors, and scholars.

Reformation Heritage Books is publishing Perkins’s *Works* in a newly typeset format with spelling and capitalization conformed to modern American standards. The old forms (“thou dost”) are changed to the modern equivalent (“you do”), except in Scripture quotations and references to deity. Punctuation has also been modernized. However, the original words are left intact, not changed into modern synonyms, and the original word order retained even when it differs from modern syntax. Pronouns are capitalized when referring to God. Some archaic terms and obscure references are explained in the editor’s footnotes.

As was common in his day, Perkins did not use quotation marks to distinguish a direct quotation from an indirect quotation, summary, or paraphrase, but simply put all citations in italics (as he also did with proper names). We have removed such italics and followed the general principle of placing citations in quotation marks even if they may not be direct and exact quotations. Perkins generally quoted the Geneva Bible, but rather than conforming his quotations to any particular translation of Scripture, we have left them in

his words. Scripture references in the margins are brought into the text and enclosed in square brackets. Parenthetical Scripture references in general are abbreviated and punctuated according to the modern custom (as in Rom. 8:1), sometimes corrected, and sometimes moved to the end of the clause instead of its beginning. Other notes from the margins are placed in footnotes and labeled, “In the margin.” Where multiple sets of parentheses were nested within each other, the inward parentheses have been changed to square brackets. Otherwise, square brackets indicate words added by the editor. An introduction to each volume by its editor orients the reader to its contents.

The projected *Works of William Perkins* will include ten volumes, including four volumes of biblical exposition, three volumes of doctrinal and polemical treatises, and three volumes of ethical and practical writings. A breakdown of each volume’s contents may be found inside the cover of this book.

If it be asked what the center of Perkins’s theology was, then we hesitate to answer, for students of historical theology know that this is a perilous question to ask regarding any person. However, we may do well to end this preface by repeating what Perkins said at the conclusion of his influential manual on preaching, “The sum of the sum: preach one Christ by Christ to the praise of Christ.”

—Joel R. Beeke and Derek W. H. Thomas

Preface to Volume 8 of William Perkins's Works

Paul exhorts Timothy to “war a good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience” (1 Tim. 1:19). This simple exhortation captured the attention of William Perkins as he ministered at Great St. Andrew’s Church in Cambridge from 1584 to 1602. As a pastor, he was concerned about imparting the “faith” (i.e., sound doctrine) to those under his watch, and he was equally concerned about promoting “a good conscience” among them. He sought to persuade his listeners (from the common worker to the college professor) that the end of all theology is application, and that the key to application is a well-informed conscience. Convinced that it is “the most tender part of the soul,” he emphasized the need to employ “means” to avoid anything that might “offend” it.¹ He diligently proclaimed these “means” from the pulpit, and subsequently published his insights in five major works, which form the content of the present volume.²

The dates of publication suggest that the five works should be read in the following sequence: *A Treatise Tending unto a Declaration* (1595), *A Case of Conscience* (1595), *A Discourse of Conscience* (1596), *A Grain of Mustard Seed* (1597), and *The Whole Treatise of the Cases of Conscience* (1606).³ This order undoubtedly has merit, as it would help the reader trace the development of

1. *A Discourse of Conscience: Wherein is set down the nature, properties, and differences thereof, as also the way to get and keep a good conscience*, in *The Whole Works of that Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the University of Cambridge, M. William Perkins* (London: John Legate, 1631), 1:554.

2. For a brief introduction to Puritan casuistry, see Joel Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 927–45; Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, “Practical Divinity and Spirituality,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, eds. John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 191–205; and W. B. Patterson, *William Perkins and the Making of Protestant England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 90–113. For fuller treatments, see Thomas Wood, *English Casuistical Divinity during the Seventeenth Century* (London: SPCK Publishing, 1952); Norman Clifford, “Casuistical Divinity in English Puritanism during the Seventeenth Century: Its Origins, Development and Significance” (PhD diss., University of London, 1957); and Arthur Lindsley, “Conscience and Casuistry in the English Puritan Concept of Reformation” (PhD diss., Pittsburgh University, 1982).

3. The last of these was published posthumously by Thomas Pickering.

Perkins's thinking on the subject of the conscience. However, I would like to suggest a different approach.

I am convinced that the place to begin is with *A Discourse of Conscience*. This work contains four major sections, which establish the framework within which Perkins developed his pastoral theology. In the first, Perkins explains what conscience is. Central to his explanation is his belief that the soul consists of two chief faculties: understanding and will (including affections).⁴ The faculty of understanding, in turn, has two parts: the "theoretical" which contemplates what is true and false; and the "practical" which compares our words, thoughts, affections, and actions against what is true and false in order to determine whether they are good or bad.⁵ According to Perkins, God has placed this conscience between Him and us, to serve as an "arbitrator" to pass sentence either for us or against us.⁶

In the second section, Perkins explains what conscience does. As God's appointed "arbitrator," it "gives testimony" by determining what we have done or not done, and it "gives judgment" by determining what was "well done or ill done."⁷ It makes this determination on the basis of God's Word—the "binder" of the conscience.⁸ God's Word is either law or gospel: the first informs us of God's will, whereas the second commands us to believe in Christ.⁹ Conscience determines whether or not we conform to these two. Of particular significance to Perkins is the fact that the mind and memory function as "assistants" to aid in this process. The mind stores God's Word, and presents the "rules of divine

4. *Discourse of Conscience*, 1:517. Perkins's emphasis upon the faculties—understanding and will (affections)—is paradigmatic within the Puritan movement. The historian Perry Miller maintains that the Puritans discuss the faculties in "passing references" that "constitute an extended treatise upon psychology, the outlines of a doctrine upon which all Puritans agreed, of a premise for all their thinking, that can be said to have influenced them all the more extensively because it was unformulated and taken as axiomatic." *New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 242–43. This axiom is known as "faculty-humor psychology." For a detailed description, see Charles Cohen, *God's Caress: The Psychology of Puritan Religious Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 25–46. Of particular importance is Cohen's comment that the Puritans "did not accept it uncritically, for like all knowledge, it had to pass muster with Scripture." *God's Caress*, 26.

5. For a similar definition, see *The Whole Treatise of the Cases of Conscience*, in *The Works of that Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the University of Cambridge, M. William Perkins* (London: John Legate, 1631), 2:11.

6. *Discourse of Conscience*, 1:517. Also see *Treatise of the Cases of Conscience*, 2:12.

7. *Discourse of Conscience*, 1:518.

8. *Discourse of Conscience*, 1:518. Also see *Treatise of the Cases of Conscience*, 2:11. Perkins believes God's Word is the "proper" binder of conscience. He also acknowledges laws, oaths, and promises as "improper" binders of conscience, but they only function as such by virtue of their conformity to God's Word. *Discourse of Conscience*, 1:525–36.

9. *Discourse of Conscience*, 1:521.

law” to the conscience, whereas the memory recalls our particular words, thoughts, affections, and actions. Conscience then compares what the mind presents and the memory recalls. Having done so, it gives judgment, either “accusing and condemning” or “excusing and absolving.”¹⁰

In the third section, Perkins explains that there are two kinds of conscience. A “good” conscience is “that which rightly excuses and comforts according to God’s Word.”¹¹ Adam and Eve possessed this kind of conscience in the “estate of innocence.” Due to the fall, however, it gave way to an “evil” conscience—that which is “corrupted by original sin” and “painful in our sense and feeling.”¹² Perkins maintains that this kind of conscience “has spread itself over mankind as generally as original sin and, therefore, it is to be found in all men who come from Adam by ordinary generation.”¹³ It accuses and condemns the unregenerate thereby causing them “to flee from God as from an enemy.”¹⁴ Mercifully, a “good” conscience is restored when the “evil” conscience is “renewed and purged by faith in the blood of Christ.”¹⁵ Because of regeneration, the “good” conscience now possesses two important “properties.” The first is *liberty*, whereby we freely enjoy earthly delights in a manner that glorifies God, and the second is *certainty*, whereby we are assured of “the pardon of sin and everlasting life.”¹⁶

In the fourth section, Perkins explains our two-fold duty as it relates to conscience. To begin with, we must “obtain” a good conscience, which is done by three steps.¹⁷ The first is *preparation*, whereby we discover what the law

10. *Discourse of Conscience*, 1:535. The effect of an “accusing and condemning” conscience is “to stir up sundry passions and motions in the heart”—namely, shame, sorrow, fear, desperation, and perturbation. The effect of an “excusing and absolving” heart is to produce joy and confidence. “Hence it is said that a good conscience is a continual feast (Prov. 15:15).” *Discourse of Conscience*, 1:536.

11. *Discourse of Conscience*, 1:538.

12. *Discourse of Conscience*, 1:549.

13. *Discourse of Conscience*, 1:549. Perkins views original sin as a privation of good. Foundational to this is his conviction that man consisted of three things prior to the fall: (1) the “substance” of his body and soul; (2) the “faculties” of his soul—namely, understanding and will (affections); and (3) the “integrity and purity” of the faculties whereby they conformed to God’s will. *Treatise of the Cases of Conscience*, 2:3. At the fall, Adam did not lose his “substance” or his “faculties” but “the integrity and purity” of his faculties. This view of the effect of Adam’s fall is known as the Augustinian principle. When Adam was separated from God by the fall, he was inclined to disobedience because this deprivation had a negative impact upon his faculties. His will was no longer directed by an understanding that knew God, or affections that desired God. This means that sin has no formal existence. According to Perkins, sin “is properly a want or absence of goodness.” *Treatise of the Cases of Conscience*, 2:7.

14. *Discourse of Conscience*, 1:549.

15. *Discourse of Conscience*, 1:538.

16. *Discourse of Conscience*, 1:539–40.

17. *Discourse of Conscience*, 1:551–52.

requires, determine our condition before God, and sorrow as a result. The second is *application*, whereby we apply “the blood (or the merits) of Christ.” “Nothing can satisfy the judgment of the conscience,” writes Perkins, “much less the most severe judgment of God, but only the satisfaction of Christ.” The third is *reformation*, whereby the conscience “begins to excuse and testify unto us by the Holy Spirit that we are the children of God and have the pardon of our sins.” Having thereby obtained a good conscience, we must seek to “keep” it. This necessitates the avoidance of *impediments* such as “ignorance, unmortified affections, and worldly lusts.” It also includes the use of *preservatives*: in short, we “cherish that saving faith whereby we are persuaded of our reconciliation with God in Christ,” and we maintain “the righteousness of a good conscience” which “is nothing else but a constant endeavor and desire to obey the will of God in all things.”¹⁸

With this essential framework in place, the reader is ready for Perkins's colossal work, *The Whole Treatise of the Cases of Conscience*. It is based upon Isaiah 50:4, where the Servant of the Lord declares, “The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary.” Based on this verse, Perkins remarks, “It was one special duty of Christ's prophetic office to give comfort to the consciences of those who were distressed.”¹⁹ Believing that Christ has imparted this “special duty” to all ministers, Perkins insists that they must be proficient in that “certain and infallible doctrine, propounded and taught in the Scriptures” which alone is able to bring relief to the troubled conscience.²⁰ Fundamental to this “doctrine” is a basic understanding of man as he stands in three different conditions.

The first is *man as he stands by himself*. Here Perkins puts forward three major questions for consideration. First, what must a man do to be saved? The answer includes humiliation before God, faith in Christ, repentance from sin,

18. *Discourse of Conscience*, 1:553–54. It is important to note Perkins's insistence that the “judicial” conscience must be established in God's forgiveness before the “legislative” conscience can be instructed in God's ways.

19. *Treatise of the Cases of Conscience*, 2:1.

20. *Treatise of the Cases of Conscience*, 2:1. Perkins excelled at this aspect of pastoral ministry. He did so through careful self-examination and faithful scriptural application. Like a skilled physician, he would probe the heart, seeking to determine the ailment; then, he would apply the remedy. While a student at Cambridge, William Ames heard Perkins preach on this subject. He records, “He began at length to teach how with the tongue of the learned one might speak a word in due season to him who is weary (Isa. 50:4) by untying and explaining diligently cases of conscience (as they are called). And the Lord found him so doing like a faithful servant. Yet he left many behind him affected with that study, who by their godly sermons (through God's assistance) made it to run, increase, and be glorified throughout England.” “To the Reader,” *Conscience with the Power and Cases thereof* (London: John Rothwell, 1643).

and performance of new obedience.²¹ Second, how can a man be assured of his salvation? Perkins points the inquirer to *the testimony of the Holy Spirit* (Rom. 8:16), *the sincerity of his walk* (Ps. 15:1–5), *the certainty of his adoption* (1 John 3:2), *the foundation of God's election* (2 Tim. 2:19), and *the practice of moral virtue* (2 Peter 1:10).²² Third, how can a man be comforted when his conscience is troubled? As Perkins explains, we must apply “the promise of everlasting life in and by the blood of Christ.” He adds, “For no physick, no art or skill of man, can cure a wounded and distressed conscience, but only the blood of Christ.”²³ The exact manner in which we apply this promise is contingent upon what has disturbed the conscience. Perkins identifies five potential “causes” of distress: *divine temptations, outward afflictions, blasphemous notions, scandalous sins, and bodily ailments*.²⁴

The second condition is *man as he stands in relation to God*. Perkins reduces his analysis of this subject to four “heads.” The first concerns the Godhead.²⁵ Is there a God? Is Jesus the Son of God? The second concerns the Scriptures.²⁶ Are they the true Word of God? How do we know? What about the many objections levied by opponents? The third “head” concerns religion.²⁷ How are we to conceive of God in our minds when we worship Him? How are we to worship Him?²⁸ The fourth “head” concerns the Sabbath.²⁹ When are we to observe the Sabbath? How are we to observe it?

The third condition is *man as he stands in relation to others*. As members of “some society” (family, church, or commonwealth),³⁰ we are to pursue virtue—“a gift of the Spirit of God and a part of regeneration” whereby we are made “apt to live well.”³¹ This “living well” entails prudence (the making of godly resolutions upon due consideration); clemency (the moderation of wrath and revenge); temperance (the moderation of appetite and lust); liberality (the

21. *Treatise of the Cases of Conscience*, 2:13–18.

22. *Treatise of the Cases of Conscience*, 2:18–21.

23. *Treatise of the Cases of Conscience*, 2:22.

24. *Treatise of the Cases of Conscience*, 2:26–45.

25. *Treatise of the Cases of Conscience*, 2:49.

26. *Treatise of the Cases of Conscience*, 2:54.

27. *Treatise of the Cases of Conscience*, 2:60.

28. Perkins distinguishes between “inward” worship (adoring God and cleaving to God) and “outward” worship (praying, hearing the Word, using the sacraments, adoring outwardly, confessing sin, taking an oath, making a vow, and fasting). *Treatise of the Cases of Conscience*, 2:60–105. These pages shed much light on the nature and practice of Perkins's piety.

29. *Treatise of the Cases of Conscience*, 2:105.

30. For an introduction to the relationship between Perkins's casuistry and political theory, see George Mosse, “William Perkins: Founder of Puritan Casuistry,” *Salmagundi* 29 (Spring 1975): 95–110.

31. *Treatise of the Cases of Conscience*, 2:113.

demonstration of kindness to others); and justice (the giving to others what is their due).³² Perkins demonstrates what these five virtues look like in a variety of situations. “How is a man to carry himself in respect of injuries and offenses done unto him?” “How far may a man proceed in the desiring and seeking of riches?” “How may we rightly use meats and drinks in such sort as our eating may be to God’s glory and our own comfort?” “What is the right, lawful, and holy use of apparel?” “What kinds of recreations and sports are lawful and convenient, and what are unlawful and inconvenient?” “How should alms be given, so that they may be good works and pleasing unto God?”³³

Underpinning Perkins’s answers—to these and other questions—is his concept of moderation as a virtue which arises when the soul’s affections are “tempered and allayed with the fear of God.”³⁴ According to Perkins, the affections are the soul’s inclination toward a particular object.³⁵ The soul loves whatever it perceives as good and, therefore, is inclined toward it. This inclination is expressed in desire (when the object is absent) and delight (when the object is present). Conversely, the soul hates whatever it perceives as evil and, therefore, is inclined away from it. This inclination is manifested in fear (when the object is absent) and sorrow (when the object is present).

For Perkins, it is important to understand how these affections operate before and after Adam’s fall in the Garden of Eden. Prior to his fall, Adam’s love was set on God and, consequently, his affections were well-directed. When he fell into sin, however, the object of his love changed. His love was no longer set on God, but *self*. In a state of regeneration, the Holy Spirit renews our love for God and, as a result, our affections are moved and inclined toward Him. However, this renewal is but in part. Because we are still susceptible to self-love, we are tempted to pursue natural delights as our ultimate happiness. Perkins believes this desire must be moderated by the fear of God.³⁶

32. *Treatise of the Cases of Conscience*, 2:117–48.

33. Perkins’s “cases” set the stage for the works in Puritan casuistry that would pour forth from the presses over the next century. For example, see Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory* (1673), in *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter* (London: George Virtue, 1846; repr., Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 2000); and George Swinnock, *The Christian Man’s Calling; or, A treatise of making religion one’s business* (1661–1665), in *The Works of George Swinnock*, ed. James Nichol (London, 1868; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1992), vols. 1–3.

34. *Treatise of the Cases of Conscience*, 2:349.

35. Perkins derives this view of the affections from Augustine. See *The City of God*, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. 2, ed. P. Schaff (New York: Random House, 1948), 14:5–9.

36. Perkins was no Stoic. He writes, “Some learned philosophers...taught that the very nature of virtue stands in a mean, or mediocrity of affections. This that they say is true in part, but not wholly. For the mediocrity of which they speak, without renovation of affections, is nothing. And, therefore, all virtues that are not joined with a renovation and change of the affections are

Perkins makes it clear that he has no problem with delights such as recreation, food, drink, music, marriage, etc.³⁷ He remarks, “We may use these gifts of God...not sparingly alone, and for mere necessity, to the satisfying of our hunger and quenching of our thirst, but also freely and liberally for Christian delight and pleasure. For this is that liberty which God has granted to all believers.”³⁸ Moreover, he affirms that “God has put into His creatures infinite varieties of colors, favors, tastes, and forms, to this end, that men might take delight in them.”³⁹ In short, we are free to derive pleasure from the created order because it is good (1 Tim. 4:4); however, we must moderate our desire by enjoying earthly delights according to God’s design. “The right manner of using them,” says Perkins, “is to sanctify them by the Word and prayer (1 Tim. 4:3–5).”⁴⁰ God’s Word shows us “what things” we may use and “in what manner” we may use them. Prayer, on the other hand, is the means by which “we crave at God’s hands the right use of them” while giving thanks for them.⁴¹

It is important to note that, in his handling of these cases of conscience, Perkins carefully avoids the charge of legalism. He is rigorous in his approach to God’s law as a rule for believers, but he never views it as the basis of salvation. He is equally cautious in evading the charge of formalism. Perkins is deeply concerned about how theology applies to practice, but he keeps his discussion in the realm of general principles rather than detailed prescriptions.⁴²

no better than sins.” *Treatise of the Cases of Conscience*, 2:163. Perkins is speaking here of the Stoics who believed everyone possesses impulses—or inclinations—toward or away from objects. As long as reason is in control, these impulses are not an issue. However, when they exceed the bounds of reason, they become passions: fear, sorrow, pleasure, and desire. The external factors that cause these passions are without virtue; thus, the passions themselves are irrational. Virtue then is a state of moderation attained when people become indifferent toward externals, thereby freeing themselves from passions. Perkins does not view moderation as an absolute value in the tradition of Stoicism. He has no difficulty with strong affections as long as they are directed by love for God.

37. For Perkins’s thoughts on Christian liberty as it relates to marriage, see Seth Osbourne, “Is Marriage Truly Open to All? The Diverging Perspectives of Puritan Casuistry on the Christian’s Freedom to Marry,” *Puritan Reformed Journal*, 8, no. 1 (Jan. 2016): 84–109.

38. *Treatise of the Cases of Conscience*, 2:321. Also see 2:342.

39. *Discourse of Conscience*, 1:539. Elsewhere, Perkins states, “By Christian liberty we are allowed to use the creatures of God, not only for our necessity, but also for meet and convenient delight. This is a confessed truth. And, therefore, to them who shall condemn fit and convenient recreation (as some of the ancient fathers have done, by name Chrysostom and Ambrose), it may be said, ‘Be not too righteous, be not too wise’ (Eccl. 7:16).” *A Case of Conscience, the greatest that ever was: How a man may know whether he is the child of God or not*, in *The Works of that Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the University of Cambridge, M. William Perkins* (London: John Legate, 1631), 1:140.

40. *Discourse of Conscience*, 1:539.

41. *Discourse of Conscience*, 1:540.

42. This sets Perkins apart from many who follow in his wake (e.g., Richard Baxter).

Having worked through Perkins's extensive treatment of casuistry⁴³ as it relates to man in his three principle conditions (by himself, in relation to God, and in relation to others), the reader is now ready for *A Case of Conscience, the greatest that ever was*. In the subtitle, Perkins leaves no doubt as to the nature of this particular "case": *How a man may know whether he is the child of God or not*.⁴⁴ He touches on this motif in both *A Discourse of Conscience and The Whole Treatise of the Cases of Conscience*, but it is here that it receives his full attention. It is of primary importance because personal assurance is the foundation upon which all other cases of conscience build.

Perkins believes it is common for those "who are touched by the Spirit and begin to come on in religion" to be "much troubled with fear that they are not God's children."⁴⁵ They are consumed with doubts concerning their standing before God, and they are in desperate search of "some resolution." Believing that the Holy Spirit has penned two "parcels of holy Scripture" for resolving this case (1 John and Psalm 15), Perkins produces two dialogues: the first is between John and the church, and the second is between God and the church. To these he attaches "a little discourse" penned by Girolamo Zanchi.⁴⁶

Most of this work is taken up with the dialogue between John and the church, based on 1 John. The church wants to know how she can be sure that Christ is her Advocate, how she can be sure that she is numbered among God's children, and how she can be sure that God dwells in her.⁴⁷ Perkins's portrayal of God's response rests upon his conviction that the affections are sanctified through the new birth. Sanctified affections are then manifested by their inclination to that which is good. First, we love God by obeying Him (1 John 2:3–5). Perkins explains that "to keep God's Word" does not mean "to fulfill it" but "to

43. The word "casuistry" comes from the Latin *casus*—case. It refers to the application of biblical principles to specific cases of conscience.

44. By the late sixteenth century, the issue of assurance loomed large within the Church of England because of the growing tendency on the part of many to take God's saving grace for granted. Perkins reacted to dead orthodoxy, which minimized the seriousness of sin and regarded mere assent to the truths of Scripture as sufficient for salvation. It thus became essential for him to distinguish between assurance and presumption. This situation was further complicated by the Roman Catholic Church's position that it is impossible for anyone in this life to be "infallibly certain of his own salvation." *Discourse of Conscience*, 540–41. In this work, Perkins speaks to the "popish" position by way of four key arguments. He also responds to twelve common objections. For some insight into the development of Perkins's casuistry in the context of his struggle with Roman Catholicism, see Ian Breward, "William Perkins and the Origins of Reformed Casuistry," *Evangelical Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (Jan.–Mar. 1968): 3–20.

45. *Case of Conscience*, 1:422.

46. Girolamo Zanchi (1516–1590) was an Italian Reformer, who served as professor of Old Testament at Strasbourg.

47. *Case of Conscience*, 1:423, 425, 427.

have a care and a desire to do it.”⁴⁸ Second, we love holiness by mortifying sin (1 John 3:2–3). According to Perkins, “a desire and endeavor to use good means to cleanse ourselves of our corruptions and private sins is a mark of adoption.”⁴⁹ Third, we love others by showing compassion (1 John 3:15; 4:12). Our love for others is the fruit of God adopting us into His family. Perkins explains, “That love wherewith He loves is thoroughly made manifest towards us by our love. As the light of the moon shining on us argues the light of the sun shining upon the moon.”⁵⁰

If we have any experience of this love (even to a small degree), then we can be certain that the Holy Spirit is sanctifying us. For Perkins, this is how the Holy Spirit witnesses to our adoption: “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Rom. 8:16). Perkins identifies “our spirit” with the conscience, which, with the Holy Spirit’s assistance, is able to discern the marks (according to Scripture) of those who are the children of God. In this paradigm, the Holy Spirit both provides the evidence (i.e., marks of grace) and empowers our conscience to evaluate it.⁵¹

In his attempt to foster assurance on the basis of sanctified affections, Perkins opens the door to two *potential* dangers. The first is *introspection*. Perkins frequently compels his readers to examine themselves. While certainly important advice for the presumptuous, it is unhelpful (even potentially detrimental) for the overly sensitive.⁵² When stated categorically, it can lead their eyes away from where they ought to be—namely, fixed on Christ. The second danger is *despair*.⁵³ While affirming the need for warm affections, Perkins acknowledges that many people suffer from cold affections. By way of solution, he seems to propose that dissatisfaction with one’s lack of affection is a sign of affection.

48. *Case of Conscience*, 1:423.

49. *Case of Conscience*, 1:425.

50. *Case of Conscience*, 1:427.

51. Joel Beeke identifies three schools of thought among the Puritans as the nature of the Holy Spirit’s witness: (1) Those who viewed the testimony of the Holy Spirit as referring exclusively to the practical and mystical syllogisms. (2) Those who distinguished the Holy Spirit witnessing with the Christian’s spirit by syllogism from His witnessing to the Christian’s spirit by direct applications of the Word. (3) Those who believed that the witness of the Holy Spirit was an immediate impression which marked the zenith of the experimental life—often equated with the “sealing of the Spirit” (Eph. 1:13). “Personal Assurance of Faith: The Puritans and Chapter 18.2 of the Westminster Confession,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 55 (1993): 25–27.

52. Andrew Davies, “The Holy Spirit in Puritan Experience,” in *Faith and Ferment* (London: Westminster Conference, 1982), 25.

53. John Stachniewski deals with this subject at some length, arguing that the doctrines of election and reprobation led the Puritans to establish detailed ways of knowing one’s spiritual state. This inevitably fostered despair. *The Persecutory Imagination: English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 26–27.

If left unexplained, such reasoning can easily lead to a vicious cycle whereby anxiety becomes a mark of piety.

Perkins guards against these potential dangers by his repeated emphasis on the covenant of grace. In short, assurance of salvation is based on God's promise and Christ's merit: "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake" (1 John 2:12). According to Perkins, the golden chain of salvation (predestination, calling, justification, sanctification, and glorification) is linked to us through the preaching of God's covenant of grace.⁵⁴ In the gospel God reveals "that there is perfect righteousness and life everlasting to be obtained by Christ" and "that the instrument to obtain righteousness and life eternal is faith in Christ."⁵⁵ For this reason, says Perkins, "Every man to whom the gospel is revealed is bound to believe his own election, justification, sanctification, and glorification in and by Christ."⁵⁶

Although Perkins encourages people to search their hearts for sanctified affections as described in 1 John, he recognizes that these are merely signs of a faith by which we become participants in Christ's finished work.⁵⁷ It is God's grace alone that makes our faith even possible. Perkins explains, "Faith does not justify in respect of itself because it is an action or virtue or because it is

54. *Treatise of the Cases of Conscience*, 2:18.

55. *Discourse of Conscience*, 1:523.

56. *Discourse of Conscience*, 1:523.

57. There is considerable controversy surrounding the relationship between John Calvin and the Westminster divines' articulation of the doctrine of assurance. R. T. Kendall ignited much of this debate by asserting that the WCF departs from Calvin's belief that "faith is *knowledge*... 'merely witnessing what God has already done in Christ' and that assurance is 'the *direct* act of faith.'" *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford: University Press, 1979). Kendall locates the primary cause of this departure in Theodore Beza's doctrine of limited atonement, for it "makes Christ's death that to which the decree of election has particular reference and that which makes the elect's salvation efficacious." *Calvin and English Calvinism*, 29. For a similar argument, see Brian Armstrong *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth-Century France* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969). Richard Muller challenges this view in *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986). Returning to Kendall, he argues that William Perkins adopted Beza's distortions of Calvin's teaching, and his legacy ensured their inclusion at the Westminster Assembly where they received "creedal sanction." *Calvin and English Calvinism*, 76. On this basis, Kendall concludes that the WCF "hardly deserves to be called Calvinistic." *Calvin and English Calvinism*, 212. Joel Beeke adopts an entirely different view from Kendall in regard to the relationship between Calvin and the WCF, commenting, "The difference between Calvin and the Calvinists is substantial and developmental, but *not* antithetical." *Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Second Reformation* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 20. Beeke argues that, although the Puritans gave practical and mystical syllogisms a more intrinsic role than Calvin, they continued to regard the promises of God as the primary ground for assurance. Plus, they distinguished between an initial act of faith and a fully developed assurance while insisting that the latter proceeds from the former.

strong, lively, and perfect, but in respect of the object thereof, namely Christ crucified, whom faith apprehends as He is set forth unto us in the Word and sacraments.... As for faith in us, it is but an instrument to apprehend and receive that which Christ for His part offers and gives.... Though our apprehension is necessary, yet our salvation stands in this, that God apprehends us for His own rather than that we apprehend Him.”⁵⁸ Perkins’s reference to faith as an “instrument” is significant, for it means that faith is a gift of God’s grace that moves us to respond to Christ through the preaching of the Word.⁵⁹ In sum, it is a passive “instrument” by which we receive Christ; but, at the moment we receive Christ, it actively responds to the gift of grace.

Perkins remains with the subject of assurance in *A Treatise Tending unto a Declaration*.⁶⁰ It is actually a compilation of eight small treatises. In the first, Perkins sets forth a series of propositions to demonstrate how far a person can go in the profession of the gospel while remaining a reprobate. In the second, he sets forth another series of propositions to show how far a Christian exceeds the “reprobate” in Christianity. These propositions are confirmed in a third treatise—a dialogue extracted from the writings of William Tyndale and John Bradford. From here, Perkins includes a treatise demonstrating how the “popish religion” falls short of assurance. The fifth highlights the devil’s attempts to sully our conscience and how we are to respond to his attacks. In the next, Perkins shows how to apply God’s Word to the soul. The remaining two treatises provide consolations for those struggling with sin and desertion respectively.

To profit from these eight treatises, it is important to grasp Perkins’s view of how God works faith in the heart. He portrays God’s involvement as consisting of two steps: first, God “prepares the heart that it may be acceptable of faith”; and, second, God “causes faith by little and little to spring and to breed in the heart.”⁶¹

For Perkins, God’s preparation of the heart for faith is accomplished by means of “humbling and softening.”⁶² This involves four steps.⁶³ The first is

58. *Grain of Mustard Seed*, 1:641.

59. *Treatise of the Cases of Conscience*, 2:15.

60. *A Treatise Tending unto a Declaration, whether a man is in the estate of damnation, or in the estate of grace; and if he is in the first, how he may in time come out of it; if in the second, how he may discern it, and persevere in the same to the end*, in *The Works of that Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the University of Cambridge, M. William Perkins* (London: John Legate, 1631), 1:356.

61. *Tending unto a Declaration*, 1:363.

62. *Tending unto a Declaration*, 1:363.

63. Commenting on Perkins, Mark Shaw writes, “His covenant theology enabled him to follow a consistent line of co-action which gave strong emphasis to God’s sovereign grace in Christ as the ultimate cause of salvation while at the same time emphasizing the necessity of human response.... The human psyche as created by God needed the sovereignty of grace to

“the knowledge of the Word of God.”⁶⁴ The second is “the sight of sin arising of the knowledge of the law.”⁶⁵ For Perkins, it is particularly important that we examine ourselves “by the commandments of the law, but especially by the tenth commandment, which ransacks the heart to the very quick.”⁶⁶ The third step is “a sorrow for sin, which is a pain and pricking in the heart arising of the feeling of the displeasure of God, and of the just damnation which follows after sin.”⁶⁷ Perkins equates this “pain and pricking in the heart” with the “spirit of bondage” in Romans 8:14, explaining, “This sorrow is called the *spirit of bondage to fear*, because when the Spirit has made a man see his sins, he sees further the curse of the law, and so he finds himself to be in bondage under Satan, hell, death, and damnation: at which most terrible sight his heart is smitten with fear and trembling.”⁶⁸ The fourth step in God’s “humbling and softening” of the heart is “a holy desperation, which is when a man is wholly out of all hope ever to attain salvation by any strength or goodness of his own, speaking and thinking more vilely of himself than any other can do, and heartily acknowledging himself to have deserved not one only but even ten thousand damnations in hell-fire with the devil and his angels.”⁶⁹

Having thus prepared the heart by “humbling and softening,” God then “causes faith by little and little to spring and to breed in the heart.”⁷⁰ To begin with, God stirs us up “to ponder most diligently the great mercy of God offered . . . in Christ.” As a result, we feel and acknowledge our “need of Christ,”

deliver it from the condemnation it was helpless to alter while at the same time it needed to apply and respond to his grace.” “Drama in the Meeting House: The Concept of Conversion in the Theology of William Perkins,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 45 (1983): 71. In other words, Perkins does not believe that sinners are simply forced into a state of salvation. If this were the case, then they would have no awareness of their own experience. Instead, he affirms that God proceeds with individuals by steps, so that they are involved in the process. Shaw identifies Perkins’s four-stage model in conversion as “humiliation—faith—repentance—obedience.” “Drama in the Meeting House,” 56.

64. *Tending unto a Declaration*, 1:363.

65. *Tending unto a Declaration*, 1:363.

66. *Tending unto a Declaration*, 1:364.

67. *Tending unto a Declaration*, 1:364.

68. *Tending unto a Declaration*, 1:364. There are two major schools of thought concerning the phrase, “spirit of bondage.” (1) It is a reference to *bondage to sin*. If that is true, then Paul is saying that we are no longer unregenerate but regenerate. (2) It is a reference to *conviction for sin*. Both instances of the word “spirit” in this verse refer to the Spirit. Therefore, the Spirit of bondage (or slavery) is an activity performed by the Spirit, whereby He convicts us of sin. Having produced conviction and humiliation for sin, the Spirit leads us to Christ, whereby we believe in Him, and are adopted into God’s family. The Spirit of bondage produces terror as the soul sees itself as God sees it. The Spirit of adoption eases that terror by leading the soul to Christ.

69. *Tending unto a Declaration*, 1:365.

70. *Tending unto a Declaration*, 1:365.

meaning we begin to desire Christ and His merits. Finally, we pray, “crying with the poor Publican, ‘O God be merciful to me a sinner.’” “After all these,” says Perkins, “arises in the heart a lively assurance of the forgiveness of sin.”

For a “better understanding” of how God cultivates faith, Perkins appeals to the fact that a sinner is often compared to a sick man in Scripture.⁷¹ In other words, what disease is to the body, sin is to the soul. Therefore, the forgiving of sin resembles the healing of disease.⁷² Before we can be cured of a disease, we must see it and perceive its danger to us. Then, realizing that we require medical attention, we must call for a doctor. When we see the doctor, we must plead with him to help us. Then, we must surrender ourselves into the doctor’s hands to do as he says. Then, our health is restored.

Perkins believes the same is true when it comes to our sin. His point is that we must perceive our need before we will come to Christ. We must be “thirsty” before we will drink of Christ. We must be “hungry” before we will feed on Christ. We must be “weary and heavy-laden” before we will rest in Christ (Matt. 11:28–30). We must be like a “battered reed” (i.e., easy to break off) and a “smoldering wick” (i.e., easy to put out) before we will turn to Christ (Matt. 12:20). For Perkins, there must be humiliation for sin before we will ever surrender to Christ.

As a pastor, Perkins seeks to employ his paradigm of how God works faith in the heart as a means to disturb the comfortable and comfort the disturbed. At first glance, his approach seems to open the door to preparationism—the idea that people must fulfill certain requirements prior to believing in Christ.⁷³ For this reason, the reader will be well advised to keep several emphases in view. The first is the fact that Perkins insists that humiliation is actually a fruit of faith. When describing how God works faith in the heart, he puts humiliation before faith, not because it is first, but because we are *aware* of it first. “Faith lies hid in the heart,” says Perkins, “and the first effect whereby it appears is the abasing and humbling of ourselves.”⁷⁴

The second emphasis is Perkins’s conviction that we become a child of God at the very instant we have any awareness of our need for Him. He writes, “In the parable of the prodigal son, the father with joy receives his wicked child. But when? Surely, when he saw him coming afar off, and when as yet he had made no confession or humiliation to his father, but only had conceived within

71. *Tending unto a Declaration*, 1:365. See Matt. 9:11–12; Luke 4:18.

72. *Tending unto a Declaration*, 1:365–66.

73. For more on this, see Sinclair Ferguson, *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), esp. pp. 60–64.

74. *Treatise of the Cases of Conscience*, 2:14.

himself a purpose to return and to say, 'Father I have sinned against heaven and against thee' (Luke 15:21).⁷⁵

The third emphasis is Perkins's assertion that humiliation for sin varies in degree and expression from person to person. He makes it clear that the important point is not external expressions of sorrow, but whether or not we are convinced that our righteousness is as "filthy rags" in God's sight (Isa. 64:6). He explains, "All men who are humbled have not like measure of sorrow, but some more, some less."⁷⁶ By way of example, he appeals to Lydia in Acts 16:14, concluding, "It is often seen in a festered sore that the corruption is let out as well with the pricking of a small pin as with the wide lance of a razor."⁷⁷

The last (and smallest) work in this volume is *A Grain of Mustard Seed*. Here Perkins makes it his aim to provide consolation to the "weak" Christian. "It is a very necessary point to be known," says he, "what is the least measure of grace that can befall the true child of God, lesser than which there is no grace effectual to salvation."⁷⁸ Why is Perkins so concerned about this? For starters, he believes it is the "very foundation of true comfort unto all troubled and touched consciences." In addition, it is "a notable means to stir up thankfulness in them who have any grace at all." Finally, it is "an inducement and a spur unto many careless and unrepentant persons to embrace the gospel."⁷⁹

Perkins proceeds to define this "least measure of grace" by way of six "conclusions." In these, his chief point is that "a constant and earnest desire to be reconciled to God, to believe, and to repent, if it is in a touched heart, is in acceptation with God as reconciliation, faith, [and] repentance itself."⁸⁰ In other words, the desire to be reconciled is reconciliation, the desire to believe is belief, and the desire to repent is repentance. Perkins clarifies, "A desire to be reconciled is not reconciliation in nature (for the desire is one thing and reconciliation is another), but in God's acceptation. For if we, being touched thoroughly for our sins, do desire to have them pardoned, and to be at one with God, God accepts us as reconciled. Again, a desire to believe is not faith in nature, but only in God's acceptation, God accepting the will for the deed."⁸¹ This is possible because God has annexed "a promise of blessedness and of everlasting life" to the desire of grace (e.g., Matt. 5:6; John 7:38; Rev. 21:6). This

75. *A Grain of Mustard Seed, or the least measure of grace that is (or can be) effectual to salvation*, in *The Whole Works of that Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the University of Cambridge, M. William Perkins* (London: John Legate, 1631), 1:637.

76. *Tending unto a Declaration*, 1:364.

77. *Tending unto a Declaration*, 1:365. Also see *Treatise of the Cases of Conscience*, 2:15.

78. *Grain of Mustard Seed*, 1:637.

79. *Grain of Mustard Seed*, 1:637.

80. *Grain of Mustard Seed*, 1:638.

81. *Grain of Mustard Seed*, 1:638.

means, therefore, that “the desire of mercy in the want of mercy is the obtaining of mercy, and the desire to believe in the want of faith is faith.”⁸²

There is much in the present volume to commend to the reader, but what clearly stands out is Perkins's skill as a spiritual advisor. He is persuasive in his exposition of Scripture and in its application to everyday issues because he is convinced that a mind instructed in God's Word and illumined by God's Spirit is the means by which to produce a good conscience. The “benefits” that accrue to those whose conscience is thus informed are manifold. Among other things, it enables them to enjoy God's “excellent gifts,” causes them to call upon God with “boldness,” makes them “patient in affliction,” and comforts them in “the hour of death.” For this reason, we must employ all means to watch over it. We must, says Perkins, “be always at the helm” so that we “carry our ship with as even a course as we possibly can to the intended port of happiness, which is the salvation of our souls.”⁸³

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82. *Grain of Mustard Seed*, 1:639.

83. *Discourse of Conscience*, 1:554.

A Discourse of Conscience

Wherein is set down the nature, properties,
and differences thereof, as also the way to get
and keep a good conscience.

Printed by John Legate,
printer to the University of Cambridge.

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The Epistle Dedicatory

To the Right Honorable Sir William Piriam, Knight,
Lord Chief Baron of her Majesty's Exchequer, Grace and peace.

Right Honorable. It cannot be unknown to yourself, or to any man of a day's experience, that it is thought a small matter to commit a sin, or to lie in sins against a man's own conscience. For many, when they are told of their duty in this point, reply and say, "What tell you me of conscience? Conscience was hanged long ago." But unless they take better heed, and prevent the danger by repentance, hanged conscience will revive and become both gibbet and hangman to them, either in this life or the life to come. For conscience is appointed of God to declare and put in execution His just judgment against sinners; and as God cannot possibly be overcome by man, so neither can the judgment by conscience, being the judgment of God, be wholly extinguished. Indeed, Satan for his part goes about, by all means he can, to benumb the conscience; but all is nothing. For as the sick man, when he seems to sleep and take his rest, is inwardly full of troubles, so the benumbed and drowsy conscience wants not its secret pangs and terrors. And when it shall be roused by the judgment of God, it waxes cruel and fierce like a wild beast. Second, when a man sins against his conscience, as much as in him lies, he plunges himself into the gulf of desperation, for every wound of the conscience, though the smart of it is little felt, is a deadly wound. He that goes on to sin against his conscience stabs and wounds it often in the same place, and all renewed wounds (as we know) are hardly or never cured. Third, he who lies in sins against his conscience cannot call upon the name of God, for guilty conscience makes a man fly from God. And Christ says, "God heareth not sinners,"¹ understanding by "sinners" such as go on in their own ways against conscience. And what can be more doleful than to be barred of the invocation of God's name? Lastly, such persons, after the last judgment, shall have not only their bodies in torment, but the worms in the soul and conscience shall never die. And what will it profit a

1. John 9:31.

man to gain the whole world by doing things against his own conscience, and lose his own soul?

Now, that men [who are] on this manner careless touching conscience may see their folly and the great danger thereof, and come to amendment, I have penned this small treatise. And according to the ancient and laudable custom, as also according to my long-intended purpose, I now dedicate and present the same to your Lordship. The reasons which have emboldened me to this enterprise (all by-respects excluded) are these: general doctrine in points of religion is dark and obscure, and very hardly practiced without the light of particular examples, and therefore the doctrine of conscience by due right pertains to a man of conscience such a one as your Lordship is, who (others of like place not excepted) has obtained this mercy at God's hand to keep faith and [a] good conscience. Again, considering that justice and conscience have always been friends, I am induced to think that your Lordship, being publicly set apart for the execution and maintenance of civil justice, will approve and accept a treatise propounding rules and precepts of conscience. Therefore, craving pardon for my boldness, and hoping of your Lordship's good acceptance, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace.²

Your Lordship's to command, W. Perkins, June 14, 1596

2. Acts 20:32.

Chapter 1

What Conscience Is

Conscience is a part of the understanding in all reasonable creatures, determining of their particular actions either with them or against them.

I say conscience is a part of the understanding, and I show it thus. God, in framing of the soul, placed in it two principal faculties: understanding and will. Understanding is that faculty in the soul whereby we use reason; and it is the more principal part serving to rule and order the whole man; and, therefore, it is placed in the soul to be as the wagoner in the wagon. The will is another faculty whereby we do will or nill anything, that is, choose or refuse it. With the will is joined sundry affections, as joy, sorrow, love, hatred, etc., whereby we embrace or eschew that which is good or evil. Now, conscience is not placed in the affections or will, but in the understanding, because the actions thereof stand in the use of reason. Understanding again has two parts. The first is that which stands in the view and contemplation of truth and falsehood, and goes no further. The second is that which stands in the view and consideration of every particular action, to search whether it is good or bad. The first is called the theoretical understanding, [and] the second the practical understanding. Conscience is to be comprehended under the latter, because its property is to judge of the goodness or badness of things or actions done.

Again, I say that conscience is a part of the mind or understanding,¹ to show that conscience is not a bare knowledge or judgment of the understanding (as men commonly write)² but a natural power, faculty, or created quality, from whence knowledge and judgment proceed as effects. The Scriptures confirm this, in that they ascribe sundry works and actions to conscience, as accusing, excusing, comforting, and terrifying. These actions could not thence proceed, if conscience were no more than an action or act of the mind. Indeed,

1. In the margin: Understanding has no parts properly, but by analogy in respect of divers objects and actions.

2. In the margin: Thom. Aquin., p. 1, q. 79, art. 13. Dominic. Bannes on this place. Antoninus, etc.