

Guidelines for True Christian Living

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Translator's Introduction

Our catechisms cover the basic doctrines of the Christian faith. We do well to master them. However, there are few resources that set forth in a simple way how to live a Christian life. I believe that Peter Allix's book does just that. If you take into account the 50 principles that he sets forth here, I believe you will be much better equipped to live a godly life. This book is simple enough that young children can understand it. I intend to use this book to teach my children the basics of godly living. I will be gratified if others put it to the same use.

Author's Introduction

These principles only contain what all Christians recognize. There is no dispute on any of these guidelines. However, we thought that this collection would not be useless because, while no one contests them when they hear them, there are very few who have them in their soul, and there are even less who practice them.

Many people imagine that they are very good Christians because they participate in the external duties of religion. Others think that they are even better because they study the questions that divide the Christian world. This devotion by custom and this instruction in controversies is not the only thing that God demands of us. There is something much more sublime and consoling in the duties that Religion prescribes to us.

In these principles or guidelines, we are trying to give an understanding of the duties of the Christian life to those who have not paid enough attention to them. We have only mentioned here the common applications that we repeat a thousand times in the pulpit because they are the essence of the precepts of the Gospel. If someone wants to complain about this because they have heard them so often, we ask them to consider that those who have heard them often are much less excusable than those who do not know them.

In the method and brevity that we have used, our goal was to make it easier to feel the necessity of these reflections and the importance of these truths. May God bless this labor in accordance with our goal in writing, namely, to be useful for the salvation of sinners and to motivate some of them to be engaged with these duties with greater care and zeal.

Principle 1: It is important to have principles for living the Christian life.

Godly living is the most important of our duties. It matters less if we do poorly in other areas of life, if we perform the duties of Christianity well. We will be happy, provided that we are good men.

What an abuse it is to put together guidelines in order to succeed better in the arts and sciences and neglect this method when it is a matter of piety! Should it be surprising that we make so little progress? Will we walk with certainty when we are not following any road?

We must quit acting so aimlessly. Godliness is well worth thinking about because it involves the actions on which our blessedness or misery necessarily depends. We must fill our hearts with the rules of piety and follow them religiously.

Principle 2: We must first consider what our ultimate purpose is.

The first act of wisdom consists in examining how we came into this world. Are we in this world because of chance, or do we owe our being to the powerful hand of God?

The second act of wisdom consists in considering whether we should follow certain rules in our conduct, or if we should blindly think the things we think, say the words we say, and do the things we do.

But the most important act of wisdom is to consider what our purpose is. The fact is that God has formed us by His goodness, and so our purpose should be to submit to Him. So, let us think of ourselves as having been created for Him and that our whole life must contribute to His glory.

Principle 3: We must act in accord with our ultimate purpose.

It is strange that most men depart this life with such little consideration of the purpose of their life. They either do not think about it all, or think about it only a little, not considering it with any depth at all.

It is more terrible still when we have considered our ultimate purpose and know what it is, but do not act in conformity with our knowledge. When we do that, our sins cry out all the more, our iniquities are only more inexcusable.

Our ultimate purpose must regulate all our actions. We must consider that ultimate purpose in order to walk wisely. After all, if it is really our ultimate purpose, won't walking according to any other ultimate purpose destroy us?

Principle 4: We must think of ourselves as being God's creatures.

A few years ago, I did not exist, and I find myself possessing being, life, movement, a reasonable soul, an enlightened spirit, and a body more perfect than other animals.

All the creatures serve my needs. The skies give me their light and influence. The earth furnishes me with its fruits, remedies, and rivers. The animals that it contains serve for my food, pleasures, and necessities.

Will I be worthy of pardon if I forget the One who has created me? I must love Him with all my soul, obey Him with faithfulness, and thank Him for of all His gifts. The best way to make sure we do this is to think of ourselves as being God's creatures.

Principle 5: We should be deeply moved by the blessing of our preservation.

The atheists think that mere chance causes them to continue to live, which is also what they consider to be the source of their being. As for us Christians, we should regard our preservation as a continual creation. The power, goodness, and wisdom of God communicate life to us each moment.

God delivers us each moment from innumerable evils that would cause us to perish, if His hand did not stop them. God blesses us each moment with innumerable blessings which are the joy and sweetness of our lives.

What sort of feeling should we see in ourselves for this blessing of God? What gratitude do we not justly owe Him? God thinks constantly of us, will we not think on Him more often than we breathe?

Principle 6: We should think about the work of our redemption over and over again.

The One who has formed me and preserves me is also the One who has redeemed me. It is not a man or an angel but God's own Son, Jesus Christ Himself, who wanted to become my surety and appease God by dying for me.

What insults He suffered, what torments! He was crucified like a slave. He underwent the punishment of hanging on a tree that God had said was a cursed death. It was not earth and hell alone that insulted Him; He complained that God Himself seemed to have abandoned Him.

Ah! What strange evil is sin that the blood of Jesus Christ was necessary to deliver me from it! I would have to be profane to trample underfoot the blood that redeemed me. I would have to be a demon not to love a Savior who has loved me so tenderly.

Principle 7: We must obey God when He calls us.

God draws us so that we come to Him. Without this drawing, we would not be able to form any thought or desire to come to Him. We must obey His voice when He calls us. If we do not do that, life and redemption will not bring us any benefit.

The pagans have not had the same advantage as us! Unbelievers and idolaters have been deprived of this grace of calling, and so they can in no way be converted. Will it be necessary for them to rise in the judgment to accuse us because we have not obeyed the calling that they did not receive?

O admirable patience! After a thousand sins, God receives us in repentance. After resisting the sweet words of His grace a thousand times, He is still willing to call us efficaciously. So, let us follow His voice that calls us to our highest good.

Principle 8: We must study the way God acts with His children.

We lose the benefits of the gifts and chastisements that God gives us when we do not know His conduct toward His children. When we do not know how God acts toward His children, we afflict ourselves in the midst of reasons for consolation and rejoice in the midst of temptations.

If Joseph had known what God was going to do with him, he would have cried when he saw himself in the confidence of his master Potiphar, and he would have been consoled when the accusation of this impudent man sent him to prison. Why? Because prison was actually bringing him nearer to the throne of Pharaoh.

The devil tries to make us judge what God is doing by focusing merely on the externals and appearances. That is one of his most disastrous illusions. Consequently, it is our duty to meditate well on what God has taught us about His own principles for the way He acts with His children.

Principle 9: We should examine our consciences every day.

To fail to reflect upon our conduct is to live without reason. But to not consider the state of our heart each day is to live without piety and godliness. We must see what good acts we have omitted and what sins we have committed.

We cannot be saved without the sorrows of repentance, without a resolution to correct our faults, and without seeking the remedies that can heal us. All that cannot happen unless we review our thoughts, words, and actions each day.

We present ourselves each day before a mirror, and yet we neglect the consultation of the law of God! This is to reject the study of perfection. Without a serious reflection on our own spiritual needs, we will pray to God merely out of custom instead of praying to Him with deep feeling.

Principle 10: We should avoid too many distractions.

A soul that is occupied with concern for its salvation does not burden itself so much with the things of this life. The time that it consecrates to God to reflect upon holy living is dearer to that soul than all the occupations of the world.

Let us remember the parable where Jesus Christ tells us that the word that falls into the heart of someone who is distracted by the cares of this life is like the seed that falls among thorns. That seed ends up getting choked.

It is so much better to have a calm and collected heart. When we do, we are like the good ground that produces thirty, sixty, and even a hundred fold. But this good fruit will not come when we are filled with one worldly care after another, even if these cares are in themselves innocent.

Principle 11: We must often pause to think about our salvation.

Most of our life is squandered. Time flies away. Life flows by. You come, go, speak, and act and almost never think about your salvation.

We may think we are innocent because we do not commit any great crimes. But let's be honest. Most of the things we do are far removed from the real purpose of our lives. Oftentimes, we just waste time doing nothing. This negligence is not innocent, even though it may not be the most criminal.

We cannot make a better use of our lives than to retire often alone to renew the resolutions that we have made to walk in the ways of piety and godliness. We must carefully examine our lives and our actions to see if they correspond with our real and most important goals.

Principle 12: We must carefully consider the vanity of this life.

There is nothing more miserable than this life. It is so short that it lasts a mere moment. We may be walking along thinking nothing about death when suddenly one of life's thousands of accidents

happens and takes us away. Life is more fragile than a glass and is nothing more than a road to death.

But can we think about the vanity of this life without feeling disgust? If we reject the advantages that we have here, this will raise our thoughts beyond this life to the life of eternity.

The world passes away, and we pass with it. It is filled with illusions that quickly dissipate and fly away as quickly as we experience them. In this life, only those who devote themselves to the will of God and hope on His salvation can have a stable and assured mind.

Principle 13: We should think often about the day of our death.

I cannot avoid death, but I do not know its time, place, nature, or circumstances. How terrible it will be for me if death surprised me in the midst of crime and impenitence! How terrible it would be to experience its coming for me to execute the terrible decree of my eternal condemnation!

The image of death makes me afraid, even though I believe it is far away. What will it be like when it is near, sets before my eyes the greatness and number of my sins in comparison with the gifts of God, and fills my soul with remorse and fear?

God uses the sight of death to give us a healthy fear that will lead us unto salvation. It awakens the conscience. It excites faith. It animates hope. But, good God, what will happen, if we descend there without knowing it or having thought about it? What will happen if I haven't already learned its lessons?

Principle 14: We must think of each day as if it were our last.

Jesus Christ has commanded us to wait for and expect His coming to judge the world every day. God has left us uncertain of the day of our death. What would we want to have done today, if Jesus Christ was coming today to judge the world? What would we want to have done today, if death was coming to take us and present us before God's tribunal?

We avoid opportunities to do good. We embrace opportunities for doing evil. We do both of these things because we believe that we are going to live a long time and repent before death surprises us. What presumption! What blindness!

I am sure that God will pardon me if I truly repent before the day of my death. But I would be crazy to think that I can put off into the future the duty to repent. I would be crazy to think this because each day could be my last.

Principle 15: We must constantly place the judgment of God before our eyes.

The wicked should fear the judgment of God. Jesus Christ whom they have offended will condemn them. Their conscience will concur in His judgment against them. The devil will await their condemnation so that he can execute it. There will be no more hope of grace and no more place for repentance.

Hidden thoughts, light words, doubtful actions, all will be considered. God's aid, patience, and blessings will rebuke them. Sins committed, good deeds neglected, and wasted time will all be punished. Excuses, prayers, and tears will be useless to prevent the justice of this tribunal.

Ah! The fear of this tribunal should occupy our thoughts. How can we quietly rest in our sin? Our soul can at each moment be called before the throne of God to be accused, judged, and condemned to eternal pains!

Principle 16: The pains of hell must work in us a healthy fear.

Are the blessings of God incapable of conquering our rebellion? Then, may the pains of hell that the wicked suffer frighten us! May such fear keep us out of hell!

Let's visit this abyss of misery in our minds. A sinner suffers there in all his senses. He must suffer punishments proportioned to the nature of his crime. He has lost God forever. He experiences eternal remorse in his conscience.

A dungeon is awful, but what is it compared to hell? Eternal darkness, fire that is never put out, the presence of Satan, the presence of all the villains of the world, weeping, crying out, blasphemies, despair. This is but an obscure image of the state of the damned.

Principle 17: The glory of heaven must powerfully motivate us to godliness.

Heaven is the dwelling place of all good men and the absence of every sort of misery. We will be blessed there with an indescribable abundance of good things for the body and the soul and the possession of God. All our desires will be satisfied. Our husband Jesus Christ will consummate all our hopes.

There will be no more temptations, sins, sufferings, or fears. There will be light in the soul, consolations for the heart, and rest for the conscience. There will be the union of believers as they eternally bless God in happiness that will never end.

What must we not do, what evils must we not suffer in order to preserve the hope of this glory that God promises us? What fear should we not feel when we think about our sins that could deprive us of heaven eternally, if we died in impenitence?

Principle 18: We must always live in a religious fear.

When Jesus Christ told His disciples that one of them would betray Him, they all trembled, horrified at this crime. They were worried, even though there was only one who was criminal.

Let us always fear the inconstancy of our nature. Who knows if the eye of Jesus Christ will discover something that is still unknown to us? The trembling of the saints should inspire us to a religious fear.

The fall of Saint Peter was followed by tears of repentance. But when we see him fall to temptation, who can be confident in his own virtue? When Jesus looked at Peter, it inspired him to repentance. But Jesus Christ does not honor with His divine looks all those who have a heart that is so faithless that it would renounce Him.

Principle 19: We must fear sin more than death.

Sin is rebellion against God. It is an imitation of the devil. It is the only object of Heaven's aversion. God punished it without remedy in the angels of darkness. And who can number the amount of men whom sin causes to perish eternally?

If death could be separated from the curse of God and if it consisted only in annihilation, the wicked would wish for it as a remedy against the remorse and agitations of their conscience. But sinners must think about death in a totally different way.

Consequently, let us fear sin more than death. Let us consider the waters of the flood, the flames that burned Sodom, and all other exemplary punishments. Let them bring before our eyes the horrors of sin and the eternal punishments that are reserved for it.

Principle 20: We must fear God more than man.

What blindness it is to fear men more than God! We suffer patiently the injuries and injustices of the great for fear that such complaints would merely attract new oppression, and we commonly offend the weak in the defense of Jesus Christ.

It is easier not to get angry as Jesus Christ commands us than to bear the injuries that are done to us. Why, then, do we light a fire that Jesus Christ smothers and put out another that men light with great care?

Let's be honest with ourselves. Let us be ashamed at such an imperfect Christianity. Let us be ashamed to do less by the fear of Jesus Christ, by this Jesus whom we ought to love, than by the fear of men who are not worthy of either our love or fear.

Principle 21: Our life must be a continual study of mortification.

Sin has so corrupted our nature that if we are not careful to continually oppose our tendency toward evil, we will inevitably fall into all sorts of crimes.

If we do not put our flesh to death, it will be a continual rebel against our spirit. If we do not resist our passions, they will rise up against the light of our reason. If we do not enlighten our reason, it will fight against the law of God and our duty.

Let us be on guard against those things that flatter our senses. Let us flee those things that nourish our passions. Let us guard against letting our imagination wander here and there. Let us regulate our spirits and our hearts by submitting them to God and His will.

Principle 22: We must continually fight against the disorder of self-love.

The disorder of self-love is the source of all our crimes. We naturally wish to be happy. This desire is innocent. But we look for this happiness either in riches, honors, or pleasures. That is our crime.

God does not forbid loving ourselves. This self-love is necessary for our preservation. But He forbids loving ourselves in a blind and unjust way. He forbids loving our bodies more than our souls and the present life more than eternal life.

Let us try to correct our passions by proposing to them legitimate objects, true goods, true honors, and true treasures. Let us put our faith in what God says about these objects rather than listening to the suggestions of our sensuality.

Principle 23: We must resist our passions.

This life is a place of combat. We do not always have to fight against human enemies or ferocious beasts, but we always have to fight against our passions which desire to reign in our hearts.

If we allow one of these passions to become the mistress of our souls, we must no longer speak of reason or tranquility. Our bodies and souls are in inescapable peril. Eternal death of both is the portion of those who are slaves to any of their passions.

But if we courageously resist the efforts they make to triumph in our hearts, we assure our rest and go to glory. We will often have it here below, and, at the least, it will be sure at the end of our battle.

Principle 24: We must suppress the pride that reigns in our souls.

Nothing is more difficult than putting off our pride. We naturally love our own excellence. We are vain with what we possess. We love the esteem of men. We display our perfections with pleasure. We love to be regarded as intelligent, capable, and good.

But nothing is more necessary than the suppression of a passion that produces bragging, ambition, obstinacy, presumption, and hypocrisy. What salvation can such people expect after God has pronounced that He resists the proud and exalts those who humble themselves?

Let us consider the source of this passion. The devil has inspired it in us. He is the king of the prideful. The effects of pride in this life fill society with trouble and disorder. Its eternal effect is to unite us with the devil and separate us from Jesus Christ who is humility itself.

Principle 25: We must not wish to make ourselves great.

Each estate has its consolations and its trials. We desire to raise ourselves up because we ignore this truth, as if there were an estate as happy as the one in which good men live in whatever estate they are.

Let us not think so much about making ourselves great and raising ourselves to a higher place in society. Let us think rather about reducing the trials of our estate and feeling its consolations more deeply. Let us put off our discontent. The place in which we are not is not better than the one in which we find ourselves.

God is the one who has prescribed the limits for each person. He has given us certain boundaries by our birth, by our blessings, and by our personality. Let us not try to get out of them. We cannot ordinarily do this without violating the orders of His providence and falling into temptation.

Principle 26: Humility must characterize us.

There is no Christianity in the heart of someone who does not have humility. Jesus Christ has taught this by His example and by His words. Do we dare to take the name of Christian, if we do not practice the lesson of humility that He has taught us?

We must give careful attention to our weaknesses. Let us not continually recount our advantages and seek the praises of the world. Instead, let us consider deeply the reasons we have for shame because these reasons can abase and put to death our pride.

To arrive at this end, we merely have to think of who we are. We have come from nothing. We are criminals. Our advantages result from the liberality of heaven, and we must one day give an account of our use of them.

Principle 27: We must guard ourselves from greed.

Saint Paul justly names greed as the root of all evil. The love of money makes us violate the justice that we must render to our neighbor. It smothers natural feelings of affection. It turns an apostle of Jesus Christ into a minister of Satan.

A soul that ardently desires riches exposes itself to a certain danger for an uncertain gain. It does not fear perishing eternally in order to satisfy its greed. This is the height of fanaticism and blindness.

Let us guard ourselves from being possessed by such a shameful passion. It leads us to betray Jesus Christ. Judas did not betray Jesus from fear of persecution but from desire for money. This obligates Jesus Christ to destroy us without remedy for having sought our blessedness in the abundance of riches and possession of them.

Principle 28: We must guard ourselves against emotions of anger.

Anger destroys man's reason by distorting it. It is the source of quarrels, blasphemies, and imprecations. It gives birth to hatred and causes someone to avenge himself without any consideration of reason, justice, or the rights of God.

It is perilous to abandon ourselves to this passion and follow such feelings. What horror it is to lose our temper at the first opportunity, or to go to God when things go badly and complain against Him, or to burst out in fury against our neighbors.

Let us resist emotions of anger when they first arise. Let us learn to consider our calamities as chastisements from God and injuries as tests that He gives us. If our heart raises itself up in spite of us, let us promptly return and never let the sun set on our anger, following the law of Jesus Christ.

Principle 29: We must remove from our hearts every sort of envy.

What madness it is to be afflicted by the blessing of our neighbor as if his blessing was causing our misery. What injustice it is to be at ease when calamity happens to our neighbor and even to insult him or take pleasure in seeing him humbled. This passion is only worthy of the heart of demons.

If we do not hate envy because it sucks the life from the envious and tears them up inside or because it takes pleasure in the filth with which it nourishes itself, let us at least hate it as the source of the miserable crime the Jews committed in delivering Jesus Christ to death.

Let us choke, let us choke this monster! Let us acquiesce in the way God distributes His gifts. Let us give liberally of the goods that we have been given, or let us ask God that He would make up for our weakness by granting the desires that we conceive for the advantage of our neighbor.

Principle 30: We must suffer injuries patiently.

When Socrates was struck by someone, he did not take part in revenge. Various pagans have imitated this example. They have even tried to oppose the malice of their enemies by doing them good.

Alas! How Christians should fear that the sweetness of these pagans will increase their condemnation! We are Christians, that is to say, we ought to hold this principle: the miserable one is he who does an injury, not he who suffers it. We are the disciples of a God who forbids us from taking vengeance, and yet we always let resentment rise up within us.

Finally, let us think just once that we are the criminals who are seeking grace, that we are before the throne and under the eyes of a God who cries, "Vengeance is mine!" Let us not despise any longer His presence, His voice, and the greatness of His judgments.

Principle 31: We must be horrified of impurity.

We cannot justly claim the glory of the angels, if we do not imitate their purity. To follow the pleasures of the flesh by seeking its gratifications and by cherishing its impure illusions is to walk in the way of damnation.

But can we be convinced of these truths without attaching ourselves to purity; without fleeing dangerous occasions, tempting company, and a listless idleness; and without arming ourselves against one's flesh by fasting and mortification?

Let us make a covenant with our eyes to never let enter into our souls any obscene thought. But if they violate this covenant, may our heart, moved by the cross of Jesus, smother at birth the thoughts that could carry us toward impurity.

Principle 32: We should guard ourselves against evil speaking.

Evil speaking is a characteristic of malignity. We cannot speak evil without destroying ourselves and those who take pleasure in hearing us. We make them complicit in our sin and by breathing the hatred that we have for our neighbor into them, we deprive them of happiness.

We count it a sin to have a hand in shedding a brother's blood. Should we regard it as innocent to have a tongue in it when by calumny we publish his faults, make him suspect, or criticize his virtue?

David declares that he could not allow slanderers in his court. Do we think that Jesus Christ will receive into heaven those who tear apart their brothers without pity and who take pleasure in such a cruel action?

Principle 33: We should never prefer slander to truth.

Pilate saw the malice of the Jews and the innocence of Jesus Christ. He wanted to absolve him, but he was opposed by political considerations. They cried, "If you release him, then you are not the friend of Caesar!" After that, he could not save Him.

What injustice! Did Jesus Christ cause some uprising? Did he gather arms, soldiers, or weapons? Did he not submit himself to the Roman laws? Didn't he pay the tribute and powerfully maintain the rights of Caesar?

It is easier to accuse a voluntary poverty of illegitimate luxury, obedience of rebellion, and humility of pride than to accuse Jesus Christ of sedition. But ordinarily, we only look for pretexts, and human blindness often prefers the voice of calumny to that of truth.

Principle 34: We must consider the consequences of vice and virtue.

We depart from virtue when we only consider the difficulties that accompany it, and we attach ourselves to vice when we only think of the pleasures that it affords us. But a Christian must add other considerations.

Virtue is the image of God, and vice is the fruit of the suggestions of Satan. Virtue fills the soul with tranquility by attracting the love of men, but a wicked man is agitated with remorse and hated by men and God.

But above all, a good man awaits the glory of heaven and will possess it. A wicked man fears in turmoil the pain of an eternal fire that God designates for those who are filled with vice. Who could not judge which one we should choose, if we take into account these considerations?

Principle 35: We must study our faults in order to correct them.

Religion calls us to the study of perfection. It sets before us God Himself and Jesus Christ as our model. It gives us thousands upon thousands of incentives to motivate us to this study. It causes us to understand that our happiness consists in this perfection. How can we desire it so little?

We read, speak, write, listen, and make speeches about morals. We speak of the passions and their remedies, and we remain in the same state, always having the same vices and the same inclinations. That is because we hardly labor at all to understand our hearts.

We will never correct ourselves, if we do not know our faults, and we cannot know them if we are not careful to study them. Our heart that studies the faults of others in order to rebuke them when there is an occasion, must study itself in order to correct its own faults. Otherwise, it is impossible to come to perfection.

Principle 36: We must not defend our faults by example or custom.

Although Christianity does not make us leave society, its first goal is to make us understand that the world is engaged in crime and licentiousness, and that we should not imitate its corruption.

The people of the world find their joy in actions that offend God. They provoke one another by their examples to violate His law without remorse or restraint. But we have renounced their principles in order to follow the law of God.

What folly is it, therefore, to put forth for our justification the example of the worldly and the customs that reign in this age? Do we really think that they can prescribe actions by their examples and customs contrary to the authority of God?

Principle 37: We must avoid falling back into sin.

It is a great misery to condemn our repentance and to enter again into a fault from which God has pulled back from us by His grace. Do we want to attract the final punishment by such an injurious rejection of the blessings of God and His salvation?

Let us preserve, then, in our heart a true grief at having offended God. Let us fear the occasions that have made us in the past fall into sin. Let us practice with care the remedies that God furnishes us to advance and assure our healing!

Is the health of the soul of less importance than that of the body? Are the eternal punishments that God will make those who have followed their passions suffer incapable of working in us a saving fear?

Principle 38: We must not abuse the patience of God.

Our corruption is strange. The patience of God invites us to repentance and instead serves to affirm us in our evil conduct. The more He makes us feel His clemency, the more we show Him our rebellion.

However, we cannot ignore the fact that His patience has limits, and that the end of clemency is the beginning of an inexorable severity. We amass a treasury of anger when we do not respond to the sweet invitations of God.

If we think about God's patience with us while we were disobeying Him, let us guard ourselves carefully from concluding that we can abuse it in the future. Irritated patience changes into wrath.

Principle 39: We must not be ashamed of piety.

The most terrible temptation that we encounter is to see the people of our age treat the fear of God as superstition and devotion as bigotry. They try to persuade us that only base people are capable of committing themselves to it.

If the worldly people had a heaven in order to recompense the approval they demand for their views as well as a hell to avenge the rejection of their principles, it would be good to listen to them on this point and spare ourselves their mocking when we do our duty.

But what are we thinking? The attention that we give to them is fatal for us. It is either folly or madness when we are not ashamed to imitate them in their crime and when we are embarrassed when we do not do things their way and instead do our duty.

Principle 40: A sluggish piety is a fatal condition.

What can we say about such sluggishness in our piety? Is God not worth being excited about and served with zeal? And does this sluggish piety give us any consolation?

Sluggish piety is eating at the table of Jesus and attending His service but burying the talents that He has committed to us. It is to fall into laziness and indifference. Is this not to reject His grace and obligate God to deprive us of it?

No, no! If God seems to bear with those who are cold, having received no impression of His grace, He cannot tolerate the lukewarm. The indifference that they have toward Him moves Him to aversion. The one who is truly alive should consider indifference and half-heartedness as treason.

Principle 41: We must persevere in the study of piety.

Judas would have been saved if it was only necessary to have an illustrious beginning in piety. We must continue to the end. "He who continues to the end will be saved." Without this perseverance, there is no grace, glory, or salvation.

Let us persevere in the worship of God not only in the times of prosperity or when there is no opportunity to pursue our passions, or when our heart does not find anything in our duty which shocks the fondness that we have for something.

Let us commit ourselves to godliness with fidelity and with constancy. It would be better for the damned to have never entered into the way of righteousness than to depart from it after having walked in it for some time.

Principle 42: We must continually meditate on Holy Scripture.

In prayer, we speak to God. In Scripture, God speaks to us. Do we think that God must listen to us when we speak to Him, if we neglect to listen and meditate with care when he speaks to us concerning His rights over us and our duties toward Him?

Scripture contains the most important truths that can know, the wisest principles that we can follow in our conduct, the greatest promises that we can imagine, and yet we neglect to devote ourselves to reading it!

What? If someone took away our freedom to read the Bible, wouldn't we regard this prohibition as the greatest of our miseries? But when God commands us to meditate on it day and night, we will we commit the injustice of not reading it to acquire knowledge and of being ignorant of its most important lessons.

Principle 43: We must diligently devote ourselves to prayer.

We cannot live well when we do not pray well; and there is no happiness, if we do not live well. A holy life is one which pleases God. Ardent prayers obtain the blessings of His love.

Prayer is the easiest of our duties because necessity teaches it to us. It is also the most noble of our duties because it causes us to communicate familiarly with God. But it's also the happiest duty because it opens the treasures of heaven and attracts all its blessings.

If we were prohibited from practicing it, we would regard such a prohibition as tyrannical because it so detrimental to our happiness and glory. How, then, in light of such a consideration, can we consider the duty of prayer as a burdensome one?

Principle 44: We must always hold before our eyes the holiness of our baptism.

It is the mark of our entrance into the covenant of God. God offers us in it the remission of our sins, the working of His grace, and the hope of glory. We have promised to Him in it that we will renounce sin, submit to His laws, and be faithful to Him until death.

Is it right for God to remember His promises, if we forget those that we have made to Him in this noble sacrament? Doesn't this forgetfulness imply rejection and unfaithfulness, or even more, rebellion?

Therefore, let us always have before our eyes the promises as well as the hopes, the duties as well as the grace that God sets forth in it. Let us keep in mind our commitments to live according to the rules of Christianity, as well as the glory that God has promised to Christians.

Principle 45: We must remember the promises that we have made to God in the Lord's Supper.

Since our infancy, we have been committed to the service of God. We were made to choose before we knew the advantages of it. But we solemnly choose the service of God on our own when we present ourselves at the sacrament of the Eucharist.

It only makes sense that we would not do something as important as that without thinking seriously on the duties that it imposes upon us. It would be better to never commune than to commune without preparation and without result.

The Eucharist speaks to us of the expiation of our crimes as well as their horror, of the indescribable love of God and of the thankfulness and devotion that we ought to have to Jesus Christ. To participate in the sacrament without weeping over our sins and departing from them, without loving Jesus Christ and consecrating ourselves to Him is to partake unto our condemnation.

Principle 46: We must prefer love above everything else.

There is nothing more precious in the sight of God than love. He became man in order to prescribe the duty of love more efficaciously, and He suffered death in order to give us an example of it.

He begins the calling of His disciple by calling two brothers. Why would He do this, other than to emphasize that he wanted brotherly love to unite all His disciples and that concord would be the distinctive characteristic of Christianity?

What can we justly prefer to the preservation of love? What should we not do? What should we not suffer? What efforts should we not make rather than violate the law of love?

Principle 47: We must meet the needs of those who are in misery.

This person in misery is our blood. He is our brother. God formed Him. Jesus Christ redeemed Him. With what care must we consider our liberality: Jesus Christ must reward us for it eternally.

The misery of our brothers should recommend them to us all the more, but if that is too small a motivation for our compassion, may the view of the fruits of charity and the example of Jesus Christ make us active in such a happy and just duty.

Will it be necessary for money that is unjustly kept to serve as an accusation against us? Jesus Christ has told us that He will consider good done to those in need as done unto Him, and we do not run to help them! Is this to love salvation and life?

Principle 48: We must have gentleness when we rebuke our neighbors.

God tells us that one of the most significant effects of love is rebuking one's neighbor when he sins. We cannot truly love him, if we do not want to pull him away from the road that leads to death. This charge makes us even more active in acquitting ourselves of our own duty.

But if it is permitted to use either gentleness or severity in our words in accord with what would be most useful to our neighbor, a sincere gentleness must always reign in our hearts. These are the interests of God that we defend against our neighbor, and God is clemency itself.

Let us rebuke him with tenderness. If we rebuke him with firmness, may it never appear with bitterness or violence in our speech. Since love causes us to act, let us persuade him by our manners that it is love and not an intention to insult him by rebuking him that makes us speak.

Principle 49: We must prefer action to knowledge and talk.

We must meditate on the law of God with devotion and labor to instruct ourselves in it deeply. We must acquire the knowledge of the mysteries of heaven. With that in view, we must apply ourselves to reading and meditation.

It is our duty to edify our neighbor by good discourse and instruct him in piety. What joy to be able to make him partake in our light! We also increase our knowledge when we take care to communicate it to someone else, and we have the honor of being used by God to advance the salvation of His children.

But after all that, what fruit do we think we can pull from knowledge and good speech, if we do not produce the acts of the spiritual life? What horror to be enlightened and speak like the angels and then live as the demons! Knowledge separated from a good conscience only makes us guiltier.

Principle 50: We must give the grace of God all the glory for our godliness and piety.

Only the devil can bring us to attribute to ourselves something in the work of our salvation. We are born in crime, live in crime, and die in crime, unless God stretches forth His hand.

Our calling to faith is the work of His grace. Our conversion is the work of His Spirit who has overcome our resistance. Our perseverance is the effect of this same Holy Spirit. The beginning, the middle, and the end of our salvation all come from Him.

Let us admit the truth. If we can only attribute misery, corruption, love of crime and resistance to the law of God to ourselves, we must regard God as the unique author of our regeneration and give Him all glory for it.