

The Right Use of Scripture

A Survey of the Works of William Tyndale Regarding the Authority and Interpretation of Scripture, with Application to the Worship and Service of God†

By Kevin B. Reed

In 1522, the English Bible scholar William Tyndale (c.1494–1536) left university life and went to Gloucestershire, where he became the instructor of the children of Sir John Walsh. During his residence there, Tyndale often engaged in conversations and debates with local clergymen. On one occasion, a cleric said to him. “We were better be without God’s law than the pope’s.” Tyndale responded, “I defy the pope and all his laws,” adding, “If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plow shall know more of the scripture than thou dost.”¹ This exclamation is frequently quoted in order to introduce Tyndale’s work as a translator, but without, perhaps, grasping the full force of the statement. To *know* scripture is not simply to possess a copy of the Bible, or become familiar with the stories of the Bible; to know scripture is to understand, believe, and apply the word of God.²

William Tyndale labored not merely to provide Englishmen with access to the scripture in their native tongue (as important as that was). He also pressed readers to make the “right use” of scripture. As he sent forth his translations of the Bible, he also produced a steady stream of expositions, seeking to remove the corrupt misconstructions of the papists. Moreover, Tyndale continually urged readers to embrace the message of the scriptures, for the salvation of their souls, to worship the Lord properly, and to serve God and the brethren with love as required in the word.

In order to obtain a better understanding of Tyndale’s enlarged vision, concerning the right use of scripture, we will survey his writings, stressing his consistent appeal to the exclusive authority and sufficiency of scripture (*sola scriptura*), his exhortations for correct biblical interpretation (hermeneutics), and his exhortations from the word to believers regarding the worship and service of God.

THE COLOGNE FRAGMENT (1525)

Tyndale’s first attempt to publish a translation of the New Testament in English was interrupted in 1524, when the printing house was raided. An initial portion of the text, through the first verses of Matthew 22, escaped destruction and found its way into circulation.³ The text of this publication opens with a Prologue designed to provide both a warrant for the translation, as well as instruct readers in key concepts of the law and the gospel, stressing the need to understand biblical terminology as it is derived from the scriptures, rather than accepting the glosses imposed on the text by the papists. Readers must not bring outside definitions to the terms found in the Bible, but be governed by the scriptural use of the words, particularly by comparing various passages of scripture with each other. This commitment to derive the meaning of terms from their scriptural use is a

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†Regarding the extensive citations from Tyndale’s works, see the note at the end of the article.

1. J. F. Mozley, *William Tyndale* (London: SPCK, 1937), pp. 22–36.

2. Tyndale repeatedly warned against spurious types of faith, such as a *story* faith, or *historic* faith, in contrast to genuine (saving) faith. This distinction is apparent in some citations below; but a more complete study on Tyndale, with regard to saving faith, would complement the consideration of his hermeneutics, because the two concepts are interrelated. Belief in the scriptures—embracing the promises therein—and delighting in obedience to God’s commandments are substantially different from a *story* faith, where men are merely curious, or entertained by the biblical narratives.

3. Alfred W. Pollard, *The Beginning of the New Testament Translated by William Tyndale 1525. Facsimile of the Unique Fragment of the Uncompleted Cologne Edition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926),

hallmark of Tyndale's theology from his earliest days as a translator and expositor of the word of God.

In the Cologne Prologue, Tyndale draws upon Luther's Preface to the New Testament (1522), both translating and modifying Luther's remarks.⁴ The use of selections from Luther's works continues, in various degrees, in Tyndale's theological writings that follow: *The Compendious Introduction to the Epistle to the Romans* (1526), and *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon* (1528). Where Tyndale finds Luther useful in explaining the common faith, he draws upon the German reformer. Beyond that, however, Tyndale freely modifies the exposition, or expands upon it, in order to suit his immediate purpose.

Because the Cologne Prologue was subsequently refined and issued as a separate publication, *A Path Way into the Holy Scripture* (1530), the contents are considered further under that heading.

THE NEW TESTAMENT (1526)

Tyndale's first complete New Testament was published in a pocket-sized blackletter edition, printed in Worms, in 1526. With the exception of a three-page epilogue "To the Reader" (followed by an errata list), this is a text-only edition of scripture. The brevity of the epilogue allows Tyndale only enough space to mention matters of preeminent importance. Here the translator urges readers to adhere to sound principles of scriptural interpretation.

4. For a description of how Tyndale adapted Luther for the Prologue and marginal notes, see the chapter, "Cologne, 1525," in David Daniell, *William Tyndale* (Yale, 1994), pp. 108–133. Nevertheless, it should be noted that, in spite of areas where Tyndale agreed with Luther, he was not simply "following" Luther; nor should he be regarded as "Lutheran" by typical categorization. Ralph Werrell argues in favor of Tyndale's independence of thought from Luther from the outset: "If we examine the *Cologne Fragment* of 1525 we find that Tyndale's theology in his earliest writing was fully Reformed, and this appears to be true for all his other writings" (*The Roots of William Tyndale's Theology* [Cambridge: James Clarke, & Co., 2013]), p. 50.

5. Epilogue "To the Reader," in *The New Testament Translated by William Tyndale* (W.R. Cooper, ed.; London: British Library, 2000), p. 553; all citations from this source reflect modernized spelling by the present writer. Cf. "Tyndale's Epistle to the Reader" (1526), in *Works*, 1.389. In other places, Tyndale specifically criticizes those who read the narratives in the Bible like they do the tales of Robin Hood; and he ridicules the philosophical meanderings of the medieval schoolmen. Thus, a reverent approach to scripture here stands in stark contrast to the cavalier or speculative treatment of those who read without a single eye toward spiritual health.

6. Epilogue "To the Reader," 553; cf. Tyndale's *Works*, 1.389.

7. Epilogue "To the Reader," 553; cf. Tyndale's *Works*, 1.389.

8. Epilogue "To the Reader," 554; cf. Tyndale's *Works*, 1.389–390.

Readers of scripture must come with "a pure mind" and "a single eye, unto the words of health, and of eternal life...." The Bible is not a book of tales for entertainment; nor is it a source-book for philosophical speculation; rather, the scriptures bring "the words of health, and of eternal life: by the which (if we repent and believe them) we are born anew, created afresh, and enjoy the fruits of the blood of Christ...."⁵

Tyndale instructs readers to "Mark the plain and manifest places of the scriptures," and not to draw any contrary interpretations from "doubtful places" (that is, difficult or obscure passages). All interpretation must "be conformable and agreeing to the faith."⁶

The translator further explains the need to distinguish between the law and the gospel, exhorting readers to "Repent and believe the gospel."⁷ He explains that the law demands delightful obedience from within the desires of the heart, not merely external compliance, thus exposing the inability of sinners to meet the demands of the law. Therefore,

Apply the gospel, that is to say the promises, unto the deserving of Christ, and to the mercy of God and his truth, and so shalt thou not despair: but shall feel God as a kind and merciful father. And his Spirit shall dwell in thee, and shall be strong in thee: and the promises shall be given thee at the last ... and all threatenings shall be forgiven thee for Christ's blood's sake, to whom commit thyself altogether, without respect, either of thy good deeds or of thy bad."⁸

From just this brief epilogue, it is clear that Tyndale does not perceive his translational work as an end in itself, or as a means to academic prestige. Rather, his purpose in translating is to supply readers with the word of life in their own language, and to teach them how to make *right use of the scripture* for the good of their souls. From this perspective, Tyndale's labours are preeminently evangelistic and pastoral: to lead readers to a proper understanding and application of the gospel, for personal salvation and genuine obedience to the Lord.

A COMPENDIOUS INTRODUCTION UNTO THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS (1528)

In 1528, Tyndale also published *A Compendious Introduction unto the Epistle to the Romans*. This work may be seen as a companion piece to his New Testament translation. Nevertheless, readers without a copy of the New Testament could still profit from the work as an independent summary of the gospel, for

the *Compendious Introduction* is filled with biblical citations.

Drawing upon Luther's Preface to the New Testament (1522), Tyndale produces an exposition nearly double the size of Luther. Other writers have provided a more detailed analysis of Tyndale's use of Luther; but such analysis is largely irrelevant to our present purpose.⁹ Tyndale includes neither Luther's name nor his own with the final product (an understandable strategy since both authors were widely condemned in England, the target market), as his main concern was simply to emphasize the teaching of scripture.

In the *Compendious Introduction*, Tyndale provides biblical definitions for key terms, and illustrates proper principles of hermeneutics, using scripture to interpret itself. This method is vastly different from the interpretive gymnastics employed by clerics and academics of the time. Tyndale does not rely on the linguistic musings of philosophers for definitions; nor does he seek support from church fathers; nor is he content with common meanings for terms as they are sometimes used in everyday life. Rather, with Luther, Tyndale looks to the scriptures to define key terms in the Bible. "First we must mark diligently the manner of speaking of the apostle, and above all things know what Paul meaneth by these words, the law, sin, grace, faith, righteousness, flesh, spirit and such like, or else read thou it never so oft, thou shalt but lose thy labour."¹⁰

9. There is a brief description of Tyndale's methodology in David Daniell, *William Tyndale: A Biography* (New Haven: Yale, 1994), pp. 149–150. Tyndale also utilizes a previous, expanded Latin translation of Luther's preface, published in 1524, by Justus Jonas, *Praefatio methodica totius scripturae in epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*, Argentoratum, 1523. For an analysis of Tyndale's methodology, see Anthea Hume, *A Study of the Writings of the English Protestant Exiles 1525–1535 (excluding their biblical translations)*; unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1961, pp. 41–54. Regarding portions where Tyndale does not follow Luther, see, Ralph Werrell, "Tyndale's Disagreement with Luther in the Prologue to the Epistle to the Romans," *Reformation and Renaissance Review*, vol. 7 (2005), pp. 57–68. Further, in *The Roots of Tyndale's Theology* (Cambridge, 2013), Werrell provides a general analysis of Tyndale's writings, in comparison with various Continental Reformers, with respect to salvation, considering soteriology more widely than justification by faith alone. Werrell asserts: "The differences between Tyndale and Luther's perspectives on salvation are so great that it seems unlikely that Tyndale drew from Luther's theology. Although Tyndale used Luther's writings, as a base for some of his earliest works, the alterations he made to them removed any specific Lutheran doctrines from them" (p. 125). Carl Trueman provides a less stark, but pointed assessment, when he writes: "Tyndale develops his thought in a way which reveals significant differences in emphasis from that of Luther." *Luther's Legacy: Salvation and English Reformers 1525–1556* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994). Regarding soteriology, Trueman observes that Tyndale's emphasis is more upon the nature and effects of regeneration (sanctification) than upon the forensic

The point could not be clearer: if the terms are not defined correctly, the reading is without profit. For added emphasis, the next twelve pages (in the original blackletter text) provide word studies, explaining and expounding the meanings of these crucial terms according to their scriptural usage.

Following the initial word studies, the treatment moves more specifically to the book of Romans, with chapter-by-chapter summaries of the apostle's epistle, and additional exposition from other passages of scripture, to reinforce the main themes of the epistle. Thus, using scripture to interpret scripture, Tyndale rehearses the principal doctrines of the faith. From Romans, justification by faith alone is a preeminent topic. There is also a solid emphasis upon the nature of faith, good works (as the fruit of the Spirit) that inevitably accompany faith (faith itself being a prior gift of God),¹¹ and the duties of believers to mortify sin in their lives.

THE PARABLE OF THE WICKED MAMMON (1528)

Tyndale's next publication is *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon* (1528), a reference to Luke 16:1–13; this passage is also known as the parable of the unjust steward. Again, Tyndale employs material from Luther, but Tyndale's treatment is about six times the size of Luther's previous sermon on the subject.¹²

aspects of justification. For a further discussion on differences between Tyndale and Luther respecting soteriology, see Donald Dean Smeeton, "Salvation: God's Ways and Works," chapter 5 of *Lollard Themes in the Reformation Theology of William Tyndale* (Kirksville, Missouri: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1986).

10. The text is reproduced here from the modern-spelling edition in *Tyndale's New Testament* (edited by David Daniell; New Haven: Yale, 1989), p. 207, where Tyndale incorporated the *Compendious Introduction* into his Prologue to Romans; cf. *Tyndale's Works*, 1.484. Note the lack of appeal to the church fathers or philosophers was not because Tyndale was unfamiliar with them; indeed, within his writings, he displays an ample knowledge of ancient writers. Nevertheless, when discussing biblical hermeneutics, the principle here is that the meanings of scriptural terms must be derived from their biblical usage. In the *Compendious Introduction*, Tyndale includes only a singular allusion, by way of illustration only, to a defender of Augustinian grace, Prosper of Aquitaine (a reference not found in Luther's preface) in order to criticize the proponents of justification by works. (*Tyndale's New Testament*, p. 209; cf. *Tyndale's Works*, 1.487.)

11. "For it [faith] is God's gift.... For as no man can give himself faith, so can he not take away unbelief...." (*Tyndale's New Testament*, Daniell, ed., p. 213; *Tyndale's Works*, 1.494.)

12. For a helpful discussion of this work, see David Daniell, *William Tyndale: A Biography*, 155–173, along with Daniell's outline of the structure of the book in Appendix A, pp. 385–386. Cf. Anthea Hume, *A Study of the Writings of the English Protestant Exiles 1525–35*, pp. 60–78. Martin Luther's sermon, which serves as a catalyst for

The shortened title of Tyndale's work may prove misleading to contemporary readers, since the book is not a straight-forward exposition of the parable. Instead, it is a defense of justification by faith alone, clearing misconstructions placed upon the parable, and further addressing the misuse of other passages employed by Romanists to assert justification by works. In this connection, the work has a strong hermeneutical thrust, particularly with regard to the proper interpretation of parables.

When initially published, the book lacked a regular title page, but the first page begins with a description that summarizes the contents more clearly than the truncated reference to the parable. The summary page begins, "That faith the mother of all good works justifieth us, before we can bring forth any good work...."¹³

After a brief preface by Tyndale, the body of the work begins under a heading of "The parable of the wicked mammon," followed by the text of the parable.¹⁴ Tyndale opens his comments with a plain statement of his purpose. He is writing to correct false interpretations thrust upon this parable (and other texts).

Forasmuch as with this and divers such other texts, many have enforced to draw the people from the true

Tyndale's book, is *Eyn Sermon von dem vnrechten Mammon. Lu. xvi.* (Wittemberg, 1522); it can be accessed online: <https://dspace.ut.ee/handle/10062/33811?show=full>; retrieved 8 July 2021.

13. For the original text, see *That fayth the mother of all good workes iustificth us before we ca[n] bringe forth anye good worke....* (Antwerp, 1528). The full title page, in modern spelling, reads: *That faith the mother of all good works justifieth us, before we can bring forth any good work: as the husband marrieth his wife before he can have any lawful children by her. Furthermore as the husband marrieth not his wife, that she should continue unfruitful as before, and as she was in the state of virginity (wherein it was impossible for her to bear fruit) but contrariwise to make her fruitful: even so faith justifieth us not, that is to say, marrieth us not to God, that we should continue unfruitful as before, but that he should put the seed of his holy spirit in us (as saint John in his first epistle calleth it) and to make us fruitful. For saith Paul Ephes.2 By grace are ye made safe through faith, and that not of your selves: for it is the gift of God and cometh not of the works, lest any man should boast himself. For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesu unto good works, which God hath ordained that we should walk in them* (David Daniell, *William Tyndale: A Biography*, pp. 156–157).

14. This heading also appears as running heads on facing pages throughout the book: "The parable of the" (left header) "wicked mammon" (right header, with folio number). This accounts for the common reference to the work under this title, rather than the lengthy description, or title, appearing on the front page, which is a more complete summary of the contents.

15. *That fayth the mother of all good works*, fol. i(r-v); emphasis added; cf. *Works*, 1.45–46.

16. The detailed discussion of the parable begins on fol. xvii(r); cf. *Works*, 1.65.

faith and from putting their trust in the truth of God's promises and in the merits and deservings of his Christ our Lord ... and have taught them to put their trust in their own merits and brought them in belief that they shall be justified in the sight of God by the goodness of their own works, and have corrupted the pure word of God.... Wherefore I have taken in hand to expound this gospel and certain other places of the new testament, and (as far forth as God shall lend me grace) to bring the scripture unto the *right sense*....¹⁵

Thus, it is worth noting that, from the outset, Tyndale is not focused narrowly upon the parable, but more extensively on "other texts" which are frequently misconstrued to advocate justification by human merit. For that reason, readers do not find a linear exposition of the parable, because the parable serves mainly as a starting-point for a larger discussion about justification.

Tyndale's hermeneutical method is to expound more difficult passages of scripture in light of clearer passages and the general teaching of scripture. For this reason, he does not immediately treat the parable or other isolated texts used by his adversaries. Rather, he spends several pages summarizing the doctrine of justification by faith alone, and a proper understanding of good works, based upon an exposition of prominent texts in Romans 3–5, Galatians 2–3, Matthew 7:17, 12:33, and Acts 15. Only after he has established the larger scriptural context of the topic does he undertake an explanation of the parable and "such other texts" employed by the advocates of justification by works. Within the parable of the unjust steward (Luke 16), the ninth verse contains the citation most subject to abuse: "And I say to you, make you friends of the wicked mammon, that when ye shall have need, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." Tyndale explains this verse in detail, but only after establishing the larger biblical framework of the parable.¹⁶

Throughout the work, Tyndale's doctrine of scripture emerges, in both his methodology and express statements. His views about the authority and sufficiency of scripture are prominent, as well as his consistent rejection of human philosophy or imagination as sources for superimposing meaning upon scripture. In contrast to the correct interpretation of the Bible, popish clerics mishandle the word to make it fit their philosophical presuppositions. They "have corrupted the pure word of God to confirm their Aristotle withal...; [T]hey rend and tear the scriptures with their distinctions and expound them violently contrary to the meaning of the text, and to the circumstances

that go before and after and to a thousand clear and evident texts.”¹⁷

The reformer adds a specific caution respecting the interpretation of parables. In dealing with the text of Luke 10 (about the Good Samaritan), he says, “Remember this is a parable, and a parable may not be expounded word by word; but the intent of the similitude must be sought out only, in the whole parable.” After explaining the lesson of the parable, he adds, “They that will interpret parables word by word fall into straits oft times, whence they cannot rid themselves. And preach lies instead of the truth.”¹⁸

Tyndale illustrates proper parabolic interpretation as he explains the story of the unjust steward:

[M]any have busied themselves in studying what or who this unrighteous steward is, because that Christ so praises him. But shortly and plainly this is the answer: That Christ praises not the unrighteous steward, neither setteth him forth to us to counterfeit [imitate] because of his unrighteousness, but because of his wisdom only in that he, with unright, so wisely provided for himself. As if I would provoke another to pray or study say[ing], The thieves watch all night to rob and steal: why canst not thou watch to pray and to study? Here praise not I the thief and murderer for their evil doing, but for their wisdom, that they so wisely and diligently wait on their unrighteousness.¹⁹

Beyond general hermeneutical principles, Tyndale also addresses the necessity of illumination by the Holy Spirit, if the reader is to understand the scriptures correctly.

The scripture speaketh many things as the world speaketh. But they may not be worldly understood, but ghostly and spiritually, yea, the Spirit of God only understandeth them, and where he is not there is not the understanding of the scripture. But unfruitful disputing and brawling about words.

... Read the second chapter of Paul to the Corinthians, the natural man understandeth not the things of God, but the Spirit of God only and we (saith he) have received the Spirit which is of God, to understand the things which are given us of God. For without the Spirit it is impossible to understand them.²⁰

Tyndale clearly establishes an inseparable link between the work of the Spirit and a true understanding of the

scriptures. This link between regeneration and hermeneutics must never be ignored.

Although this treatise is primarily focused upon justification, it contains an arresting statement regarding the spiritual nature of true worship and the outward pomp of idolatry.

Seek the word of God in all things, and without the word of God do nothing, though it appear never so glorious. Whatsoever is done without the word of God, that count idolatry. The kingdom heaven is within us, Luke 17. Wonder therefore at no monstrous shape nor at any outward thing without the word. For the world was never drawn from God, but with an outward show and glorious appearance and shining of hypocrisy and of feigned and visored fasting, praying, watching, singing, offering, sacrificing, hallowing of superstitious ceremonies and monstrous disguising.²¹

This statement demonstrates the connection between the singular authority of scripture and outward forms of worship and service. He underscores this connection in his subsequent writings.

There is one other detail that may have relevance to Tyndale’s subsequent view of the Decalogue. Expounding Paul’s statement, that “by the law cometh knowledge of sin,” Tyndale speaks of the moral law of God, in distinction from the ceremonies of the law, because

17. *That fayth the mother of all good works*, fol. i(v); cf. *Works*, 1.46. Later in the book, in a critical reflection on popish clerics, he adds: “We need not to use filthy lucre in the gospel, to chop and change and to play the taverners, altering the word of God, as they do their wines to their most advantage, and to fashion God’s word after every man’s mouth, or to abuse the name of Christ to obtain thereby authority and power to feed our slow bellies.... Man’s imagination can make the commandment of God neither greater nor smaller neither can to the law of God either add or [di]minish.” (fo. xxxix(v); xl(r); cf. *Works*, 1.96.)

18. *That fayth the mother of all good works*, fols. xxxi(v), xxxii(r); cf. *Works*, 1.84.

19. *That fayth the mother of all good works*, fol. xx(r); cf. Tyndale’s *Works*, 1.70.

20. *That fayth the mother of all good works*, fol. xxxiii(r-v); cf. *Works*, 1.88. Tyndale returns to this theme repeatedly in his writings, asserting the Spirit’s work of illumination in God’s elect. He speaks of the necessity of regeneration, citing the Lord’s words to Nicodemus: “that which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit as who should say, He that hath the Spirit through faith and is born again and made anew in Christ, understandeth the things of the Spirit and what he that is spiritual meaneth. But he that is flesh and as Paul saith, 1 Cor. 2, a natural man and led of his blind reason only, can never ascend to the capacity of the Spirit. (*That fayth the mother of all good works*, fol. li(r); cf. *Works*, 1.111.)

21. *That fayth the mother of all good works*, fol. xlv(r); cf. *Works*, 1.103.

the ceremonies “were given to reconcile the people to God again after they had sinned.” Explaining further, in reference to the law, he says, “These commandments also (Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not lust, desire, or wish after they neighbour’s wife, servant, maid, ox, or ass, or whatsoever pertaineth unto thy neighbour) give me not power so to do, but utter the poison that is in me, and damn me...” In speaking of *commandments* (plural) concerning the prohibition against covetousness, he seems to be following the medieval division of the law, that was also retained by Luther. If that is his paradigm here, it soon changed, after he became more familiar with the Hebrew text of the Pentateuch.²²

THE OBEDIENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN MAN (1528)

Tyndale’s next work, commonly referenced by its shortened title, *The Obedience of the Christian Man*, treats various aspects of authority pertaining to a man’s relationships with others: obedience to God, obedience to civil authority, obedience and respect due to masters and parents within family life. Such topics are treated methodically and succinctly. Nevertheless, if we focus narrowly upon this element of piety, we fail to perceive the larger scope of the work.

The full title of the book is more indicative of its design a whole: *The obedience of the Christian man and how Christian rulers ought to govern, wherein also (if*

*thou mark diligently) thou shalt find eyes to perceive the crafty conveyance of all jugglers.*²³ The term *conveyance* carries the older connotation of thievery through sleight of hand, and the extended title reveals additional themes of critical importance in the English reformer’s thought.²⁴

Tyndale is keen to establish the authority of kings (and civil authority in general). To rule justly, kings and civil officers must not be subservient to the pope, prelates, and other clerics who have usurped much authority that properly belongs to civil rulers. In this matter, the clerics are exceedingly *disobedient* to God, because they have seized princely authority and become entangled in the affairs of the world, to the neglect of genuine spiritual service. This is not to grant kings absolute power, since they also have defined roles, according to the word of God, as ministers of justice in the civil realm. Yet, the domination of both church and state by one party (the Papiſts) has subverted proper order—a grand form of disobedience by those who claim to be the spiritual guides of the people.²⁵

The Romish clerics are referenced as “jugglers,” an unflattering term that depicts the *misuse* of scripture by the “spirituality” (as they were styled): a misuse employed to deceive the common people and civil rulers alike. From this perspective, the clerics are both disobedient to the word of God and the chief purveyors of false religion in the land.

In the introductory section of *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, Tyndale sets forth numerous reasons why the scriptures should be available to the general population in their mother tongue. He also includes scattered comments about the proper interpretation of scripture, reinforcing the importance for the laity to know and understand the scriptures, in order to assess the lives and teachings promulgated by the contemporary clergy. Tyndale generally regards the *spirituality* as being “against-Christ,” or “Antichrist,” because they juggle the scriptures and beguile the people “with false interpretations as all the false prophets, scribes and Pharisees did in the Old Testament.”²⁶ Throughout his ongoing exposé of the clerics, Tyndale illustrates that hermeneutical issues are at the forefront of his battle against Romanism.

Indeed, in at least 20 places (either in the text or marginal notations), Tyndale employs forms of the term *juggle* (verb) or *juggler* (noun) in reference to Romish clerics. They are “shameless jugglers,” who “juggle through dumb ceremonies,” darkening the understanding of the people.

22. *That fayth the mother of all good works*, fol. v(v)—vi(r); cf. *Works*, 1.51–52.

23. Title page of *The Obedience of the Christian Man*, 1528; facsimile reprint; Menston, Yorkshire: Scolar Press, 1970; cf. Daniell, *Obedience*, p. 1.

24. For readers who desire a succinct synopsis of the book as a whole, turn first to Tyndale’s own summary at the end of the book, “A compendious rehearsal of that which goeth before” (fo. cl(v)—clxi(r); Daniell edition, pp. 180–191; *Works*, 1.331–344).

25. In his summary conclusion, Tyndale says the spirituality have “turned the obedience that should be given to God’s ordinance unto themselves”; they are “always both rebellious and disobedient to the kings” (*Obedience*, fols. clv(r), clvii(r); Daniell edition, pp. 185, 187; *Works*, 1.336, 338). Tyndale reiterates this theme elsewhere. In the preface to his *Answer to Sir Thomas More’s Dialogue*, he raises the point in the form of a question: “Have they not compelled the emperors of the earth and the great lords and high officers to be obedient unto them, to dispute for them and to be their tormentors, and the Samsumims themselves do but imagine mischief and inspire them? *An answer vnto Sir Thomas Mores dialogue made by Willyam Tindale* (1531), fol. iiiii, sig. A4(r); cf. *An Answer Vnto Sir Thomas Mores Dialogue* (edited by Anne M. O’Donnell and Jared Wicks; Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), p. 9; *Works*, 3.9, 10).

26. *The Obedience of the Christian Man*, fols. xii(r)—xv(v); cf. Daniell ed., pp. 15–19.

Antichrist with the mist of his juggling hath beguiled our eyes, and hath cast a superstitious fear upon the world of Christian men, and hath taught them to dread not God and his word, but himself and his word: not God's law and ordinances, princes and officers which God hath set to rule the world, but his own law and ordinances, traditions and ceremonies, and disguised disciples, which he hath set everywhere to deceive the world, and to expel the light of God's word, that his darkness may have room.²⁷

Note that Rome's corrupt practices of worship, not just her doctrine of salvation, are rooted in misconstructions of scripture.

In contrast to the crafty conveyance of ecclesiastical jugglers, Tyndale asserts the self-interpreting nature of scripture:

Let God's word try every man's doctrine and whomsoever God's word proveth unclean let him be taken for a leper. One scripture will help to declare another. And the circumstances, that is to say, the places that go before and after, will give light unto the middle text. And the open and manifest scriptures will ever improve the false and wrong exposition of the darker sentences.²⁸

Seeking to promote a proper understanding of scripture, Tyndale confronted a number of practical problems. Most Englishmen did not have access to the Bible in their own language; and even if some understood Latin (the official ecclesiastical tongue), the laity were given only small portions of scripture in the liturgy, with the readings removed from the larger context of scripture as a whole. Beyond that, the Bible was veiled by the interpretive methods of the medieval schoolmen, who asserted a four-fold meaning of scripture.

The four-fold meaning of scripture was the primary interpretive method by which the Romanists obscured the meaning of the scripture, imposing on the text multiple layers of meaning, rather than looking for a plain exposition of the passage. In a lengthy section, Tyndale treats this linguistic subterfuge under the heading of "The four senses of scripture." He opens his critique with a pointed assessment.

They divide the scripture into four senses, the literal, tropological, allegorical, and anagogical. The literal sense is become nothing at all. For the pope hath taken it clean away and hath made it his possessions. He hath partly locked it up with the false and counterfeited keys of his traditions, ceremonies and feigned lies. And partly

driveth men from it with violence of sword. For no man dare abide by the literal sense of the text, but under a protestation, if it shall please the pope.²⁹

When Tyndale speaks of the *literal* meaning of scripture, he is not advocating a bald literalism that ignores symbols and ordinary figures of speech; as an expert linguist, he avoids that trap. Rather, he advocates a natural reading of the text, to prevent readers from being carried away by convoluted interpretations that have no basis in the structure of the text. The proper interpretation of figurative language in the Bible is *the literal interpretation*, but to impose a fanciful meaning or allegory upon an ordinary text is a *gloss*—an unwarranted imposition that distorts the scripture.

Likewise, Tyndale rejects the notion of multiple meanings, hidden in the text, to be unlocked with scholastic gymnastics. He asserts the singular meaning of scripture. As he explains, "Thou shalt understand therefore that the scripture hath but one sense which is the literal sense. And that literal sense is the root and ground of all, and the anchor that never faileth whereunto if thou cleave thou canst never err or go out of the way. And if thou leave the literal sense, thou canst but go out of the way."³⁰

Again, when Tyndale defends the "literal sense" of scripture, he is not advocating a forced literalism that ignores figurative speech; he acknowledges figurative

27. *Obedience*, fols. xl(v), clx(r), lxvii(r); Daniell ed., pp. 50, 190, 82; cf. *Works*, 1.190, 342, 224. For other uses of the juggling terminology, see fols. xii(v), xiiii(v), xxvii(r), xxxviii(r), xli(v), lvi(v), lxii(r), twice), lxxv(v), lxxvi(v), cxix(r), clv(r), clviii(r), twice), clxx(r); Daniell ed., pp. 15, 17, 34, 47, 51, 69, 75, 76, 79, 80, 143, 185, 188, 189; *Works*, 1.145, 147, 171, 186, 191, 215 (twice), 221, 223, 291, 336, 339, 340, 341. Indeed, Tyndale uses this terminology frequently throughout his writings. For example, in his work, *The Practyse of Prelates* (1530), he uses the noun form once, and the verb form eight times in his description of the prelates: sigs. Ai(v), Eii(r), Eiiii(v), Fii(r), Fiiii(v), Hi(v), Hv(r), Hvi(r); *Works*, 2.298, 240, 283, 286, 293, 296, 314, 320, 321. He continues to use this terminology throughout his biblical expositions, when exposing Romish glosses of scripture.

28. *Obedience*, fols. lxxxvi(v)–lxxxvii(r); Daniell ed., pp. 105–106; *Works*, 1.250. Tyndale adds a marginal note at this point, "The right way to understand the scripture."

29. *Obedience*, fol. cxxix(r-v); Daniell ed., pp. 156ff; *Works*, 1.303. See Daniell's comment in *William Tyndale: A Biography*, p. 395, footnote 41.

30. *Obedience*, fol. cxxix(r); Daniell ed., p. 156; cf. *Works*, 1.304. In the conclusion of *Obedience*, Tyndale reiterates his point regarding the singular meaning of scripture, speaking of "the four senses of the scripture of which three are no sense" (fol. clx (v); Daniell ed., p. 190; cf. *Works*, 1.343). In the mid-17th century, the singular nature of scripture was clearly proclaimed in the Westminster Confession (1:9)—the "sense of any scripture, (which is not manifold but one)"—but in Tyndale's day, this basic principle of hermeneutics was not widely understood.

expressions as elements common to all languages. Nevertheless, readers must seek the singular meaning of such figurative elements: “the scripture useth proverbs, similitudes, riddles or allegories as all other speeches do, but that which the proverb, similitude, riddle or allegory signifieth is ever the literal sense which thou must seek out diligently.”

He provides illustrations from common expressions in English. The saying, “Look ere thou leap” (in contemporary parlance, “Look before you leap”), is a caution to “do nothing suddenly or without advertisement.” The latter is the literal meaning of the statement, even though it is couched in figurative terms. Similarly, common tales, such as Aesop’s fables, present lessons through stories, and the proper interpretation of them is “the literal sense.”³¹

For biblical examples of figurative speech, Tyndale includes metaphors of Christ as the lamb or the vine.

So when I say, Christ is a lamb, I mean not a lamb that beareth wool, but a meek and a patient lamb which is beaten for other men’s faults. Christ is a vine, not that bears grapes: but out of whose root the branches that believe, suck the spirit of life and mercy and grace and power to be the sons of God and to do his will. The similitudes of the gospel are allegories borrowed of worldly matters, to express spiritual things.³²

Once the literal sense of scripture is determined, from “the process of the text or by a like text of another place,” an expositor may derive additional illustrations and applications from the text to elucidate the literal meaning.³³ Tyndale refers to such illustrations as *allegories* and *similitudes*.

Here Tyndale describes an acceptable practice routinely employed by biblical expositors. After first establishing a doctrine from sound exegesis of the text, a preacher may add a biblical illustration (or, perhaps, a story from everyday life), in order to make the basic concept clearer or more memorable. Nevertheless, a doctrine cannot be proven by the illustration, but only by the initial exegesis of the original text.³⁴

31. *Obedience*, fol. cxxx(r, v); Daniell ed., pp. 156–157; cf. *Works*, 1.304.

32. *Obedience*, fol. cxxx(v)–cxxx(i)(r); Daniell ed., p. 157; cf. *Works*, 1.305.

33. *Obedience*, fol. cxxx(i)(r); Daniell ed., p. 158; cf. *Works*, 1.305.

34. *Obedience*, fol. cxxx(ii)(r); Daniell ed., pp. 158–159; cf. *Works*, 1.306.

35. *Obedience*, fols. cxxx(ii)(v), cxxx(vii)(r); Daniell ed., pp. 159, 165; cf. *Works*, 1.307, 312.

36. *Obedience*, fols. cxii(r)–cxii(v); Daniell ed., p. 169; *Works*, 1.317.

Tyndale reiterates his point, “because that allegories prove nothing, therefore are they to be used soberly and seldom and only where the text offereth thee an allegory.” And again, “That preacher therefore that bringeth a naked similitude to prove that which is contained in no text of scripture nor followeth of a text, count a deceiver, a leader out of the way and a false prophet, and beware of his philosophy and persuasions of man’s wisdom as Paul everywhere warneth thee.”³⁵

Tyndale’s vehemence against unwarranted allegorizing was integral to his critique of popish methods. “The greatest cause of which captivity and the decay of the faith and this blindness wherein we now are, sprang first of allegories.” He traces the faulty (allegorical) hermeneutical method back to Origin, stating that others, in the ensuing centuries, “followed so long, till at the last they forgot the order and process of the text, supposing that the scripture served but to feign allegories upon.” Tyndale laments the resulting confusion in which “twenty doctors expound one text twenty ways.”

In another place, he summarizes:

And as they are false prophets which prove with allegories, similitudes and worldly reasons that which is nowhere made mention of in scripture: Even so count them for false prophets which expound the scriptures drawing them unto a worldly purpose clean contrary unto the example, living, and practicing of Christ and of his apostles and of all the holy prophets. For saith Peter, 2 Peter 1, no prophecy in the scripture hath any private interpretation. For the scripture came not by the will of man: but the holy men of God speak, as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. No place of the scripture may have a private exposition, that is it may not be expounded after the will of man or after the will of the flesh or drawn unto worldly purpose contrary unto the open texts and the general articles of the faith and the whole course of the scripture contrary unto the living and practicing of Christ and the apostles and holy prophets. For as they came not by the will of man so may they not be drawn or expound[ed] after the will of man: but as they came by the Holy Ghost, so must they be expound[ed] and understood by the Holy Ghost.³⁶

This summary is a succinct statement of the *sola scriptura* principle of Protestant theology. The scriptures are inspired by God; they require the Spirit’s illumination to be understood; they must not be perverted by faulty interpretation or supplanted by extra-biblical reasoning. Moreover, proper exposition of a single text must

be governed by other clear passages in the word, and by the teaching of scriptures as a whole.

A further litmus test, regarding the right use of scripture, is the Christological focus of the word. “The scriptures spring out of God and flow unto Christ, and were given to lead us to Christ. Thou must therefore go along by the scripture as by a line, until thou come at Christ, which is the way’s end and resting-place. If any man therefore use the scripture to draw thee from Christ and to nuzzle [*nurture*] thee in anything save in Christ, the same is a false prophet.”³⁷

With general hermeneutics in place, there is also a fresh emphasis within *The Obedience of the Christian Man*, regarding the knowledge of God and practices of worship as an outworking of our understanding of scripture.

In his preface “to the Reader,” Tyndale describes the folly of man. He contrasts God’s word to man’s wisdom, and he asserts:

Man’s wisdom is plain idolatry, neither is there any other idolatry than to imagine of God after man’s wisdom. God is not man’s imagination, but only which he saith of himself. God is nothing but his law and his promises, that is to say, that which he biddeth thee do and that which he biddeth thee believe and hope. God is but his word: as Christ saith, John 8, I am that I say unto you, that is to say, that which I preach am I. My words are spirit and life. God is that only which he testifieth of himself and to imagine any other thing of God than that, is damnable idolatry.³⁸

In his treatment of miracles and saint-worship, Tyndale applies a passage from the law of Moses:

God commandeth by Moses, Deuteronomy 12, saying: What I command you that observe and do, and put nothing to, nor take ought therefrom: yea and Moses warneth straightly in an hundred places that we do that only which God commandeth and which seemeth good and righteous in his sight and not in our own sight. For nothing bringeth the wrath of God so soon and so sore on a man, as the idolatry of his own imagination.³⁹

Near the conclusion of the book, Tyndale alludes to the law of Moses (cf. Deut. 12), in an exhortation that recognizes the sufficiency and exclusive authority of scripture: “Without God’s word do nothing. And to his word add nothing neither pull anything therefrom, as Moses everywhere teacheth thee. Serve God in the spirit, and thy neighbour with all outward service.” He adds a

further admonition, based upon the negative example of King Saul, 1 Sam. 13.

Serve God as he hath appointed thee and not with thy good intent and good zeal. Remember Saul was cast away of God forever for his good intent. God requireth obedience unto his word and abhorreth all good intents and good zeals which are without God’s word. For they are nothing else than plain idolatry and worshipping of false gods.⁴⁰

Tyndale includes further denunciations of idolatry in his subsequent writings; and he has particular criticisms against the plea of good intent as an excuse for adding human inventions to the worship of God. Certainly, at this point, it is clear that his views on worship and service rest upon his recognition of the sufficiency and regulative authority of scripture. Moreover, when *The Obedience of the Christian Man* was first published in 1528, Tyndale was undoubtedly working on his forthcoming translation of the Pentateuch, and his comments here anticipate a subsequent emphasis from the law wherein he applies the sufficiency of scripture to right worship and service to God.

Concerning worship, Tyndale also discusses the sacraments in *The Obedience of the Christian Man*. More details of his sacramental theology will be covered in a subsequent section on his *Brief Declaration of the Sacraments*. In the *Obedience*, however, it is helpful to note his fundamental description of a sacrament as a sign associated with a redemptive promise. The purpose of a sacrament is to draw the mind to the word, or promises of God; and thus ritual observances that ignore or

37. *Obedience*, fol. cxlii(v); Daniell ed., pp. 169–170; *Works*, 1.317–318.

38. *Obedience*, fol. xix(v); Daniell ed., p. 24; cf. *Works*, 1.160.

39. *Obedience*, fol. cxx(v); cf. *Works*, 1.292. There seems to be a typographical error in the Daniell text here (p. 145). The Daniell text has “what I command you that I observe,” but the second *I* here is not in Tyndale’s original text published in 1528, nor Tyndale’s translation of Deut. 12:28, published in 1530. Thus, the passage and should read, as above, “what I command you that observe and do...”

40. *Obedience*, fols. cxlix(v)–cli(r); Daniell ed., p. 179; cf. *Works*, 1.330. For some reason, the scripture reference is misidentified in Daniell’s endnote (*Obedience*, p. 231, note 485), giving instead a reference to Acts 9 and 13:9, covering accounts of Saul’s conversion and his later encounter with Elymas. Daniell was an extremely competent scholar, so the most likely explanation for this misidentification is some sort of typographical error, since verse 13:9, in 1 Samuel, is the specific verse where Saul commits the offense for which he later sought to excuse himself with a plea of good intent. Note also Tyndale’s statement in his synopsis of the book, “Because we be blind, God hath appointed in the scripture how we should serve him and please him” (*Obedience*, fols. cli(r)–cli(v); Daniell ed., p. 181; cf. *Works*, 1.332.).

mute the meaning of the signs (as the popish ceremonies) are corruptions of the sacraments.

This word, sacrament, is as much to say as an holy sign, and represents alway some promise of God.

Sacrament is then as much to say as an holy sign. And the sacraments which Christ ordained preach God's word unto us, and therefore justify and minister the Spirit to them that believe: as Paul through preaching the gospel was a minister of righteousness and of the Spirit unto all that believed his preaching. Dumb ceremonies are no sacraments, but superstitiousness. Christ's sacraments preach the faith of Christ as his apostles did and thereby justify. Antichrist's dumb ceremonies preach not the faith that is in Christ: as his apostles, our bishops and cardinals, do not. But as Antichrist's bishops are ordained to kill whosoever preach the true faith of Christ: so are his ceremonies ordained to quench the faith which Christ's sacraments preach. And hereby mayest thou know the difference between Christ's signs or sacraments and Antichrist's signs or ceremonies, that Christ's signs speak and Antichrist's be dumb.⁴¹

THE PENTATEUCH (1530)

Tyndale's translation of the Pentateuch is probably his most significant contribution to the recovery of the regulative principle of worship for English-speaking readers. It changes the consideration of worship, precisely because it restores the proper structure of the moral law of God as it applies to worship.

Prior to Tyndale's translation, the English church, as churches generally within Western Christendom, relied upon the Latin Vulgate as the approved version of scripture. Coupled with the Vulgate, the Decalogue was enumerated so that the first two precepts regarding worship were combined as one commandment, and the prohibition against covetousness was divided into two commandments. The net count was still *ten*

41. *Obedience*, fols. lxxxix(r), cxii(v)–cxiii(r); Daniell ed., pp. 108, 136; cf. *Works*, 1.252, 283.

42. Original edition (1530); cf. Daniell, *Tyndale's Old Testament* (Yale, 1992), p. 116.

43. Margaret Aston states that, regarding the prohibition of images in the Decalogue, there was patristic precedent for "separating it off to make a second commandment." Yet Aston notes, "[I]t is important to consider what the Lollards did *not* do. They did not reach the point—despite some suggestive hints in this direction—of making the Decalogue text into a separate second commandment" (Ashton, *Lollards and Reformers*, pp. 138, 190).

commandments, but by subsuming the second commandment as a subordinate section to the first, the effect was to neutralize the prohibition against images, along with corollary applications related to worship. Under the Romanist view, images are acceptable for didactic purposes, and as devotional aids in the service of the true God; they are only unlawful if they are employed in the service of false gods, or worshipped in themselves. This construction of the law permits a multitude religious ceremonies and devotional practices, so long as they are performed in the name of the true God.

When Tyndale began his translation of the Old Testament, he followed the original Hebrew text (not the Latin). Considering the Decalogue, he divided the commandments as they appear in the Hebrew text. In this enumeration, the first commandment (combined with the prologue), which prohibits the worship of false gods, is distinct from the second commandment, which prohibits the making or use of images (whether to serve the true God or false gods). To round out the Decalogue, the prohibition against covetousness is a single commandment.

The typographical arrangement of Exodus 20 makes the distinction clear at once:

And God spake all these words and said: I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt and out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods in my sight.

Thou shalt make thee no graven image, neither any similitude that is in heaven above, either in the earth beneath, or in the water that is beneath the earth. See that thou neither bow thyself unto them neither serve them: for I the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, and visit the sin of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me: and yet show mercy unto thousands among them that love me and keep my commandments.⁴²

In Exodus 20 of Tyndale's translation, each separate commandment begins with a new paragraph, making the enumeration of the Decalogue visible at a glance.

To contemporary English and Reformed Protestants, this division may seem routine, but it was a monumental shift in its day. Although Wycliffe and the Lollards previously spoke against the abuse of images, they did not return to the scriptural enumeration of the law.⁴³ Likewise, Lutherans (among whom Tyndale is loosely associated by historians) did not adjust the enumeration of the law, as seen in the Lutheran catechisms and

expositions of the ten commandments; and Lutherans allow the didactic and devotional use of images to the present day. To be sure, subsequent Reformed writers and Reformed catechisms restored the Hebrew enumeration of the Decalogue,⁴⁴ but Tyndale first introduced this reform to the generality of English readers, by means of his translation and subsequent expositions, thus changing the parameters of discussions about worship in England and Scotland.

Combined with his translation of the books of Moses, Tyndale includes an introduction, or prologue, to each book, stressing important matters of hermeneutics, doctrine, and worship. There are also word lists associated with various books, giving succinct definitions for terms that might not readily be understood. Additionally, he adds marginal notes and cross-reference sparsely throughout the text.

Preceding the text of Genesis, there is section “To the Reader,” in which Tyndale rehearses the opposition he faced when producing his earlier translation of the New Testament. Nevertheless, he persisted in his labors,

Because I had perceived by experience, how that it was impossible to [e]stablish the lay people in any truth, except the scripture were plainly laid before their eyes in their mother tongue, that they might see the process, order and meaning of the text: for else whatsoever truth is taught them, these enemies of all truth quench it again, partly with the smoke of the bottomless pit whereof thou readeſt, Apocalypse 9, that is, with apparent reasons of sophistry and traditions of their own making, founded without ground of scripture, and partly in jugglings with the text, expounding it in such a sense as is impossible to gather of the text, if thou see the process, order and meaning thereof.⁴⁵

Following his preface “To the Reader,” Tyndale provides “A Prologue showing the use of scripture.” Once more, Tyndale states the distinction between the law and gospel, between the commands and the promises, instructing his readers how to profit spiritually from the reading of the Bible, particularly from the early narrative portions of scripture. When Tyndale revised his translation of Genesis, in 1534, this Prologue was expanded slightly, and the original preface was omitted.

Moving to Exodus, Tyndale continues to promote principles of sound interpretation; and the second book of Moses gives him opportunity to reflect on how hermeneutics apply to the topic of worship:

Of the ceremonies, sacrifices and tabernacle with all his glory and pomp understand, that they were not permitted only, but also commanded of God to lead the people in the shadows of Moses and night of the old testament, until the light of Christ and day of the new testament were come: As children are led in the fantasies of youth, until the discretion of man’s age be come upon them. And all was done to keep them from idolatry. The tabernacle was ordained to the intent they might have a place appointed them to do their sacrifices openly in the sight of the people and namely of the priests which waited thereon: that it might be seen that they did all things according to God’s word, and not after the idolatry of their own imagination. And the costliness of the tabernacle and the beauty also pertained thereunto, that they should see nothing so beautiful among the heathen, but that they should see more beautiful and wonderful at home: because they should not be moved to follow them. And in like manner the divers fashions of the sacrifices and ceremonies was to occupy their minds that they should have no lust [*desire*] to follow the heathen; and the multitude of them was, that they should have so much to do in keeping them that they should have no leisure to imagine other[s] of their own: yea and that God’s word might be by in all that they did, that they might have their faith and trust in God, which he cannot have that either followeth his own inventions, or traditions of men’s making without God’s word.⁴⁶

In his Prologue Tyndale makes the interpretive caution, regarding the typology of the Aaronic priesthood: “And of Aaron also see that thou make no figure of Christ until he come unto his sacrificing, but an example unto all preachers of God’s word, that they add nothing unto God’s word or take ought therefrom.”⁴⁷

In connection with the Aaronic priesthood, and its

44. Calvin’s first edition of the *Institutes*, published six years later (in 1536) also reflects the Hebrew division of the Decalogue (cf. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, [Basel 1536]; translated by Ford Lewis Battles; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975, revised edition, 1986, pp. 24–25). In subsequent editions of *Institutes*, Calvin gives an explanation regarding the division of the Decalogue, before undertaking a discussion of the individual commandments. Cf. *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Geneva: 1541 edition; translated from the French by Robert White; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2014), pp. 118–120; *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559 edition; translated by Ford Lewis Battles; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1.376–379.

45. *The fyrst boke of Moses called Genesis* [1530], sigs. ii(v)–iii (r); cf. Daniell, *Tyndale’s Old Testament*, p. 4; *Works*, 1.394.

46. *The seconde boke of Moses, called Exodus*, sigs. iv(v)–fol. v(r); cf. Daniell, *Tyndale’s Old Testament*, pp. 86–87; *Works*, 1.414–415.

47. *The seconde boke of Moses, called Exodus*, sig. ii(v); cf. Daniell, *Tyndale’s Old Testament*, p. 85; *Works*, 1.412.

uniquely typological nature, Tyndale adds an exceptionally long marginal note, adjacent to the heading for the twenty-eighth chapter of Exodus.

From hence unto the book's end and throughout all the next book [*Leviticus*], thou shalt see what moved the Pope and whence he took the fashion of the garments and ornaments that are now used in the church and the manner of hallowings of the church, altar, chalice, font, bells, and so forth, and is become as it were a priest of the old law and hath brought us into captivity as it were under the ceremonies of the old law, save theirs spoke and ours be dumb.⁴⁸

Here Tyndale demonstrates that the Pope's hermeneutical distortions are the basis for Rome's corruption of both the gospel and worship. This is no casual observation; in its historical context, it is breath-taking. It is a challenge to the entire priestly apparatus and ceremonial worship of Rome, because Rome's imitation of the Aaronic priesthood represents a repudiation of the final priesthood of Christ. In short, the Mosaic ordinances were typological, foreshadowing the person and work of Christ, their true meaning being a witness to Christ; the popish ordinances, lacking divine authority, are tied to no specific promise of redemption, and indeed are "dumb" (mute), incapable of communicating truth, making them unintelligible to the common people.

Tyndale's reiterates the purpose of the Mosaic ceremonies in the opening words of his Prologue to the book of Leviticus.

The ceremonies which are described in the book following, were chiefly ordained of God, (as I said in the end of the prologue upon Exodus) to occupy the minds of that people the Israelites, and to keep them from serving of God after the imagination of their blind zeal and good intent: that their consciences might be stablished and they sure that they pleased God therein, which were impossible, if a man did of his own head that which was not commanded of God nor depended of any appointment made between him and God.⁴⁹

48. *The seconde boke of Moses, called Exodus*, fol. L(r); cf. Daniell, *Tyndale's Old Testament*, p. 126.

49. *The third boke of Moses, called Leviticus*, sig. Ai(v); cf. Daniell, *Tyndale's Old Testament*, p. 145; *Works*, 1.421.

50. *The third boke of Moses, called Leviticus*, sig. Av(v); cf. Daniell, *Tyndale's Old Testament*, p. 148 *Works*, 1.425.

51. *The third boke of Moses, called Leviticus*, sigs. Av(v)–Avi(r); cf. Daniell, *Tyndale's Old Testament*, p. 148; *Works*, 1.425–426.

52. *The third boke of Moses, called Leviticus*, sigs. Avii(v)–Aviii(r); cf. Daniell, *Tyndale's Old Testament*, pp. 149–150; *Works*, 1.427–428.

In the remainder of this Prologue, Tyndale discusses the typology of Leviticus, with warnings about the misuse of allegorical interpretation. In many ways, this section parallels his previous cautions in *The Obedience of the Christian Man*; but given that his books were underground publications, and his readers may not easily consult his other works, he repeats the substance of his hermeneutical arguments here. "We need to take heed everywhere," he warns, "that we are not beguiled with false allegories, whether they be drawn out of the new testament, or the old, either out of any other story or of the creatures of the world, but namely in this book. Here a man had need to put on all his spectacles and to arm himself against invisible spirits."⁵⁰

Readers are reminded that "allegories prove nothing." Rather, "the very use of allegories is to declare and open a text that it may be better perceived and understood."⁵¹ He then provides several examples, showing from how biblical narratives and types are used to illustrate doctrines that are first proven in a "clear text," such as a command or a promise in scripture. Therefore, when papists resort to vague allegories to justify ecclesiastical rituals, they are misusing scripture. As an example, he decries popish attempts to establish the ecclesiastical practice of confession from the laws regarding lepers.

[O]f the lepers thou canst prove nothing: thou canst never conjure out confession thence, howbeit thou hast an handsome example there to open the binding and loosing of our priests with the key of God's word. For as they made no man a leper, even so ours have no power to command any man to be in sin or to go to purgatory or hell. And therefore (inasmuch as binding and loosing is one power) as those priests healed no man, even so ours cannot of their invisible and dumb power drive any man's sins away or deliver him from hell of feigned purgatory. Howbeit if they preached God's word purely, which is the authority Christ gave them, then they should bind and loose, kill and make alive again, make unclean and clean again, and send to hell and fetch thence again, so mighty is God's word. For if they preached the law of God, they should bind the consciences of sinners with the bonds of the pains and hell and bring them to repentance. And then if they preached [to] them the mercy that is in Christ, they should loose them and quiet their raging consciences, and certify them of the favour of God and that their sins be forgiven.⁵²

Moving to the book of Numbers, Tyndale further demonstrates the legitimate uses of allegories to illustrate truths established in clear texts elsewhere in scripture.

In his Prologue to Numbers, Tyndale draws upon the historical narrative within the book to illustrate what happens when men—in this case virtually an entire generation—refuse to believe the promises of God, and seek to establish righteousness by their own efforts and devising. In his exposition, Tyndale does not rely upon the narrative portions of the text to prove the doctrine of justification, but to exemplify and reinforce the truth he has established from didactic portions of scripture, such as the earlier declarations in Genesis (regarding Abraham) and the epistles of Paul.

Tyndale applies biblical lessons about faith to the errors of the Romanists, who have refused to rest in faith upon the promises of God, but instead rely upon their invented system of worship and service, in an effort to obtain righteousness by works. He explains: “[W]hat is the cause of this unbelief? verily no sin that the world seeth, but a pope-holiness and a righteousness of their own imagination as Paul saith, Romans 10. They be ignorant of the righteousness wherewith God justifieth and have set up a righteousness of their own making through which they be disobedient unto the righteousness of God.”⁵³

Tyndale’s Prologue to Deuteronomy is very brief. At this point there is no need to repeat detailed observations made in prologues to other books of Moses, so this introduction consists mostly of a succinct chapter-by-chapter summary of the contents of the book.

Tyndale places a high value on Deuteronomy, referring to it as “the most excellent of all the books of Moses.” There is little mystery why the translator views the book so favorably, for it contains gospel themes emphasized throughout his writings as a whole. The book is “easy also and light and a very pure gospel that is to wit, a preaching of faith and love: deducing the love to God out of faith, and the love of a man’s neighbor out of the love of God.” For Tyndale, service to God is never isolated to external performance of rituals and deeds, but about a willing obedience, flowing from faith and love. He asserts that the repetition of the ten commandments in Deuteronomy is that the people “might see a cause to do them of love,” for the Lord “biddeth them remember that they were bound in Egypt and how God delivered them with a mighty hand and a stretched out arm, to serve him and to keep his commandments: as Paul saith that we are bought with Christ’s blood and therefore are his servants and not our own, and ought to seek his will and honour only and to love and serve one another for his sake.”⁵⁴

The “fountain of all commandments,” as stressed in the sixth chapter of the book, is to “believe how that

there is but one God that doeth all, and therefore ought only to be loved with all the heart, all the soul and all the might. For love only is the fulfilling of the commandments, as Paul also saith unto the Romans and Galatians likewise.”⁵⁵ The summary of man’s duty in the two great commandments, of loving God and loving one’s neighbor, is, of course, central in the teachings of Jesus, as the substance of all the law and prophets. For Tyndale, love for God and love for one’s neighbour (biblically defined) are controlling principles to understand the meaning of any particular laws or duties.

Throughout this Prologue, there is an underlying assumption, always present in Tyndale’s thought, that the only true source for knowing God and his will—making it possible to know, love, and serve him—is the word of God. The word of the Lord is here committed to writing by Moses, and given for instruction to the present and future generations. “[H]e chargeth them to put nought to nor take ought away from God’s words, but to be diligent only to keep them in remembrance and in the heart and to teach their children, for fear of forgetting. And to beware of making imagery or of bowing themselves unto images, saying: Ye saw no image when God spoke unto you, but heard a voice only and that voice keep and thereunto cleave, for it is your life and it shall save you.”⁵⁶

Marginal notes in the Decalogue reinforce this emphasis on the exclusive authority of the word, along with exhortations not to corrupt the word or worship through additions, subtractions or false exposition of the scriptures. Adjacent to Exodus 15:25–26, a note reads: “We must do that which is right in God’s sight and as his word teacheth us and not asir our own imagination.”

Regarding the judgment of God on Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:1–2), Tyndale notes, “Hereof ye see the fruit of a man’s good intent without God’s word. As we may do no less, so doth this example teach that we may do no more than is commanded.” At the end of Numbers 15, he says, “God’s signs were to put men in remembrance of his word, that they should not seek a way to please God after their own imagination.”

53. *The fourthe boke of Moses called Numbers* (1530), sig. Aiii(v); cf. *Tyndale’s Old Testament*, p. 192; *Works*, 1.431.

54. *A Prologue in to the fyfte boke of Moses, called Deuteronomy* (1530), sigs. Ai(v)–Aii(v); cf. *Tyndale’s Old Testament*, pp. 254–255; *Works*, 1.441–442.

55. *A Prologue in to the fyfte boke of Moses, called Deuteronomy* (1530), sig. Aii(v); cf. *Tyndale’s Old Testament*, p. 255; *Works*, 1.442.

56. *A Prologue in to the fyfte boke of Moses, called Deuteronomy* (1530), sig. Aii(r); cf. *Tyndale’s Old Testament*, p. 254 *Works*, 1.441–442. (Fol. XVI(v); cf. *Tyndale’s Old Testament*, p. 262.)

The text of Deuteronomy 4:2 is rendered, “Ye shall put nothing unto the word which I command you neither do ought therefrom.” In a marginal note, Tyndale applies this verse to the interpretive tactics of the schoolmen: “No: nor yet corrupt it with false glosses to confirm Aristotle: but rebuke Aristotle’s false learning therewith.”⁵⁷ A few verses later, the text reads, “And the Lord spake unto you out of the fire and ye heard the voice of the words: but saw no image, save heard a voice only.” Tyndale’s marginal comment is: “The voice is altogether [*everything*]: unto that image ought men to bow their hearts.”

The text of chapter 12 includes a further warning about altering the word of God: “[W]hatsoever I command you that take heed ye do: put nought thereto, nor take ought therefrom.” Once again, Tyndale includes a marginal note for emphasis, “Put nought to nor take ought away.” In the following chapter, there is a warning against prophets or dreamers, who might even use signs or wonders to mislead the people (13:1–5). Tyndale warns: “God giveth us his word and confirmeth it with miracles to prove who hath a true heart. We must take heed to the scripture, lest false prophets or false miracles deceive us.”⁵⁸

Even in less obvious places, Tyndale can drive home the point, contrasting God’s word with human notions. In chapter 21:9, an admonition in the text says, “And so shalt thou put innocent blood from thee, when thou shalt have done that which is right in the sight of the Lord.” Tyndale’s marginal reflection is, “Right in the Lord’s sight, and not in thine imagination.”⁵⁹

Here it is important to recognize Tyndale’s ongoing rejection of any rivals to the authority of scripture, whether they be pagan philosophers, false prophets, or human imaginings. In his subsequent writings, Tyndale

adds further warnings against human imagination as subversive to the authority of God’s word.

A PATH WAY INTO THE HOLY SCRIPTURE (1530)

About 1530, under the title of *A path way into the holy scripture*, Tyndale issued a modified version of his 1526 Prologue from the Cologne Fragment. This brief work is designed to clear false constructions imposed on scripture by papal glosses. He wants readers of the Bible to understand the meaning of key terms, by deriving definitions based upon their scriptural usage: “That ye well understand what these words mean: the old testament, the new testament, the law, the gospel, Moses, Christ, nature, grace, working and believing, deeds and faith. Lest we ascribe, to the one that which belongeth to the other, and make of Christ, Moses, of the gospel, the law, despise grace and rob faith: and fall from meek learning into idle disputations, brawling and scolding about words.”⁶⁰

Tyndale devotes several pages to a discussion of the Greek word *evangelion*, or *gospel*. He notes the original gospel promise in Genesis 3:15, and how that promise was fulfilled through the seed of Abraham, even Christ Jesus. The law “was given to bring us unto the knowledge of ourselves, that we might thereby feel and perceive what we are by nature.... In the gospel, when we believe the promises, we receive the spirit of life, and are justified in the blood of Christ, from all things whereof the law condemneth us.”⁶¹

Tyndale warns those who are deceived,

which without all fear of God give themselves unto all manner vices with full consent, and full delectation, having no respect to the law of God (under whose vengeance they are locked up in captivity) but say: God is merciful and Christ died for us, supposing that such dreaming and imagination is that faith which is so greatly commended in holy scripture. Nay that is not faith but rather a foolish blind opinion springing of their own corrupt nature, and is not given them of the Spirit of God but rather of the spirit of the devil....⁶²

The root of this feigned faith is human imagination: “Righteousness is diverse, for blind reason imagineth many manners of righteousness.” He decries a righteousness of works, sought by those aiming for a mere outward performance of the law.

There is in like manner the justifying of ceremonies which some imagine their own selves, some counterfeit [*imitate*] other[s],⁶³ saying in their blind reason,

57. *A Prologue in to the fyfte boke of Moses, called Deuteronomye* (1530), fol. TII [misnumbered] (r); cf. *Tyndale’s Old Testament*, p. 262.

58. *A Prologue in to the fyfte boke of Moses, called Deuteronomye* (1530), fols. XXV(v), XXVI(r); cf. *Tyndale’s Old Testament*, pp. 275, 276. “In the thirteenth he forbiddeth to hearken unto ought save unto God’s word: no though he which counselleth contrary should come with miracles, as Paul doth unto the Galatians” (from the Prologue to Deuteronomy, sig. Avii(v); *Tyndale’s Old Testament*, p. 256).

59. *A Prologue in to the fyfte boke of Moses, called Deuteronomye* (1530), fol. XXXVII(v); cf. *Tyndale’s Old Testament*, p. 284.

60. *A path way into the holy scripture* [1530], sigs. Aii(v)–Aiii(r); cf. *Works*, 1.8.

61. *A path way into the holy scripture* [1530], sigs. Aiii(r)–Avi(r); cf. *Works*, 1.1–11.

62. *A path way into the holy scripture* [1530], sigs. Aviii(r–v); cf. *Works*, 1.12.

63. The point here is that, in resorting to ceremonies as a means of justification, it is irrelevant whether a man invents his own ceremonies

Such holy persons did thus and thus, and they were holy men, therefore if I do so likewise, I shall please God. But they have none answer of God, that, that pleaseth. The Jews seek righteousness in their ceremonies which God gave unto them not for to justify, but to describe and paint Christ unto them, of which Jews testifieth Paul, saying, how that they have affection to God: but not after knowledge, for they go about to establish their own justice, and are not obedient to the justice or righteousness that cometh of God, which is the forgiveness of sin in Christ's blood unto all that repent and believe. The cause is verily, that except a man cast away his own imagination and reason, he cannot perceive God, and understand the virtue and power of the blood of Christ.⁶⁴

Once again, human imagination is a fountain that corrupts both doctrine and worship.

The *Pathway* continues with further reflections upon man's natural depravity and inability. Tyndale demonstrates that Christ is not only our Redeemer, with respect to our justification, but also the great example to follow, after regeneration. "A man's deeds declare what he is within but make him neither good nor bad, though after we be created anew by the Spirit and doctrine of Christ, we wax perfecter alway with working according to the doctrine, and not with blind works of our own imagining."⁶⁵ The works of believers then have a three-fold benefit in promoting assurance, mortification of sin, and edification of the saints.⁶⁶

Tyndale concludes with some further reflections upon a life of faith, with emphasis on love for the brethren and duties in society. Baptism is a reminder of our obligations:

[R]epentance and faith begin at our baptism and first professing the laws of God, and continue unto our lives' end, and grow as we grow in the Spirit. For the perfecter we be the greater is our repentance, and the stronger our faith. And thus as the Spirit and doctrine on God's part, and repentance and faith on our part, beget us anew in Christ: even so they make us grow and wax perfect and save us unto the end, and never leave us until all sin be put off and we clean purified and fully-formed and fashioned after the similitude and likeness of the perfection of our Saviour Jesus, whose gift all is.⁶⁷

THE PRACTICE OF THE PRELATES (1530)

In *The Practice of the Prelates*, Tyndale expands a topic

treated earlier in *The Obedience of a Christian Man*. In the previous work, he exposed the disobedience of Romish clerics, as they usurped authority in the church and the state. In *The Practice of the Prelates*,⁶⁸ the reformer describes the historical rise of the prelates and the pope. He traces how they came to dominate both church and state, displacing Christ and his word in the church, and supplanting the king (and other civil officers) in the state. Ultimately, he takes aim at specific schemes of the English prelates, particularly Cardinal Thomas Wolsey and two bishops, John Longland (of Lincoln), and John Stokesley (of London).

The polemical and political contents of this work do not reflect any significant advancement respecting the reformer's views of scripture and worship. Tyndale builds upon premises already established in his earlier works. For example, the Preface opens with a reference to the old scribes and Pharisees, who "darkened the scripture with their traditions, and false interpretations." He then casts the prelates as successors to the Pharisees in their abuse of scripture.⁶⁹ The prelates are identified as men who love their worldly dominions and persecute as "heretics" those who "preach nothing save that which our Saviour Jesus Christ preached and his apostles, adding nought thereto nor plucking aught therefrom as the scripture commandeth...."⁷⁰

or imitates the practices of other men regarded as holy. None of the ceremonies can obtain the favour of God.

64. *A path way into the holy scripture* [1530], sigs. Biii(r)–Biiii(r-v); cf. *Works*, 1.15–16.

65. *A path way ... holy scripture* [1530], sig. Cv(v); cf. *Works*, 1.23.

66. *A path way ... scripture* [1530], sigs. Cvi(r-v); cf. *Works*, 1.23–24.

67. *A path way ... scripture* [1530], sigs. Diii(r-v); cf. *Works*, 1.27.

68. As Daniell notes: "As well as its more customary meaning today of the exercise of a profession, 'practice' carries even more its older meaning, now almost lost, of scheming through trickery...." Daniell, *William Tyndale*, p. 201. For example, Tyndale speaks of the behavior of the prelates as "no new invention that they now do, but even an old practice; though they have done their busy care to hide their science, that their conveyance should not be espied." *The practyse of Prelates* (1530), sigs. Fiv(v)–Fv(r) (*Works*, 2.297). In this one line, he employs three terms—*practice*, *science*, *conveyance*—all serving to reinforce the scheming nature of the prelates. Remember that the term *conveyance*, that is, "crafty conveyance" (thievery through sleight of hand), was used in the long title of Tyndale's previous book, *The obedience of the Christian man and how Christian rulers ought to govern, wherein also (if thou mark diligently) thou shalt find eyes to perceive the crafty conveyance of all jugglers*. This trickery of the prelates is combined with references to these clerics as jugglers: they are jugglers of scripture, and schemers (usurpers) in relation to civil authority.

69. *The practyse of Prelates* (1530), sig. Ai(v); cf. *Works*, 2.240. "Even so our scribes and Pharisees now that their hypocrisy is disclosed and their falsehood so brought to light that it can no longer be hid," etc. (*The practyse of Prelates* (1530), sig. Aiii(r); cf. *Works*, 2.242).

70. *The practyse of Prelates* (1530), sig. Aiii(r); cf. *Works*, 2.242.

At one point, Tyndale considers the meaning of Hebrews 7:12. Contrary to popish claims that this passage supports a translation of the priesthood and law-making power to the papacy, the text actually destroys papal doctrine. Tyndale demonstrates that the old priesthood was restricted to the Levites, whose duty was to offer sacrifices:

Wherefore, when that priesthood ceased the sacrifices and ceremonies ceased also. Now that priesthood ceased in Christ, which was a priest of the order of Melchizedec and not of the order of Aaron.... Wherefore they that are under Christ's priesthood are under no sacrifices or ceremonies. And of this manner juggle they with all the scripture, which falsehood lest the laymen should perceive with reading the process of the text, is all their fear whatsoever they pretend.⁷¹

This explanation of Hebrews 7 reinforces Tyndale's earlier remarks, regarding the latter chapters of Exodus and the book of Leviticus, where he pointed out that a fundamental error of the Romish ordinances is that they were formed in imitation of the Levitical ceremonies. It follows that, if the Levitical sacrifices and ceremonies have ceased, there is no basis for the pope (or anyone else) to create new ceremonies to take their place. The priesthood of Christ is preeminent, and the only valid observances are those delivered in his word.

Later, Tyndale furnishes a witty account to illustrate how lengthy man-made ceremonies and ordinances inevitably supplant scripture within church.

[T]he abbots took the scripture from their monks, lest some should ever bark against the abbots' living, and set up such long service and singing to weary them withal that they should have no leisure to read in the scripture but with their lips, and made them good cheer to fill their bellies and to stop their mouths. And the bishops in like manner to occupy their priests withal that they should not study the scripture for barking against them, set up long service, wondrous[ly] intricate, so that in

a dozen years thou couldst scarce learn to turn aright unto it: long matins, long evensongs, long masses, long dirges with vantage yet to mitigate the tediousness, *quia levis est labor cum lucro*; for lucre (say they) maketh the labor light: ever nuzzling them in ceremonies, and in their own constitutions, decrees, ordinances and laws of holy church.⁷²

Returning to the schemes of the clerics, Tyndale provides a brief historical synopsis describing various intrigues used by the prelates and popes throughout the centuries, in order to retain their hold over political realms. The schemes generally involve the political manipulation of kings and rulers, setting one kingdom against another, to guarantee that no nation becomes powerful enough to threaten the overarching authority of the prelates and the pope. One tool used by the clerics, to which Tyndale repeatedly refers, was sharing confidential information obtained by priests in the confessional, to provide ecclesiastical superiors and colleagues with strategic advantages.⁷³

Tyndale references widespread machinations, throughout the centuries on the Continent and in England. He gives special attention to England, particularly to the tactics of (Cardinal) Thomas Wolsey, whom he styles "Wolfsee," because the "wily wolf" was a "raging sea, and shipwreck of all England."⁷⁴ He recounts Wolsey's machinations to engineer war and peace with France: war initially to dilute the power of the French king Louis XII, later peace in an attempt to offset the power of the emperor Charles V.⁷⁵ In Tyndale's account, Wolsey then supported the king's desire for divorce, with the aim of arranging a French alliance through a marriage between King Henry VIII and the French king's sister, Margaret.⁷⁶

These events formed the historical background to a burning question of the day in England, whether King Henry VIII might lawfully divorce his wife Catherine, who was the aunt of the emperor Charles. Strictly speaking, the king's query was couched in language of annulment, based on the claim that the marriage itself had been unlawful, because Catherine had previously been married to the king's deceased brother.

Tyndale undertakes a brief discussion on the subject of divorce. He asserts, "If the king's grace will needs have another wife, then let him search the laws of God, whether it be lawful or not...."⁷⁷ Ultimately, Tyndale concludes that the king does not have just grounds for a divorce, but he is also looking at the larger, national picture. The reformer sees that the prelates are using the situation for their own ends. Their time-worn strategy

71. *The practyse of Prelates* (1530), sig. Eii(r); cf. *Works*, 2.283.

72. *The practyse of Prelates* (1530), sig. Eviii(r); cf. *Works*, 2.290–291.

73. *The practyse of Prelates* (1530), sigs. Fi(r)–Giiii(r); cf. *Works*, 2.292–307.

74. *The practyse of Prelates* (1530), sigs. Giiii(r)–Gvi(r); cf. *Works*, 2.307–310.

75. *The practyse of Prelates* (1530), sigs. Gvi(r)–Hiiii(v); cf. *Works*, 2.310–319.

76. *The practyse of Prelates* (1530), sigs. Hiiii(v)–Hvii(r); cf. *Works*, 2.319–322.

77. *The practyse of Prelates*, sig. Hvii(r); cf. *Works*, 2.323.

was to encourage (or break) marital alliances between countries, thus reducing the strength of powerful nations, in order to bolster the power of the papacy and the prelates.⁷⁸ Tyndale decries this sort of treachery as unworthy of those claiming to be ministers of Christ, a diabolical disservice to the king, and hurtful to the commonwealth as a whole.

Tyndale casts his thoughts back to John the Baptist, who was the only minister in his day to rebuke Herod.

And the glorious scribes and the Pharisees for all their holiness rebuked not Herod, nor Caiphas and Annas for all their highness, but vile John the Baptist. By what authority? Verily, by the authority of God's word: which only, whatsoever garment she wear, ought to have all authority among them that have professed it. That word is the chiefest of the apostles and pope and Christ's vicar and head of the church and the head of the general council. And unto the authority of that ought the children of God to hearken without respect of person, for they that are of God, hear God's word, John 6, and Christ's sheep hear Christ's voice, John 10....⁷⁹

In Tyndale's consideration of the law of God, regarding the subject of divorce, he makes some summary statements about the laws of Moses. He notes that there are three parts to the Mosaic law: the ceremonies, the penal laws, and the moral law. The ceremonies are "signs that put men in remembrance either of the benefits of God done already" or they are "signs of the promise and appointment made between God and man, as circumcision: or signs that testify unto the people that the wrath of God is peaced and their sins forgiven, as all manner of sacrifices: which all ceased as soon as Christ offered up the sacrifice of his body and blood for us. And instead of them, come the open preaching of Christ, and our signs which we call sacraments."⁸⁰

The penal laws "are laws of penalty or punishment to avenge sin if it break out and hurt a man's neighbour...." These laws "were given unto the Jews only and we heathen or Gentiles are not bound unto them, that we should punish every sin after the same manner: but it is enough that every land punish their trespassers as it seemeth best for the commonwealth there, some of one manner, some of another."⁸¹

Tyndale then speaks of that part of the Mosaic law that pertains to "faith and love"—and he notes that the substance of this part pre-dates Moses, "insomuch that though Moses had never written it, yet had the Jews been no less bound thereto by nature and by natural right and equity."

Moreover, whosoever hath this law graven in his heart, this same keepeth all laws, and whosoever hath it not written in his heart, the same keepeth no law. For whosoever believeth that there is one God and loveth him with all his heart, with all his soul, mind and strength (which is the first of the ten commandments pertaining unto the person of God) the same will worship nothing of his own imagination without God's word: and then he can make none image to worship it. Which is the second commandment pertaining unto the person of God. He cannot also, for very love sake, take the name of God in vain and swear by it unreverently: and so thou hast the third commandment pertaining unto the person of God. Furthermore, he that believeth God and hath his trust only in him and loveth him as I said, cannot but keep his holy day, not after Moses' fashion, but spiritually: that is, he cannot but observe a time to wait on God's word, to hear it and learn it, and to [ac]knowledge his sins to God, and to desire him of mercy, according to his promises and testament which he hath made with us: and so thou hast the fourth commandment pertaining unto the person of God.⁸²

Tyndale continues his exposition with a summary of the fifth commandment, which he associates with the first four, as pertaining unto the person of God, "for the obedience of father and mother, and of all high powers which rule the world in God's stead, pertaineth unto the person of God, and must be done with love as unto God's self."⁸³ While this grouping might seem unconventional, as regards the two tables of the law, what is unmistakable here is that the enumeration of the law reinforces Tyndale's translation of the Decalogue, restoring the second commandment to its distinctive position.

THE PROPHET JONAS (1531)

In 1531, Tyndale issued a standalone translation of the

78. "I did my diligence a long season, to know what reasons our holy prelates should make for their divorcement, but I could not come by them: I searched what might be said for their part but I could find no lawful cause of myself by any scripture that I ever read: I communed with divers learned men of the matter, which also could tell me no other way than I have shewed. Then I considered the falsehood of our spirituality, how that it is but their old practice, and a common custom, yea, and a sport to separate matrimony, for to make division where such marriage made unity and peace." (*The practyse of Prelates*, sigs. Jviii(v)–Ki(r); cf. *Works*, 2,332–333).

79. *The practyse of Prelates*, sigs. Jviii(r-v); cf. *Works*, 2,333.

80. *The practyse of Prelates*, sigs. Hviii(r-v); cf. *Works*, 2,324.

81. *The practyse of Prelates*, sig. Jviii(v); cf. *Works*, 2,324.

82. *The practyse of Prelates*, sigs. Ji(r-v); cf. *Works*, 2,324–25.

83. *The practyse of Prelates*, sig. Ji(v); cf. *Works*, 2,325.

book of Jonah, with a lengthy introduction that serves as a devotional commentary on the book, as well as a primer for the interpretation of the narrative portions of scripture. Sadly, this is the only book among the Old Testament prophets that Tyndale published prior to his martyrdom. Nevertheless, this small work provides a lively treatment of a prophetic and poetic passage (chapter 2) from the Hebrew scriptures.

Perhaps the best synopsis of the work is found in the full title, which is frequently truncated when the work is referenced elsewhere. The complete title is: *The prophet Jonas, with an introduction before teaching to understand him and the right use also of all the scripture, and why it was written, and what is therein to be sought, and showing wherewith the scripture is locked up that he which readeth it, cannot understand it, though he study therein never so much: and again with what keys it is so opened, that the reader can be stopped out with no subtlety or false doctrine of man, from the true sense and understanding thereof.*

From the outset Tyndale wishes to promote the right use of scripture, and deliver readers from the “fleshly-minded hypocrites” who, “stop up the veins of life” in scripture with “their traditions, false similitudes and lying allegories.” The marrow and sweetness of scripture is given only to the elect, whom God has chosen, “to give them his Spirit, and to write his law and faith of his Son in their hearts.”⁸⁴

Tyndale states that the proper use of the law is to drive men to repentance, in order to seek mercy in Christ. Yet, he notes, when hypocrites “come to the law, they put glosses to and make no more of it than a worldly law which is satisfied with the outward work. . . . And when they come to the Gospel, there they mingle their leaven and say, God now receiveth us no more to

mercy, but of mercy receiveth us to penance, that is to wit, holy deeds that make them fat bellies and us their captives, both in soul and body.”⁸⁵ Here once more, Tyndale makes a connection between interpretive glosses upon scripture, and the construction of a system of rituals and ceremonies that are regarded as holy deeds.

The readers of scripture, then are divided into two types: hypocrites, who read biblical narratives casually (or academically); and readers of sincere faith, for whom the narrative portions are full of spiritual lessons. For hypocrites, “the lives, stories and gests [*deeds*] of men which are contained in the Bible, they read as things no more pertaining unto them, than a tale of Robin Hood, and as things they wot not whereto they serve, save to feign false descant and juggling allegories, to stablish their kingdom withal.” By contrast, for genuine believers, “all other stories of the Bible, without exception, are the practising of the law and of the gospel, and are true and faithful examples and sure earnest that God will even so deal with us, as he did with them, in all infirmities, in all temptations, and in all like cases and chances.”⁸⁶

Based on these interpretive principles, Tyndale moves to the narrative of Jonah. The basic framework for the book is stated: “First count Jonas the friend of God, and a man chosen of God to testify his name unto the world: but yet a young scholar, weak and rude, after the fashion of the apostles, while Christ was with them yet bodily. Which, though Christ taught them ever to be meek and to humble themselves, yet oft strove among themselves who should be greatest.”⁸⁷ From this perspective, Tyndale draws numerous devotional lessons from the life of the prophet.

Within his exposition, Tyndale makes scattered applications to the subject of worship. In one illustration, he laments the hardness of his native land: “Wycliffe preached repentance unto our fathers not long since: they repented not, for their hearts were indurate and their eyes blinded with their own pope holy righteousness. . . .” The expression, “pope holy righteousness” is shorthand for the Romish system of ordinances and devotional works of human devising, which serve as a mere cloak for hypocrisy. Tyndale underscores his lament with a pithy observation: “for in open sins there is hope of repentance, but in holy hypocrisy none at all.”⁸⁸

Concerning the sacraments, Tyndale emphasizes the connection between the signs and the things signified. At the time of Jonah, the Israelites had lost the significance of the sacrifices they offered, thereby turning them into mere “image service: as our ceremonies and sacraments are become now to all that trust and believe in

84. *The prophete Jonas* (1531), sig. Aii(r); cf. Daniell, *Tyndale's Old Testament*, p. 628.

85. *The prophete Jonas* (1531), sigs. Aiii(r), Aiii(v); cf. Daniell, *Tyndale's Old Testament*, pp. 629–630.

86. *The prophete Jonas* (1531), sigs. Aii(v)–Aiii(r); cf. Daniell, *Tyndale's Old Testament*, pp. 628–629. Tyndale repeatedly distinguishes between genuine (saving) faith and a *story* faith exhibited by those who read the Bible as they would the tales of Robin Hood—an illustration used on multiple occasions. See *That fayth the mother of all good works*, fol. xxvii(v); *Works*, 1.80; *The Obedience of the Christian Man*; 1528, fols. cxxxii(r), cxlviii(r); cf. Daniell edition, pp. 159, 157; *An answer vnto Sir Thomas Mores dialogue made by Willyam Tindale* (1531), fol. xxix(v), sig. D5(v); cf. *An Answer Vnto Sir Thomas Mores Dialogue*, p. 51; *Works*, 3.51.

87. *The prophete Jonas* (1531), sig. Avi(r); cf. Daniell, *Tyndale's Old Testament*, p. 631.

88. *The prophete Jonas* (1531), sig. Biii(v); cf. Daniell, *Tyndale's Old Testament*, p. 634.

the work of them and are not taught the significations, to edify their souls with knowledge and the doctrine of God.” That is, even divinely-ordained signs are corrupted into idolatry, *image service*, if they are divorced from their proper meaning; the sacraments removed from faith in the promises of God become polluted exercises of worship.⁸⁹

As a natural application of the text (cf. Luke 11:30), Tyndale contrasts the repentance of the Ninevites with obstinacy of the Pharisees, who had constructed an elaborate system of glosses that supplanted the word of God. Humanly-devised service is the handmaid or companion of unbelief.

[T]hey had set up a righteousness of holy works, to cleanse their souls withal: as the pope sanctifieth us with holy oil, holy bread, holy salt, holy candles, holy dumb ceremonies and holy dumb blessings, and with whatsoever holiness thou wilt save with the holiness of God’s word which only speaketh unto the heart, and sheweth the soul her filthiness and uncleanness of sin, and leadeth her by the way of repentance unto the fountain of Christ’s blood to wash it away through faith.... And so, through fleshly interpreting the law and false imagined righteousness, their hearts were hardened, and made as stony as clay in a hot furnace of fire, that they could receive neither repentance nor faith or any muster [manner] of grace at all.

By comparison, although the Ninevites were blind in their own sins, they were not infected with the fleshly interpretation of the law and imagined righteousness, “and therefore, with the only preaching of Jonas came unto the knowledge of their sins, and confessed them and repented....”⁹⁰

Tyndale concludes his introduction with an exhortation for readers to make “the right use” of scripture: Interpret the law in its true sense, spiritually, as it convicts us of sin, driving us to the need for God’s mercy in Christ. Likewise, search for, and believe, the promises of redemption through the blood of Jesus; for “the promises be given unto a repenting soul that thirsteth and longeth after them, of the pure and fatherly mercy of God through our faith only without all deserving of our deeds or merits of our works, but for Christ’s sake alone and for the merits and deservings of his works, death, and passions that he suffered altogether for us....” These points,

if they be written in thine heart, are the keys which so open all the scripture unto thee, that no creature can

lock thee out, and with which thou shalt go in and out, and find pasture and food everywhere. And if these lessons be not written in thine heart, then is all the scripture shut up, as a kernel in the shell, so that thou mayest read it and commune of it and rehearse all the stories of it and dispute subtly and be a profound sophister, and yet understand not one jot thereof.

Coming to the scriptures thus, with the eyes of faith, “take the stories and lives which are contained in the Bible, for sure and undoubted examples, that God so will deal with us unto the world’s end.”⁹¹

AN ANSWER TO SIR THOMAS MORE (1531)

In 1529, Thomas More published *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, with a goal of combatting the growth of English Protestantism in general, as well as the influence of Tyndale in particular. The format of More’s work is an imaginary dialogue (or debate) between an inquisitive “messenger,” who sets forth certain Protestant ideas, and the author, who defends the positions of Popery. In the dialogue, the Protestant messenger is largely a straw man, furnishing More with an opportunity to rehearse Romish dogma while venting his disdain for Lutheranism. He makes specific denunciations of Tyndale’s translations and writings. More claims that Luther’s teachings contain abominable heresies, and that Tyndale’s English books, in some parts, are “worse yet.”⁹²

Throughout More’s meandering work, “Three matters dominate: the cult of the saints, the Bible in English, and the Church as incapable of error.”⁹³ Within this framework, More asserts that “any good Christian man having any drop of wit in his head,” would not complain at the burning of Tyndale’s translation of the New Testament, because Tyndale’s translation was “too bad to be mended.”⁹⁴

Tyndale’s reply requires him to follow the progression of More’s book, making for a lengthy, and sometimes tedious approach to the subject matter. A thorough

89. *The prophete Jonas* (1531), sigs. Biiii(v)–Bv(r); cf. Daniell, *Tyndale’s Old Testament*, p. 635.

90. *The prophete Jonas* (1531), sigs. Bvii(v)–Bviii(r); cf. Daniell, *Tyndale’s Old Testament*, p. 637.

91. *The prophete Jonas* (1531), sigs. Ci(r)–Cii(r); cf. Daniell, *Tyndale’s Old Testament*, pp. 638–639.

92. Thomas Moore, *Complete Works* (Edited by Thomas M. C. Lawler, Germain March’hadour, and Richard C. Marius; New Haven: Yale, 1981), vol. 6, *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, p. 348.

93. David Daniell, *William Tyndale*, 265. See Daniell’s summary of More’s polemics against Tyndale, chapter 10, pp. 250–280.

94. More, *Complete Works*, 6.285, 292.

analysis of the debate cannot be attempted here, but we can highlight specific matters pertaining to the right use of scripture and worship.

More objects to Tyndale's translation of particular terms, such as *congregation* (instead of *church*), *seniors* or *elders* (instead of *priests*), *love* (instead of *charity*), *repentance* (instead of *penance*). The popish apologist views these renderings as subversive to Romish doctrine.⁹⁵ No doubt Tyndale's translation does undermine popish dogma, but it is more accurate than More's preferences, because Tyndale's translation is based upon the Greek New Testament, not the Latin text and medieval glosses of the Romaniists. In response to More, Tyndale explains his translation of these key terms individually. In a summary observation he says, "So now the cause why our prelates thus rage, and that moveth them to call master More to help, is not that they find just causes in the translation, but because they have lost their juggling and feigned terms, wherewith Peter prophesied they should make merchandise of the people" [2 Peter 2:3].⁹⁶

Tyndale next moves to the question, whether the church comes before the gospel, or the gospel before the church. This query is fundamental to the subject of authority: that is, whether the authority of the church is supreme over scripture, or whether the scripture is the supreme authority over the church. Tyndale is direct in his assessment. "[This] question is as hard to solve, as whether the father be elder than the son or the son

elder than his father. For the whole scripture, and all believing hearts testify that we are begotten through the word. Therefore, if the word beget the congregation, then is the gospel before the church."⁹⁷

Contrary to More's claims of unwritten apostolic traditions, Tyndale rests upon the sufficiency of scripture:

Christ and his apostles preached an hundred thousand sermons and did as many miracles which had been superfluous to have been all written. But the pith and substance in general of everything necessary unto our souls' health, both of what we ought to believe and what we ought to do, was written, and of the miracles done to confirm it, as many as were needful. So that whatsoever we ought to believe or do, that same is written expressly or drawn out of that which is written.⁹⁸

Armed with the authority of scripture over the church, Tyndale rebuts the false doctrines and practices of Rome. In the ensuing pages, he exposes the corruptions of the clergy, saint worship, false sacraments, superstitions of popish worship, and Rome's false notions of faith. The authority and teaching of scripture must govern the church, and not vice-versa. The singular authority of scripture is foundational to all the other issues in dispute.

Beginning a lengthy discussion on images, Tyndale states: "First images be not God, and therefore no confidence is to be given them. They be not made after the image of God nor are the price of Christ's blood, but the workmanship of the craftsman and the price of money, and therefore inferiors to man."⁹⁹ In his consideration of image worship, Tyndale groups together "sacraments, ceremonies or signs" as "three words of one signification."¹⁰⁰ His basic paradigm is then to ask whether these outward symbols are used in service to men, genuinely drawing their minds to the remembrance of spiritual realities which they represent, and whether they foster service to the needs of our brethren; or, rather, do they promote bodily service to the images (under the color of service to God, who does not need the bodily service typically given to images).

Tyndale acknowledges a general, or hypothetical, use of images, ceremonies, and sacraments, as memorials or signs, to evoke certain truths, persons or events to remembrance: "Wherefore the right use, office and honour of all creatures, inferiors unto man, is to do man service, whether they be images, relics, ornaments, signs, or sacraments, holy days, ceremonies or sacrifices. And that may be on this manner, and no doubt it so once was."¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, he is quick to delineate

95. More, *Complete Works*, 6.285–290.

96. *An answer vnto Sir Thomas Mores dialogue made by Willyam Tindale* (1531), fols. v(r)–xiii(v), sigs. A5–B5(v); cf. *An Answer Vnto Sir Thomas Mores Dialogue* (edited by Anne M. O'Donnell and Jared Wicks; Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), pp. 10–23; Tyndale, *Works*, 3.11–24. This critical edition of Tyndale's *Answer* is the first published in the project to produce a scholarly edition of Tyndale's theological writings (with original orthography); for additional information, see <http://community.village.virginia.edu/tyndale/about> (retrieved 5 August 2024).

97. *Answer* (1531), fol. xiii(r), sig. B5(r); *Answer* (O'Donnell & Wicks), p. 23; cf. *Works*, 3.24.

98. *Answer* (1531), fol. xiii(v)–fol. xiv(r), sigs. B5(v)–B6(r); *Answer* (O'Donnell & Wicks), p. 24; cf. *Works*, 3.26.

99. *Answer* (1531), fol. xxxv(v), sig. E3(v); *Answer* (O'Donnell & Wicks), pp. 57–58; cf. *Works*, 3.59.

100. *Answer* (1531), fol. xiv(v), sig. F5(v); *Answer* (O'Donnell & Wicks), p. 74; cf. *Works*, 3.74.

101. *Answer* (1531), fol. xxxv(v), sig. E3(v); *Answer* (O'Donnell & Wicks), p. 58; cf. *Works*, 3.59. In this portion of Tyndale's work, he considers together biblical sacrifices, ceremonies, and sacraments along with non-biblical elements, for the sake of discussing what may provide service to men, in contrast to what things men serve and abuse. Elsewhere, Tyndale distinguishes more specifically between the abuse of scriptural observances, such as the Old Testament ordinances and the sacraments, and the observances of Rome, which have no basis in the word of God.

the reality; the abuse of images, ceremonies and signs, is the path to *image-service*, a form of idolatry.

Tyndale speaks of the potential of images, relics, ornaments, signs, or sacraments, holy days, ceremonies or sacrifices as aids which originally had a good purpose; but he immediately illustrates the abuse of these instruments, showing that, although their origin seems edifying, they are generally abused and become snares for idolatry:

[T]he abuse of the thing is evil, and to have a false faith: as to bear a piece of the cross about a man, thinking that so long as that is about him, spirits shall not come at him, his enemies shall do him no bodily harm, all causes shall go on his side even for bearing it about him, and to think that if it were not about him it would not be so, and to think, if any misfortune chance, that it came for leaving it off, or because this or that ceremony was left undone, and not rather because we have broken God's commandments, or that God tempteth [*tests*] us, to prove our patience. This is plain idolatry: and here a man is captive, bond and servant unto a false faith and a false imagination, that is neither God nor his word. Now am I God's only, and ought to serve nothing but God and his word. My body must serve the rulers of this world and my neighbour (as God hath appointed it) and so must all my goods: but my soul must serve God only, to love his law and to trust in his promises of mercy in all my needs.¹⁰²

Further, he criticizes the riches bestowed on images and pilgrimages (rather than using such gifts to assist the poor).

In speaking of the origins of idolatry, or image-service, Tyndale turns to the Old Testament ordinances for illustration. "All the ceremonies, ornaments and sacrifices of the old testament were sacraments: that is to wit, signs preaching unto the people one thing or another." After describing the meaning of circumcision and the Passover, he adds, "And in like manner the ornaments, and all other ceremonies were either an open preaching or secret prophecies, and not satisfactions or justifying. And thus the works did serve them and preach unto them, and they not the works, nor put any confidence therein." Sadly, the Israelites

let the significations of their ceremonies go and lost the meaning of them, and turned them unto the works to serve them, saying that they were holy works commanded of God, and the offerers were thereby justified and obtained forgiveness of sins, and thereby became

good.... And so the better creature against nature did serve the worse. Where of all likelihood God should have accepted their work by the reason of them, if their hearts had been right, and not have accepted their souls for the blood's sake of a calf or sheep, forasmuch as a man is much better than a calf or sheep, as Christ testifieth, Matt. 12. For what pleasure should God have in the blood of calves, or in the light of our candles? His pleasure is only in the hearts of them that love his commandments.¹⁰³

Tyndale then draws a parallel between the superstition of Jews regarding the temple, where men behaved as though God would only hear their prayers in a specific holy places. "And therefore they could not pray but there, as ours can nowhere but at church, and before an image. For what prayer can a man pray when the word of God is not in the temple of his heart? yea, and when such come to church, what is their prayer, and what is their devotion, save the blind image-service of their hearts?"¹⁰⁴

In an ensuing section, Tyndale describes the proliferation of ceremonies in the church: "because such a multitude came with a faithless faith, they went clean contrary unto the mind of Paul, set up ceremonies in the new testament, partly borrowing them of Moses and partly imagining like, as ye now see, and called them sacraments: that is to say, signs (as it is plain in the stories), the sacrament of holy water, of holy fire, holy bread, holy salt and so forth. And they gave them significations...."

And so throughout all the sacraments, ceremonies or signs (three words of one signification) there were significations unto them at the beginning. And so long as it was understood what was meant by them, and they did but serve the people and preach one thing or another unto them, they hurted not greatly, though that the free servant of Christ ought not to be brought violently into captivity under the bondage of traditions of men. As S. Augustine complaineth in his days, how that the condition and state of the Jews was more easy than the Christians under traditions: so sore had the tyranny of the shepherds invaded the flock already in those days.¹⁰⁵

102. *Answer* (1531), fol. xxxvi(v), sig. E4(v); *Answer* (O'Donnell & Wicks), pp. 59–60; cf. *Works*, 3.60–61.

103. *Answer* (1531), fols. xxxix(r)–xl(r), sigs. E7(r)–E8(r); *Answer* (O'Donnell & Wicks), pp. 63–65; cf. *Works*, 3.64–66.

104. *Answer* (1531), fol. xli(r), sig. F1(r); *Answer* (O'Donnell & Wicks), p. 67; cf. *Works*, 3.67.

105. *Answer* (1531), fols. xliii(r), xlv(v), sigs. F3(r), F5(v); *Answer* (O'Donnell & Wicks), pp. 70, 74; cf. *Works*, 3.70, 74.

Over time, the meaning of the ceremonies was lost, and men “became servants unto the ceremonies; ascribing their justifying and salvation unto them, supposing that it was nothing else to be a Christian man, than to serve ceremonies, and him most Christian that most served them, and contrariwise him that was not popish and ceremonial, no Christian man at all.” And, “the deeds of the ceremonies we count better than the deeds which God commanded to be done to our neighbour in his need.” Tyndale exclaims: “O monster! Christ’s death purchased grace for man’s soul, to repent of evil and to believe in Christ for remission of sin, and to love the law of God, and his neighbour as himself, which is the true worshipping of God in the spirit, and he died not to purchase such honour unto unsensible things, that man to his dishonour, should do them honourable service and receive his salvation of them.”¹⁰⁶

In the pages which follow, Tyndale treats the nature of faith. He also reflects on distinctions between the outward church and the spiritual flock of Christ. In one passage, he describes the deceived multitude and the worship it produces:

[T]he great multitude that is called and not chosen, when they have gotten this faith common as well to the devils as them, and more strongly persuaded unto the devils than unto them, then they go unto their own imaginations saying, We may no longer serve idols, but God that is but one. And the manner of service they fetch out of their own brains, and not of the word of God, and serve God with bodily service, as they did in times past their idols, their hearts serving their own lusts still.

By contrast, the “little flock, as soon as he is persuaded that there is a God, he runneth not unto his own imaginations, but unto the messenger that called him, and of him asketh how he shall serve God...”¹⁰⁷ Here he is stressing the root of the issue: false worship has its origins in the imaginations of men, as opposed to being drawn from the word of God.

In his *Dialogue*, More resorts to the Romish distinction between *doulia* and *latria* (*service* and *worship*), to deflect criticisms against image worship. Tyndale replies plainly:

He [More] saith, that bodily service is not *latria*. No but bodily service done and referred unto him, which is a spirit, is *Idololatria*.

He trusteth that men know the image from the saint. I ask M. More why God did hide Moses’s body and divers other? The Jews would have known that Moses had not been God and that Moses’s bones had not been Moses. And they knew that the brasen serpent was not God, and that the golden calves were not God, and that wood and stone were not God. But, sir, there is ever a false imagination by. The world, because they cannot worship God in the spirit, to repent of evil and to love the law and to believe that he will help at all need, therefore run unto their own imaginations and think that God, for such service as they do to images, will fulfill their worldly desires: for godly can they nought desire. Now God is a spirit and will be worshipped in his word only, which is spiritual; and will have no bodily service. And the ceremonies of the old law he set up, to signify his word only, and to keep the people in mind of his testament. So that he which observeth any ceremony of any other purpose is an idolater, that is, an imageserver.¹⁰⁸

At this point in his *Answer*, Tyndale still has over 100 pages of blackletter type remaining in his response to More’s verbal labyrinth. Because More’s *Dialogue* is composed in four books, with a total of 77 chapters, an argument could be made that Tyndale is succinct in his *Answer*. He covers a wide range of compelling topics, revealing the emerging conflict of the Reformation in real time. Modern readers can profit from Tyndale’s entire work, particularly the reformer’s extended considerations of the nature of saving faith; but for this study, we note only a few additional citations relevant to scripture and worship.

In a further observation about the use of images, Tyndale raises the example of Hezekiah’s destruction of the brasen serpent, which was originally a divinely-ordained symbol. Earlier he had commented on the spiritual blindness of the people: “they went and fetched out the brasen serpent, which Moses commanded to be kept in the ark for a memory, and offered before it; thinking (no doubt) that God must be there present, for else how could it have healed the people that came not nigh it, but stood afar off, and beheld it only?” Now, after his discussion on image-service, Tyndale makes an application: “Ezekias broke the brasen serpent, 4 Kings 18, for the abuse. And even so, such processions, and the multitude of

106. *Answer* (1531), fols. xlvi(v)–xlvii(v); sigs. F6(v)–F7(v); *Answer* (O’Donnell & Wicks), pp. 75–77; cf. *Works*, 3:76–77.

107. *Answer* (1531), fols. lxxv(v), lxxvi(r); sigs. I1(v), I2(r); *Answer* (O’Donnell & Wicks), pp. 105–106; cf. *Works*, 3:107–08.

108. *Answer* (1531), fols. lxxvi(v)–fol. lxxvii(r); sigs. K4(v)–K5(r); *Answer* (O’Donnell & Wicks), p. 124; cf. *Works*, 3:125.

ceremonies and of holy days too, might as well be put down.”¹⁰⁹

Elsewhere, Tyndale describes the connection between human imagination and idolatry, condemning the popish practice of celibacy as a form of imagined service to God.

[T]he heathen, because they could not understand God spiritually, to serve him in the spirit, to believe in him and to love his laws, therefore they turned his glory unto an image and served him after their own imagination with bodily service as the whole kingdom of the pope doth, having less power to serve him in spirit than the Turks. For when the heathen made an image of the aches or fevers and sacrificed thereto, they knew that the image was not the fevers, but under the similitude of the image, they worshipped that power of God which plagued them with the fevers, with bodily service, as the pope doth above all the idolaters that ever were in the world. As when we paint St Michael weighing the souls and stick up a candle to flatter him and to make him favourable unto us, and regard not the testament of Christ nor the laws of God, because we have no power to believe nor to love the truth. And even so to refer virginity [celibacy] unto the person of God, to please him therewith, is false sacrifice and heathenish idolatry.¹¹⁰

Regarding the inseparable connection between the faith and the sacraments, he says plainly, “The faith of a repenting soul in Christ’s blood doth justify only. And the sacrament standeth in as good stead as a lively preacher. And as the preacher justifieth me not, but my faith in the doctrine: even so the sign justifieth not, but the faith in the promise which the sacrament signifieth and preacheth. And to preach is all the virtue of the sacrament. And where the sacraments preach not, there they have no virtue at all.”¹¹¹

In his *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, Thomas More attacks Luther over the idea “that a man is not bounden to believe anything but if it may be proved evidently from scripture.” In a denial of *sola scriptura*, More argues for unwritten ecclesiastical traditions “which holy doctors agree, were taught the apostles by Christ, and the church by the apostles, and so come down to our days by continual succession from theirs.” One example cited by More to support his claim for ecclesiastical traditions is the changing of the sabbath day from Saturday. (Another example is the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary, which, More says, “every good Christian man I doubt not believeth.”)¹¹²

Tyndale’s response to More’s argument includes the following statement:

And as for the sabbath, a great matter, we be lords over the sabbath and may yet change it into the Monday or any other day, as we see need, or may make every tenth day holy day only if we see a cause why. We may make two every week, if it were expedient and one not enough to teach the people. Neither was there any cause to change it from the Saturday than to put difference between us and the Jews, and lest we should become servants unto the day after their superstition. Neither needed we any holy day at all, if the people might be taught without it.¹¹³

While Tyndale’s view certainly does not represent the subsequent position of confessional sabbatarianism, it needs to be understood in context. For Tyndale, if an ordinance is regarded as meritorious, it ceases to fulfill its purpose to edify, and has been corrupted. If it is required by the authority of the church, as a form of false works, it is image-service. Thus, Tyndale rejects More’s assertions that an obligation is created for the sabbath (or the multitude of other saints’ and holy days) based upon unwritten “apostolic” traditions.

Tyndale’s reference to “lords over the sabbath” is at once both an allusion and an application of Christ’s teaching in the gospels that, as Lord of the sabbath, he interprets its true purpose: “the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath day” (Mark 2:28). The sabbath was designed for the good of man, to ensure a proper rest to “teach the people” from the word of God. In Tyndale’s understanding of worship, the ordinances are to serve man (minister to his needs and edification); whereas a slavish bondage to an ordinance is predicated upon a false view of God, as though he needs our bodily works. The sabbath must minister to the spiritual needs of men; otherwise men become “servants unto the day,” subjects of image-service.

If Tyndale’s perspective anticipates any particular position on the sabbath here, it is more akin to Calvin, who subsequently opposed popish sabbatarianism and holidays because of Romish beliefs in their

109. *Answer* (1531), fols. xli(r), lxxvii(v); sigs. F1(r), K5(v); *Answer* (O’Donnell & Wicks), pp. 66–67, 125; cf. *Works*, 3.67, 126.

110. *Answer* (1531), fols. cii(r–v), sigs. N6(r–v); *Answer* (O’Donnell & Wicks), pp. 164–165; cf. *Works*, 3.163.

111. *Answer* (1531), fol. cvii(r), sig. O3(r); *Answer* (O’Donnell & Wicks), p. 173; cf. *Works*, 3.172.

112. More, *Complete Works*, 6.146–150.

113. *Answer* (1531), fol. lix(v), sig. H3(v); *Answer* (O’Donnell & Wicks), p. 96; cf. *Works*, 3.97–98.

merits.¹¹⁴ More important, like Calvin, Tyndale was not seeking a license for commerce or entertainment on the Lord's day—the other extreme with which the Puritans contended.

Lest anyone mistake Tyndale's reply to More as an excuse for antinomianism, they should consult Tyndale's practice. On the Lord's day, the reformer spent the time in the word, promoting the edification of his brethren by reading and expounding the scriptures. During his exile, Tyndale dwelt among the English merchants living in Antwerp. "When the Sunday came, then he went to one merchants' chamber or other, whither came many other merchants, and unto them would he read some one parcel of Scripture: the which proceeded so fruitfully, sweetly, and gently from him, much like to the writing of John the Evangelist, that it was a heavenly comfort and joy to the audience to hear him read the Scriptures; likewise, after dinner, he spent an hour in the same manner." On other days of the week, he gave himself to acts of charity:

On Monday he visited all such poor men and women as were fled out of England, by reason of persecution into Antwerp; and these ... he did very liberally comfort and relieve; and in like manner provided for the sick and diseased persons. On the Saturday he walked round about the town, seeking every corner and hole where he suspected any poor person to dwell; and where he found any to be well occupied, and yet over-burdened with children, or else were aged and weak, these also he plentifully relieved.¹¹⁵

Tyndale was a living exposition of love and service unto his brethren. It was fitting that his next publication was an exposition of the first epistle of John.

114. The first edition of Calvin's *Institutes*, summarizing his views on the sabbath, was published in 1536, the year of Tyndale's death. See *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1536 edition; translated and annotated by Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 1975, revised edition 1986), pp. 23–24. For a practical application of the commandment, readers should also note *John Calvin's Sermons on the Ten Commandments* (edited and translated by Benjamin W. Farley; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), pp. 97–113.

115. Account by John Foxe, as cited in Robert Demaus, *William Tyndale: A Biography* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1886), pp. 351–352.

116. *The exposition of the fyrste Epistle of seynt Jhon with a Prologge before it: by W.T. (1531)*, sig. Aii(r); cf. *The Exposition of the Fyrst Epistle of Seynt Jhon and Exposition Vppon the V. VI. VIII. Chapters of Matthew*, ed. J. Christopher Warner (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2023), p. 5; *Works*, 2.136.

117. *The exposition of the fyrste Epistle of seynt Jhon*, sigs. Aii(v)–Aiii(r); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), pp. 6–7; *Works*, 2.136.

AN EXPOSITION OF 1 JOHN (1531)

As with earlier publications, Tyndale's exposition of 1 John begins with a Prologue that addresses the need for a right understanding of scripture. In this case he emphasizes the meaning of baptism as the key to open the scriptures. "Except a man have the profession of baptism in his heart he cannot understand the scripture." This profession, or confession, encompasses two main points: first, "the knowledge of the law of God, understanding it spiritually" in its demand to "Love the Lord God with all thine heart, all thy soul, and all thy might, and thy neighbour as thyself for his sake, and that love only be the fulfilling of the law (as Paul teacheth) and that whatsoever deed we do and not of that love, that same fulfilleth no law in the sight of God." The second point "is to know the promises of mercy, which are in our saviour Christ, understanding them purely without all leaven, after the mercifullest fashion as scripture soundeth them, and after the fatherly love and kindness of God unto all that repent toward the law and believe in Christ."¹¹⁶

In this two-fold emphasis on the law and the gospel, Tyndale is retracing a familiar path, that a spiritual understanding of the law convicts sinners, driving them to Christ alone as the satisfaction for the guilt and penalty of sin. A sincere confession will be joined with newness of life, to motify sin: "we must from henceforth walk in the life of penance (if ye will have it so called) and after the doctrine of Christ every man tame his flesh," yet always mindful that toward God "is there no satisfaction save faith in Christ's blood out of a repenting heart."¹¹⁷

In essence, what Tyndale is stressing, once more, is that there can be no proper understanding of scripture, apart from the illumination and regeneration of the Spirit. Those who maintain only an empty profession—in their ignorance of the first principles of the law and the gospel, without genuine repentance and faith—inevitably distort the meaning of scripture. The blindness of the clergy promotes such ignorance among the common people.

[Y]ea, and so much more blind are our great clerks, that where the lay people for a great number of them are taught nought at all, they be all wrong[ly] taught, and the doctrine of their baptism is all corrupt unto them, with the leaven of false glosses, ere they come to read the scripture. So that the light which they bring with them to understand the scripture withal is utter darkness and as contrary unto the scripture as the devil unto Christ.

By reason whereof the scripture is locked up and become dark unto them that they grope for the door and can find no way in, and is become a maze unto them, which they wander in a mist ... and the brightness thereof hath blinded their eyes with malice, so that though they believe not the scripture to be false, yet they persecute the right understanding thereof, and cannot believe it true in the plain sense, which it speaketh to them in.¹¹⁸

This is a remarkable portrait of “the blind leading the blind”; as apropos today as the day it was written. Tyndale continues his assessment by noting that without a spiritual understanding, “the sentences of scripture are nothing but very riddles unto them, at the which they cast as the blind man doth at a crow, and expound by guess, an hundred doctors an hundred ways, and one man in twenty sermons alleging one text after twenty fashions, having no sure doctrine to cleave unto, and all for lack of the right knowledge of the profession of our baptism.”¹¹⁹

Tyndale further asserts, if we are not taught “the appointment made between God and us in Christ’s blood,” as represented in baptism,

the scripture is dark, and so far passing our capacity. And the cause why our expositions are heresies, is because we be wrong[ly] taught, and corrupt[ed] with false opinions beforehand and made heretics ere we come at the scripture, and have corrupt[ed] it, and it not us, as the taste of the sick maketh wholesome and well-seasoned meat bitter, wearish, and unsavoury. Nevertheless yet the scripture abideth pure in herself and bright, so that he which is sound in the faith shall at once perceive that the judgment of heretics is corrupt in their expositions, as an whole man doth feel at once, even with smelling to the meat, that the taste of the sick is infected.¹²⁰

Because “the scripture is the light and life of God’s elect” by which God regenerates and fashions them anew in the image of Christ, Tyndale rejects the popish argument that “the scripture maketh heretics”—an argument Romanists used to keep the Bible out of the language of the common people. Instead, Tyndale laboured tirelessly to translate the Bible into English. Nevertheless, the task of translation was only a part of his work. “[A]s it is not enough that the father and the mother have both begotten the child and brought it into this world, except they care for it and bring it up, till it can help itself: even so it is not enough to have translated, though it were the

whole scripture into the vulgar and common tongue, except we also brought again the light to understand it by, and expel that dark cloud which the hypocrites have spread over the face of the scripture, to blind the right sense and true meaning thereof.” To help clear the glosses of Rome, Tyndale refers readers to his *Compendious Introduction* to Romans and *A Path Way into the Holy Scripture*, as well as the exposition on 1 John that follows this Prologue.¹²¹

The Prologue and the other works he references demonstrate that, when Tyndale says he wants the plow-boy to know more scripture than the cleric, he is not simply envisioning the work of translation. Rather, he sees the concurrent need to foster the right use of scripture, by clearing the glosses of false expositions and wrong presuppositions; and, after clearing the corruptions, expounding the scriptures properly, unto the salvation of his readers. Tyndale’s labour was not an academic exercise, but preeminently a pastoral work.

After laying the general groundwork on the right understanding of scripture, Tyndale moves to the exposition. Correlating the first chapter of the gospel of John with the first verses of the epistle, Tyndale opens with a declaration regarding the person of Jesus: “[W]e have in plain and open words a manifest article of our faith, that our Saviour Christ is very God and very man.” Expounding the epistle further, in the second chapter, he stresses the satisfaction of Christ for sin: “Christ is our righteousness, our justifying, our redemption, our atonement, that hath appeased God, and cleanseth us from our sins, and all in his blood, so that his blood is the satisfaction only.” In his commentary on the fourth chapter, Tyndale treats the true nature of the incarnation, in contrast to the constructions of heretics, including the popish system which promulgates a practical denial of the work of Christ in the flesh. “For though the most part of all heretics confess that Christ is come in the flesh after their manner, yet they deny that he is come, as the scripture testifieth and the apostles preached him to come.” Regarding the Roman Antichrist, he states:

The pope preacheth that Christ is come to do away sins, yet not in the flesh, but in water, salt, oil, candles,

118. *The exposition of the fyrste Epistle of seynt Jhon*, sigs. Aiii(r-v); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), p. 9; *Works*, 2.139–140.

119. *The exposition of the fyrste Epistle of seynt Jhon*, sig. Aiii(v); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), p. 9; *Works*, 2.140.

120. *The exposition of the fyrste Epistle of seynt Jhon*, sigs. Av(v)–Avi(r); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), pp. 11–12; *Works*, 2.141–142.

121. *The exposition of the fyrste Epistle of seynt Jhon*, sigs. Avii(r-v); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), p. 14; cf. *Works*, 2.143–144.

boughs, ashes, friars' coats, and monks' cowls, and in the vows of them that forswear matrimony to keep whores, and swear beggary, to possess all the treasure, riches, wealth and pleasures of the world: and have vowed obedience, to disobey with authority, all the laws both of God and man. For in these hypocritical and false sacrifices, teacheth he us to trust for the forgiveness of sins, and not in Christ's flesh.¹²²

Throughout the exposition, there is an ongoing discussion regarding the nature of saving faith. Early in his commentary, Tyndale notes there is a "great difference between believing that there is a God and that Christ is God and man, and to believe in God and Christ, God and man, and in the promises of mercy that are in him. The first is common to good and bad, and unto devils thereto, and is called the faith and the belief of the history. The second is proper to the sons of God and is their life, as it is written, The righteous liveth by faith..." Commenting on verse 4:16, he adds, "[W]e believe not only with story faith, as men believe old chronicles, but we believe the love and mercy that God shewed us, and put our trust and confidence therein (and so taketh scripture belief): we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, made man, and was slain for our sins, which is a token of great love. And that love believe we, and trust thereto."¹²³

Saving faith is not a work of the sinner; it is produced by the regeneration of the Holy Spirit: "[W]e are in this our second birth God's workmanship and creation in Christ: so that as he which is yet unmade, hath no life nor power to work, no more had we till we were made again in Christ. The preaching of mercy in Christ quickened our hearts through faith, wrought by

the Spirit of Christ, which God poured into our hearts, ere we wist."¹²⁴

Throughout Tyndale's exposition of 1 John, there is also a substantial emphasis on worship. Tyndale's views on worship are rooted in his convictions regarding the authority and sufficiency of scripture. False beliefs and false works of service originate from human imagination, and, hence, being humanly-devised constructions, are a form of image service, or idolatry. This is but another reason why the scripture must be understood correctly: to foster true worship, rather than the inventions of men. Tyndale states:

And that thou mayest the better perceive the falsehood of our holy father's [*the pope's*] fleshly imagination, call to mind how that the scripture says, John the fourth chapter [4:24], God is a Spirit and must be worshipped in the spirit. That is, repentance, faith, hope, and love toward his law, and our neighbour for his sake, is his worship in the spirit. And therefore whosoever worshippeth God with works, and referreth his works to God, to be a sacrifice unto him, to appease him as though he delighted in the work for the work's sake, the same maketh of God an image or idol, and is an image-server, and as wicked an idolater as ever was any blind heathen, and serves God after the imagination of his own heart, and is abominable unto God: as thou seeest in how many places God defieth the sacrifice of the children of Israel, for the said imagination.¹²⁵

Over the next several pages, Tyndale critiques the sacraments, ceremonies and common practices within popery. He repeatedly decries these corruptions as springing from human imagination. The practice of penance "was enjoined to make satisfaction to God for the sin that was committed, robbing our souls of the fruit of Christ's blood and making us image servants, referring our deeds unto the person of God and worshipping him as an image of our own imagination with bodily work..."¹²⁶

To make offerings and gestures to the images of a saints "are with all like service plain idolatry, that is, in English, image-service." Citing Philippians 2:15-16, Tyndale says, "the worship which all true saints now seek, and the worship that all the true messengers of God seek this day, or ever shall seek, is to draw all to Christ with preaching the true word of God, and with the ensample of pure living fashioned thereafter. Will you therefore worship saints truly? Then ask what they preached, and believe their doctrine. And as they followed that doctrine, so conform your living like unto

122. *The exposition of the fyrste Epistle of seynt Jhon*, sigs. Aviii(r-v), Bvii(v)-Bviii(r), Fiii(r)-Fiiii(r); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), pp. 16, 29-30, 79-80; *Works*, 2.145, 157, 196, 197.

123. *The exposition of the fyrste Epistle of seynt Jhon*, sigs. Aviii (v), Fvii (r-v); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), pp. 17, 86; *Works*, 2.146, 201. See also, the paragraph that begins, "Let this be an undoubted article of thy faith, not a history faith, as thou believest a gest of Alexander, or of the old Romans, but of a lively faith and belief, to put thy trust and confidence in..." Sig. Bvi(r); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), p. 26; *Works*, 2.154. Similarly, on vs. 5:1, "To believe that Jesus is Christ, is to believe in Christ: that is, to believe earnestly, and to put all thy trust therein, and to lay the price of thy soul thereupon..." Sig. Gii(r); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), p. 91; *Works*, 2.205.

124. *The exposition of the fyrste Epistle of seynt Jhon*, sig. Fvi(r); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), p. 84; *Works*, 2.200.

125. *The exposition of the fyrste Epistle of seynt Jhon*, sig. Bviii(r); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), p. 30; *Works*, 2.157.

126. *The exposition of the fyrste Epistle of seynt Jhon*, sigs. Cii (v)-Ciii (r); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), p. 35; *Works*, 2.162.

theirs.” In a further reflection on the supposed merits of the saints, he responds that this is another notion “of our own imagination between the saints and us, in their merits for our image-service. Which can be but a false faith, seeing it hath not God’s word (unto which alone we ought to cleave) but is also clean contrary thereto.”¹²⁷

Near the end of the second chapter of John’s epistle, Tyndale discusses the intermediate state of men who have died, awaiting the return of Christ and the general resurrection of the dead. In this context, he reiterates the *sola scriptura* rule of theology. He cautions against the speculations of a man who “doth but teach the presumptuous imaginations of his own brain.” Tyndale reminds us that “the whole nature of man is poisoned and infected with sin.” Therefore,

God hid many things in his power, and commanded that we shall search none of his secrets further, than he hath opened them in his scripture, to mortify this poison of all poisons, the desire to appear wise, and that we be ashamed to be ignorant in any thing at all. Wherefore they that violently make articles of the faith without God’s word are yet alive in the root of all sin and vice, and grow out of the devil and not out of Christ. And their articles are of the blindness of the devil, and not of the light of Christ, for Christ’s light has testimony of the scripture everywhere.¹²⁸

Near the conclusion of the third chapter, Tyndale contrasts the keeping of God’s commandments (3:22), with the commandments of men.

[T]he text saith, because we keep his commandments. Yea verily his commandments make us bold. But the keeping of men’s traditions and dumb [*mute*] ceremonies make not bold before God, nor certify our conscience that our faith is unfeigned. Thou shalt not know by sprinkling yourself with holy water, nor kissing the pax [*crucifix*], nor with taking ashes, or though thou were anointed with all the oil in Thames street, that thy faith is sure. But and if thou couldest find in thine heart to bestow both life and goods upon thy neighbour in a just cause, and have proved it: then art thou sure, that thou lovest Christ, and feelest that thou hast thy trust in his blood.¹²⁹

Moving into chapter 4, Tyndale comes to the twelfth verse, “No man hath at any time seen God.” He applies the text simply:

And forasmuch as we never saw God, let us make no

image of him nor do him any image-service after our own imagination, but let us go to the scripture that hath seen him, and there wit [*know*] what fashion he is of, and what service he will be served with. Blind reason saith God is a carved post and will be served with a candle. But scripture saith, God is love, and will be served with love. If thou love thy neighbour then art thou the image of God yourself, and he dwelleth in the living temple of thine heart. And thy loving of thy neighbour for his sake, is his service and worship in the spirit, and a candle that burneth before him in thine heart and casteth out the light of good works before the world, and draweth all to God, and maketh his enemies leave their evil, and come and worship him also.¹³⁰

From chapter 5, Tyndale demonstrates that the popish sacraments have been transformed into idolatry, by divorcing the observances from the word, and turning them into meritorious works: “[in popery] we are not taught to take the sacraments for witnesses, but for image-service, and to offer the work of them to God, with such a mind as the old heathen offered sacrifices of beasts unto their gods. So that whatsoever testifieth unto us that we have everlasting life in Christ, that mouth have they stopped with a leavened manchet [*wafers*] of their Pharisaical glosses.”¹³¹

Tyndale renders the final verse of the epistle as, “Little children beware of images,” followed by over fourteen pages of concluding exposition. He opens this section with a description of idolatry which might similarly have been an exposition of the second commandment. The final section begins:

Serve none image in your hearts. Idolatry is Greek, and the English is image-service: And an idolater is also Greek, and the English an image-servant. Be not idolaters nor commit idolatry: that is, be none image-servants, nor do any image-service, but beware of serving all manner [of] images. And think it not enough to have put all the images of false gods out of the way, if ye now set up the image of very God and of his true saints

127. *The exposition of the fyrste Epistle of seynt Jhon*, sigs. Ciiii (r-v), Cv(vo–Cvi(r)); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), p. 40; *Works*, 2.164, 166.

128. *The exposition of the fyrste Epistle of seynt Jhon*, sigs. Eiii(r-v); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), p. 64; cf. *Works*, 2.185.

129. *The exposition of the fyrste Epistle of seynt Jhon*, sig. Fi(v); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), p. 76; *Works*, 2.194.

130. *The exposition of the fyrste Epistle of seynt Jhon*, sig. Fvi(v); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), p. 85; *Works*, 2.200–201.

131. *The exposition of the fyrste Epistle of seynt Jhon*, sig. Gv(r); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), p. 96; *Works*, 2.210.

in their rooms, to do the same service unto them which ye did unto the other. For you may do as strong image-service unto the image of God and of his saints, as unto the images of false Gods: yea, you may commit as great idolatry to God, and yet before no outward image, but before the image which thou hast feigned of God in thine heart, as thou mayest before an outward image of the devil. The Jews in the temple of God, where was none image of God, did as great image-service to God, as the heathen unto their false gods: yea, the Jews, in doing to God the things which God commanded them, did commit worse idolatry and sinned more grievously against God, than the heathen did in offering unto their false gods, which thing to be true the prophets testify. For when the Jews did their ceremonies and sacrifices: the meaning and signification lost, and the cause forgotten which God ordained them for: to flatter and please God with the gloriousness of the deed in itself, and to purchase aught of him for the costliness or properness of the present, what other [else] made they of God in their imagination, than a child, whom, if he cry or be displeased, men still with a puppet, or if we will have him to do aught, make him an horse of a stick?¹³²

AN EXPOSITION OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT
(1533)

Tyndale's last major expositional work is a treatment of Christ's Sermon on the Mount. While the exposition is quite devotional, the expanded title emphasizes Tyndale's larger focus on the right use of scripture. In modern orthography, the title page begins, *An exposition upon the fifth, sixth, [and] seventh chapters of Matthew, which three chapters are the key and the door of the scripture, and the restoring again of Moses' law corrupted by the scribes and Pharisees. And the exposition is the restoring again of Christ's law corrupted by the papists.* Beneath this long title is a further paragraph, *Item: before the book, thou hast a prologue very necessary, containing the whole sum of the covenant made between God and*

us, upon which we be baptized to keep it. The hermeneutical cast of the work is unmistakable.

The choice to expound the Sermon on the Mount is significant, no doubt, because in this portion of Matthew's gospel Christ systematically clears away the glosses of the Pharisees imposed upon Moses, in order to explain the right understanding of the law. In the twenty-first century, even casual readers of the Bible are familiar with the Sermon on the Mount as a prominent portion from Christ's teaching ministry; yet we should remember that this was not the case in Tyndale's time. Through his translation and exposition, it is Tyndale who introduced this passage to English readers in their native tongue; he is the man who brought the cadence of the Beatitudes into common discourse.

At the outset of his Prologue, Tyndale explains the importance of a proper understanding of the law, because the law "in her right understanding is the key, or at the least way the first and principal key to open the door of scripture. And the law is the very way that bringeth unto the door Christ," as "our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ" (Gal. 3). Conversely, "if thou give the law a false gloss and say: that the law is a thing which a man may do of his own strength, even out of the power of his free will: and that by the deeds of the law thou mayest deserve forgiveness of thy fore [previous] sins: then died Christ in vain, Galatians 2, and is made almost of no stead, seeing thou art become thine own saviour." With such a critical issue, Tyndale warns that by "false interpretation of the law," Christ is lost and "the scripture locked up." It is a tool of hypocrites to "cover over with the mist of their glosses, that the light thereof should not be seen."¹³³

Throughout his prologue, Tyndale draws contrasts between true believers and hypocrites. It is a fitting discussion as preparatory to his exposition of the Sermon on the Mount. "And read here the words of Christ with this exposition following, and thou shalt see the law, faith and works, restored each to his right use and true meaning. And thereto, the clear difference between the spiritual regiment and the temporal, and shalt have an entrance and open way into the rest of all the scripture. Wherein and in all other things the Spirit of verity guide thee and thine understanding. Amen."¹³⁴

Moving to his exposition, Tyndale's underlying premise for the beatitudes is: "Righteousness in this place is not taken for the principal righteousness of a Christian man, through which the person is good and accepted before God. For these eight points are but doctrine of the fruits and works of a Christian man, before which the faith must be there: to make righteous without all

132. *The exposition of the fyrste Epistle of seynt Jhon*, sigs. Gviii(v)–Hi(r); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), pp. 102–103; *Works*, 2.214–215.

133. *An exposition vppon the .v. .vi. .vii. chapters of Mathew: which thre chaptres are the keye and the dore of the scripture, and the restoringe agayne of Moses lawe corrupte by the Scrybes and Pharises.* (1533). Fols. ii–v, sigs. Aii(v)–Aiiii(r); cf. *The Exposition of the Fyrst Epistle of Seynt Jhon and Exposition Vppon the V. VI. VIII. Chapters of Mathew* (J. Christopher Warner, ed.; Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2023), pp. 123–126; *Works*, 2.3–5.

134. *An exposition* (1533), fol. xii, sig. Biiii(r); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), p. 138; *Works*, 2.15.

deserving of works and as a tree out of which all such fruits and works must spring.¹³⁵ In other words, justification must not be confounded with sanctification, but it is understood that sanctification follows justification, since regeneration results in both faith and a new heart in the believer. This was a critical contrast between Pharisaism and the true teaching of the law; for the Pharisees sought justification by works, yet at the same time were devoid of genuine piety. Their outward works revealed their ongoing breaches of the true teaching of the law.¹³⁶

Ever on his guard against forced constructions placed upon the word of God, Tyndale makes an arresting remark, “when God’s word is altered with false glosses, it is no more God’s word.”¹³⁷ This statement shows the importance of hermeneutics. *When the Bible is wrongly interpreted it ceases to be the word of God.* Tyndale’s purpose in providing a translation fit for plow-boys was not to give the readers the Bible, in order for them to confirm their own misconceptions, or make imaginative uses of the text. Rather, the Bible is to be read in its own terms, in order to shape their thoughts, that under the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit, they might be granted understanding unto faith and regeneration, and walk in newness of life. That is what it truly means, to know more scripture than the clerics of the day.

In treating vs. 4, “Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted,” Tyndale speaks of the comfort given to the godly, although they suffer cruel persecution. He makes a poignant application: “How overcome they (wilt thou say) that be always persecuted, and ever slain? Verily in every battle some of them that win the field, be slain: yet they leave the victory unto their dear friends for whose sakes they took the fight upon them, and therefore are conquerors, seeing they obtain their purpose and maintain that they fought for.”¹³⁸ The fact that English readers of the Bible worldwide still read these verses of the beatitudes in virtually the same form as they were originally rendered by Tyndale is a testimony to a notable victory he left to “dear friends” for generations, after he was slain on the battlefield during his endeavours.

The intensity of this spiritual battle was ever present to Tyndale, who left his native land (never to return), and laboured under continual threats to his life, in order to bring the word of God to his countrymen. He exemplified the duty of Christians to be the salt of the earth. As he notes, salt may be an irritant:

The office of an Apostle and true preacher is to salt, not only the corrupt manners and conversation of earthly

people, but also the rotten heart within and all that springeth out thereof, their natural reason, their will, their understanding and wisdom: yea, and their faith and belief and *all that they have imagined without God’s word, concerning righteousness, justifying, satisfaction and serving of God.* And the nature of salt is to bite, fret and make smart.¹³⁹

Since men are not eager to have their sins rebuked, “True preaching is a salting that stirreth up persecution, and an office that no man is meet for save he that is seasoned himself before with poverty in spirit, softness, meekness, patience, mercifulness, pureness of heart and hunger of righteousness, and looking for persecution too: and hath all his hope, comfort and solace in the blessing only, and in no worldly thing.”¹⁴⁰ In this manner, the corrupt system of Rome must be confronted: “The pope’s pardons must be rebuked, the abuse of the mass, of the sacraments and of all the ceremonies must be rebuked and salted. And selling of merits and of prayers must be salted. The abuse of fasting and of pilgrimage must be salted. All idolatry and false faith must be rebuked.”¹⁴¹

135. *An exposition* (1533), fol. xvii, sigs. Ci(r-v); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), p. 146; *Works*, 2.22.

136. As he reiterates elsewhere, “Whatsoever holiness, wisdom, virtue, perfectness or righteousness is in the world among men, howsoever perfect and holy they appear, yet is all damnable darkness, except the right knowledge of Christ’s blood be there first, to justify the heart before all other holiness.” Fol. xviii, sig. Diii(r); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), p. 161; *Works*, 2.34.

137. From Tyndale’s comments on Matt. 5:20, *An exposition* (1533), fol. xxxiii, sig. Eii(r); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), p. 170; *Works*, 2.41.

138. *An exposition* (1533), fol. xv, sig. Bvii(v); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), p. 143; *Works*, 2.20.

139. *An exposition* (1533), fol. xxv, sig. Di (v); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), pp. 157–158; *Works*, 2.31. Emphasis added.

140. *An exposition* (1533), fol. xxvi, sig. Dii(r); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), p. 158; *Works*, 2.32. “He that is not ready to give his life for the maintenance of Christ’s doctrine against hypocrites, with whatsoever name or title they be disguised, the same is not worthy of Christ nor can be Christ’s disciple, by the very words and testimony of Christ. Nevertheless we must use wisdom, patience, meekness and a discreet process after the due order of charity in our defending the word of God, lest while we go about to amend our prelates we make them worse. But when we have proved all that charity bindeth us and yet in vain: then we must come forth openly and rebuke their wickedness in the face of the world and jeopard life and all thereon” (Fol. xxx, sig. Dvi(v); cf. *The exposition* {Warner, ed.}, p. 165; *Works*, 2.37).

141. *An exposition* (1533), fol. xxvi, sig. Dii(r); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), p. 159; *Works*, 2.32. A short time later, he adds, “And what if the doctrine be not true salt? Verily then is it to be trodden under foot: as must all wearish and unsavoury ceremonies which have lost their significations, and not only teach not and are become unprofitable and do no more service to man: but also have obtained authority

Considering the Lord's statement in Matthew 5:17–18, Tyndale stresses that Jesus did not overturn the law, but restored it to its right use and understanding. The Lord was teaching his disciples the doctrine

wherewith they should lighten the blind understanding of man, and with true knowledge drive out the false opinions and sophistical persuasions of natural reason, and deliver the scripture out of the captivity of false glosses which the hypocritical Pharisees had patched thereto: and so out of the light of true knowledge, to stir up a new living, and to salt and season the corrupt manners of the old blind conversation. For where false doctrine, corrupt opinions and sophistical glosses reign in the wit and understanding: there is the living devilish in the sight of God, howsoever it appear in the sight of the blind world. And on the other side, where the doctrine is true and perfect, there followeth godly living of necessity. For out of the inward belief of the heart floweth the outward conversation of the members.¹⁴²

In the sixth chapter of Matthew, Christ expands his critique beyond the doctrine of the scribes and Pharisees to their *practices*. By exposing these religious leaders, Christ is not denigrating common deeds of piety, but exposing the hypocritical observance of such practices: "Christ here destroyeth not prayer, fasting and alms deed: but preacheth against the false purpose and intent of such works and perverting the true use: that is to say, their seeking of glory, and that they esteemed themselves righteous thereby and better than other men, and so despised and condemned their brethren."¹⁴³

To give alms, to pray, to fast or to do any thing at all, whether between thee and God, or between thee and thy neighbour, canst thou never do to please God therewith, except thou have the true knowledge of God's word to season thy deeds withal. For God hath put a rule in the

as God in the heart of man, that man serveth them and putteth in them the trust and confidence that he should put in God his maker through Jesus Christ his redeemer. Are the institutions of man better than God's?" (*An exposition*, fol. xxvii, sig. Diii(r); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), p. 160; *Works*, 2.33).

142. *An exposition* (1533), fol. xxxi, sig. Dvii(r); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), pp. 165–166; *Works*, 2.38.

143. *An exposition* (1533), fol. lxiii, sig. Hvii(v); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), pp. 210–211; *Works*, 2.73.

144. *An exposition* (1533), fols. lxvii, liii(v); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), p. 216; *Works*, 2.77–78.

145. *An exposition* (1533), fol. lxii, sig. Hvi(r); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), p. 209; *Works*, 2.72.

146. *An exposition* (1533), fol. xcvi, sig. Ni(v)–fol. xcvi, sig. Nii(v); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), pp. 259–260; *Works*, 2.112, 113.

scripture without which thou canst not move a hair of thine head, but that it is damnable in the sight of God. As it is of the Jews, though (as Paul beareth them record) they have a fervent zeal to God, yea and have the scripture thereto: yet because they have not the true understanding, all is damnable that they do.¹⁴⁴

This last remark is telling with respect to the worship and service of God. The Lord must be served according to the rule of scripture. Nevertheless, if service is offered to God, drawn from his word, but performed with a wrong understanding or abuse, then it is damnable. The scribes and Pharisees possessed the scriptures; yet, due to their misunderstanding and abuse of scripture, they were condemned as hypocrites. Building on his earlier statement, regarding the negation of God's word through misinterpretation, Tyndale expands his thought: "For as the scripture corrupt[ed] with glosses, is no more God's word, even so the deeds commanded in the scripture (when the intent of them is perverted) are no more godly deeds."¹⁴⁵

Tyndale continues his treatment of the sixth chapter of Matthew, covering the Lord's prayer. He stresses further that good deeds are the fruit of genuine faith, and presses the importance of seeking first the kingdom of God.

Moving to the seventh chapter, he explains Christ's warning against judging as an admonition against hypocrisy, making pointed application to contemporary clerics.

The hypocrites will have fastings, prayings, kneeling, crouching, ducking and a thousand ceremonies of their own invention; and whosoever do not as they do, him they count a damned soul by and by.... O hypocrite, cast out first the beam that is in thine own eye, and then thou shalt see better. Thou understandest all God's laws falsely, and therefore thou keepest none of them truly: his laws require mercy and not sacrifice. Moreover, thou hast a false intent in all the works that thou doest, and therefore are they all damnable in the sight of God. Hypocrite, cast out the beam that is in thine own eye, learn to understand the law of God truly, and to do thy works aright, and for the intent that God ordained them. And then thou shalt see whether thy brother have a mote in his eye or not, and if he have, how to pluck it out, and else not.¹⁴⁶

On Matthew 7:7–11, Tyndale describes prayer as a natural reflection of faith. "To pray is God's commandment, as it is to believe in God, to love God or to love thy

neighbour: and so are alms and fasting also. Neither is it possible to believe in God, to love him or to love thy neighbour, but that prayer will spring out therehence immediately.¹⁴⁷

The golden rule is self-explanatory; it “is a short sermon, that no man need complain that he cannot for the length, bear it away. It is so nigh thee, that thou needest not to send over sea for it.”¹⁴⁸ It encompasses the law and the prophets, in reflecting the two greatest commandments, to love God, and to love our neighbour as ourselves, “as when Paul saith, Love is the fulfilling of the law. That is, to do as thou wouldest be done to, is all the law that is between thee and thy neighbour, and that according to the true understanding and interpreting of all true prophets.”¹⁴⁹

Few men find the strait gate: “[T]heir own wisdom, their own power and the reasons of their own sophistry blind them utterly. That is to say: the light of their own doctrine which is in them, is so extreme darkness that they cannot see....”¹⁵⁰

Many are deceived by false prophets. In his analysis, Tyndale observes that such men fashion an image of God after themselves.

But the false prophets do well to paint God after the likeness of their own visenomy [*physiognomy*]: glad when he receiveth, yea when they receive in his name: but sour, grudging and evil content when he giveth again. But thou pleasest God, when thou asketh in faith, and when thou receivest with thanks, and when thou rejoicest in his gifts and lovest him again, to keep his commandments, and the appointment and covenant made between him and thee.

And for a conclusion besides, that they expel faith which is the goodness of all works: they set up works of their own making to destroy the works of God, and to be holier than God’s works, to the despising of God’s works, and to make God’s works vile.

With their chastity they destroy the chastity that God ordained and only requireth. With their obedience, they destroy the obedience that God ordained in this world, and desireth no other. With their poverty they destroy the poverty of the spirit which Christ taught only: which is, only not to love worldly goods. With their fast, they destroy the fast which God commandeth, that is a perpetual soberness to tame the flesh. With their pattering prayer, they destroy the prayer taught by God, which is either thanks, or desiring help, with faith and trust that God heareth me.¹⁵¹

In this situation, it is essential to judge men by their fruits. “But go to and judge their works, for the spiritual judgeth all things saith Paul, 1 Cor. 2. Who is that spiritual? Not such as we now call men of holy church, but all that have the true interpretation of the law written in their hearts, the right faith of Christ and the true intent of works, which God biddeth us work. He is spiritual and judgeth all things, and is judged of no man.”¹⁵²

After the conclusion of Christ’s sermon, Matthew notes that the people were astonished by the teachings of Jesus, because “he taught them as one having power, and not as the scribes” (7:29). Tyndale wraps up his exposition with reflections on the transformative power of the word of God, and its proper use.

Christ’s words were spirit and life, John 6.... A man before the preaching of God’s word is but one man, all flesh, the soul consenting unto the lusts of the flesh, to follow them. But the sword of the word of God where it taketh effect, divideth a man in two, and setteth him at variance against his own self: The flesh haling one way, and the spirit drawing another: the flesh raging to follow lusts, and the spirit calling back again, to follow the law and will of God. A man all the while he consenteth to the flesh and before he be born again in Christ, is called soul or carnal. But when he is renewed in Christ through the word of life, and hath the love of God and of his neighbour, and the faith of Christ written in his heart, he is called spirit or spiritual. The Lord of all mercy send us preachers with power: that is to say, true expounders of the word of God and speakers to the heart of man: and deliver us from scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites, and all false prophets. Amen.¹⁵³

Note the sharp contrast between false prophets and “true expounders” who preach “to the heart of man.” It is only the latter who are making the right use of the scripture.

147. *An exposicion* (1533), fol. c, sig. Niiii(v); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), p. 263; *Works*, 2.115.

148. *An exposicion* (1533), fol. ciii, sig. Nvii(r); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), p. 267; *Works*, 2.118.

149. *An exposicion* (1533), fol. ciii, sig. Nvii(v)–fo. ciiii, sig. Nviii(r); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), p. 268; *Works*, 2.119–120.

150. *An exposicion* (1533), fol. ciii, sig. Nviii(v); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), p. 269; *Works*, 2.120, 121.

151. *An exposicion* (1533), fol. cx, sig. Ovii(v)–fol. Cxi, sig. Ovii(r); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), pp. 278–279; *Works*, 2.127.

152. *An exposicion* (1533), fol. cxi, sig. Ovii(v); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), p. 279; *Works*, 2.128.

153. *An exposicion* (1533), fol. cxiii, sig. Pii(v)–fol. cxv, sig. Piii(r); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), pp. 283–284; *Works*, 2.131–132.

THE NEW TESTAMENT (1534)

After working on translations of Old Testament books from the Hebrew text, Tyndale refined his New Testament translation, and published the revision in 1534. He observes that the New Testament, while written in Greek, was penned by writers whose thoughts and expressions reflect the Hebrew background of the Old Testament. The New Testament is, in many ways, Greek written from a Hebrew mindset.¹⁵⁴

This new edition of the New Testament also includes features that made it a “study Bible.” There are prologues for individual books of the New Testament. The margins include textual notes explaining important or obscure terms and providing cross-references to parallel passages of scripture. There are additional interpretive notes to clear glosses of the papists, as well as pithy devotional comments, applications drawn from the text, and side-headings.

To modern readers, these features may seem rather basic, although Tyndale’s references and notes are less extensive than those found in later Bibles. Nevertheless, the grand scope of Tyndale’s project was revolutionary in its day. The design of this publication reflects his view of the importance of biblical hermeneutics, providing aids to make the right use scripture. These features reflect how scripture is its own interpreter, by encouraging readers to adhere to biblical terminology, as it is used in context, and compare scripture with scripture to clear difficulties, without imposing false constructions on the text.

A detailed analysis of Tyndale’s New Testament could be a book of its own; the present study will only cover some highlights. The volume begins with a general introduction, “W.T. to the Reader, in which he retraces some of the themes covered in his previous works.

154. See Tyndale’s explanation in his introduction, “W.T. to the Reader,” *The new Testament, only gently corrected and compared with the Greke by William Tindale* (Nov. 1534), sig. Ai(v); cf. *Tyndale’s New Testament*, David Daniell, ed. (Yale, 1989), p. 3.

155. *The new Testament* (Nov. 1534), sigs. *ii(v)–sig. 4(r); cf. *Tyndale’s New Testament*, David Daniell, ed. (Yale, 1989), pp. 4–5.

156. *The new Testament* (Nov. 1534), sig. *v(r); cf. *Tyndale’s New Testament*, David Daniell, ed. (Yale, 1989), p. 6.

157. *The new Testament* (Nov. 1534), sigs. *vi(r)–**iii(v); cf. *Tyndale’s New Testament*, David Daniell, ed. (Yale, 1989), pp. 7–12.

158. For English readers who wish to compare Tyndale’s prologues with Luther’s Prefaces, consult volume 6 of the “Philadelphia” edition of *Works of Martin Luther* (Muhlenberg Press, 1932), pp. 439–479; compared with *The new Testament* (Nov. 1534), or more handily, in Daniell’s edition of *Tyndale’s New Testament* (1989). Also note Ralph Werrell’s synopsis of contrasts between Luther’s approach to scripture and Tyndale, *The Roots of William Tyndale’s Theology*, pp. 57–58.

Readers need to “search for the profession of our baptism or covenants made betwixt God and us,” in order to “understand the scripture unto our salvation.” We find that “the whole law was given to utter our corrupt nature,” with the essence of the law summarized in the ten commandments, and comprehended in the two great commandments: to love God, and love our neighbour. He distinguishes between a true faith and a vain faith (or false profession): “two things are required to begin a Christian man. The first is a steadfast faith and trust in almighty God, to obtain all the mercy that he hath promised us, through the deserving and merits of Christ’s blood only, without all respect of our own works. And the other is, that we forsake evil and turn to God, to keep his laws and to fight against ourselves and our corrupt nature...” For Tyndale, sanctification is never severed from justification, as our profession (or covenant) in baptism requires the mortification of sin, in those who have new life in Christ Jesus.¹⁵⁵

As always, our duty is to follow God’s word against its principal rival, human imagination: “And, Matt. 7, all that hear the word of God and do not, thereafter build on sand: that is, as the foundation laid on sand cannot resist violence of water, but is undermined and overthrown, even so the faith of them that have no lust [*desire*] nor love to the law of God build upon the sand of their own imaginations, and not on the rock of God’s word according to his covenants, turneth to desperation in time of tribulation and when God cometh to judge.”¹⁵⁶

After further discussion of the law and the gospel, Tyndale has two sections covering specific terms in the text: *repentance* and *elders*. These were among the terms that his popish detractors had criticized in their attempts to discredit the previous edition of his New Testament. Tyndale explains the accuracy of his translation by drawing upon the Hebrew and Greek usage of the words. At the end of this introduction, he adds simple background summaries for each of the four gospels.¹⁵⁷

After the narrative books of the New Testament, Tyndale supplies particular prologues for the epistles. The prologue for Romans is essentially a reprint of Tyndale’s important *Compendious Introduction* of 1528. For many other epistles, Tyndale draws upon portions of prefaces to Luther’s 1522 edition of the New Testament. Yet, in significant places, Tyndale departs from Luther and pens original prologues more suited to the emphasis of the text.¹⁵⁸

Regarding the book of Hebrews, Tyndale replaces Luther’s brief, puzzled reflections on the epistle with an introduction of his own. Luther begins his preface

by grouping the letter to the Hebrews with James, Jude and Revelation, as books of a lesser reputation than the “chief books” of the New Testament. He expresses uncertainty about the authorship of Hebrews, and is troubled by difficult passages in chapters 6, 10, and 12 that seem to deny the prospect of repentance in situations where other scripture would allow it. Luther concludes his brief introduction by commending certain positive features of the epistle, indicating that these elements of gold, silver, and precious stones should be accepted, though they be mixed with wood straw and hay.¹⁵⁹

Tyndale’s prologue to Hebrews is altogether different than Luther’s. First, Tyndale never accepts Luther’s downgraded view of this epistle (or other general epistles); whereas Luther speaks of wood, hay or straw, intermixed with precious materials in the book, Tyndale states that the author has built on the “ground of the faith of Christ,” “cunningly [*skillfully*] thereon pure gold, silver and precious stones.”¹⁶⁰

On the question of authorship, Luther asserts that it makes no difference, and Tyndale concurs. Nevertheless, where Luther struggles to reconcile troublesome passages with other portions of scripture, Tyndale resolves those interpretive questions, addressing the concerns raised from chapters 6, 10, and 12. Tyndale’s assumption is, as stated elsewhere, that the difficult passages of scripture are understood by comparing them to the clearer passages.

Wherefore seeing no scripture is of private interpretation: but must be expounded according to the general articles of our faith and agreeable to other open and evident texts, and confirmed or compared to like sentences, why should we not understand these places with like reverence as we do the other, namely when all the remnant of the epistle is so godly and of so great learning?¹⁶¹

Tyndale then reviews the difficult passages in Hebrews 6, 10, and 12, explaining how they blend with other passages in the Bible. After that, he remarks on the chief value of the epistle in proving the priesthood of Christ.

Moreover there is no work in all scripture that so plainly declareth the meaning and significations of the sacrifices, ceremonies and figures of the old testament, as this epistle: insomuch that if willful blindness and malicious malice were not the cause, this epistle only were enough to weed out of the hearts of the Papiests that cankered heresy of justifying of works, concerning

our sacraments, ceremonies and all manner traditions of their own invention.¹⁶²

Stressing the harmony of Hebrews with the rest of scripture, Tyndale closes with a reiteration of the canonicity of the book. “And seeing the epistle agreeth to all the rest of the scripture, if it be indifferently looked on, how should it not be of authority and taken for holy scripture?”¹⁶³

Both Luther and Tyndale provide combined introductions to the books of James and Jude. Luther continues his two-tiered approach to scripture, relegating James and Jude to a secondary status, and raising questions of their authorship. By contrast, Tyndale asserts that the book of James “ought of right to be taken for holy scripture,” and he immediately demonstrates how the teaching of the epistle harmonizes with other passages of scripture. The common objections to James are built upon a misunderstanding of the true meaning of the epistle, and not the result of any defect on the part of James.¹⁶⁴

Respecting the teaching of James that “faith without deeds is dead in itself,” Tyndale explains,

he meaneth none other thing than all the scripture doth: how that faith which hath no good deeds following, is a false faith and none of that faith justifieth or receiveth forgiveness of sins. For God promised them only forgiveness of their sins which turn to God to keep his laws. Wherefore they that purpose to continue still in sin have no part in that promise: but deceive themselves, if they believe that God hath forgiven them their old sins for Christ’s sake.¹⁶⁵

These observations are consistent with Tyndale’s exhortations elsewhere, warning men against presumption or a hypocritical profession. To keep the law fundamentally is to demonstrate a love for God and one’s neighbour, the two chief commandments of the law. Those with

159. *Works of Martin Luther*, 6.476, 477.

160. *The new Testament* (Nov. 1534), fol. cccxxxiii, sig. tiii(r); cf. *Tyndale’s New Testament*, p. 347.

161. *The new Testament* (Nov. 1534), fol. cccxxxii, sig. tii(r); cf. *Tyndale’s New Testament*, p. 346.

162. *The new Testament* (Nov. 1534), fol. cccxxxiii, sig. tiii(r); cf. *Tyndale’s New Testament*, p. 347.

163. *The new Testament* (Nov. 1534), fol. cccxxxiii, sig. tiii(v); cf. *Tyndale’s New Testament*, p. 347.

164. *Works of Martin Luther*, 6.476–479; *The new Testament* (Nov. 1534), fol. cccxlvi, sig. xi(v)–fol. cccxlvi, sig. xii(r); cf. *Tyndale’s New Testament*, pp. 361–362.

165. *The new Testament* (Nov. 1534), fol. cccxlvi, sig. xii(r); cf. *Tyndale’s New Testament*, p. 361.

true faith in Christ now have the law of God written upon their hearts, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, and walk in a newness of life, as an outward reflection of their inward faith.

Tyndale next explains that the distinct uses of the term *justify*, in the epistles of Paul and James, are governed by their contexts, in which Paul is speaking of a man's (forensic) justification before God, whereas James is merely speaking of a man's outward proof of his faith, made visible to other men. These are two very different things, so there is no contradiction between the two epistles, if the relevant passages are rightly understood.

And after when he saith that a man is justified by deeds and not of faith only, he will no more than that faith doth not so justify everywhere, that nothing justifieth save faith. For deeds also do justify. And as faith only justifieth before God, so do deeds only justify before the world, whereof is enough spoken, partly in the Prologue on Paul to the Romans, and also in other places. For as Paul affirmeth, Rom. 4, that Abraham was not justified by works afore God, but by faith only, as Genesis beareth record, so will James that deeds only justified him before the world, and faith wrought with his deeds: that is to say, faith wherewith he was righteous before God in the heart did cause him to work the will of God outwardly, whereby he was righteous before the world, and whereby the world perceived that he believed in God loved and feared God. And as, Hebrews 11, the scripture affirmeth that Rahab was justified before God through faith, so doth James affirm that through works by which she shewed her faith, she was justified before the world, and it is true.¹⁶⁶

Luther dismisses Jude in a single paragraph, as a mere imitation of 2 Peter. Tyndale commends the book in his own short summary, appealing to the unity of scripture as a basis for its inclusion in the canon. “[S]eeing the matter is so godly and agreeing to other places of holy scripture, I see not but that it ought to have the authority of holy scripture.”¹⁶⁷

As previously indicated, the marginal notes adjacent to the text are of distinct types. Textual notes and cross-references flow from Tyndale's conviction respecting the self-interpreting nature of scripture. These notes help readers consider both the immediate context and meaning of a passage, as well as the larger compass of the

scriptures as a whole. Side-headings and topic markers serve as navigational aids for searching the scriptures for comparative analysis. We should also recall that, at this time, the published text did not feature verse numbers (only chapter numbers), making the marginal notes even more valuable for locating particular passages.

The interpretive notes and pithy applications are a much smaller portion of the marginalia. The explanatory notes in the New Testament seem less polemical than those found in the Pentateuch. Many marginal comments are pastoral in nature, directing readers positively to chief matters of faith and practice, occasionally identifying popish errors which contradict the fundamental truths or duties of the Christian faith.

The identification of covenants is a prime example among the topical notes. In his introduction to the reader, Tyndale states the importance of the subject: “Faith now in God the Father through our Lord Jesus Christ, according to the covenants and appointment made between God and us, is our salvation. Wherefore I have ever noted the covenants in the margins, and also the promises.” In many cases, the subject is emphasized by the single word *covenant*, or *covenants*; these annotations may indicate conditional promises, such as those adjacent to the beatitudes and other portions of the Sermon on the Mount: Matthew 5:6; 6:14; 7:7; Luke 6:21, 35. Additional passages with this singular notation include Matthew 10:41; 19:28; 25:29, 45; Mark 11:25; Luke 9:26, 11:9; 12:8–10, 48; 18:29, 30; John 15:7; 2 Cor. 11:16; 2 Tim. 2:11ff. In the case of Heb. 8:9ff., the simple reference to “covenant,” does not infer a condition, but gives attention to a promise made by God in the new covenant.

In some cases, Tyndale provides extended notes, to explain the nature of a promise. Adjacent to Matthew 13:10ff., he says, “A covenant to them that love the word of God to further it, that they shall increase therein, and another that they that love it not, shall lose it again, and wax blind.” A promise may also carry a threat; regarding the parable in Matthew 16:28, he states that it is a “covenant to the unmerciful.”

The largest number of notes consist simply of single words, or short phrases, free of added commentary. In the gospels and the book of Acts, these notes help readers locate specific events or topics, when navigating through extended narratives. The opening book of Matthew illustrates their functions. Notes of single words mark people, places, or topics: “Immanuel” (Matthew 1:23), “Centurion” (8:5), “Sadducees” (22:23), “Antichrist” (24:4), “Barabbas” (27:25), “Gergesenes” (8:28), “Nineveh” (12:41), “Gennesaret” (14:15), “Salt”

166. *The new Testament* (Nov. 1534), fol. cccxlviii, sig. xii(r); cf. *Tyndale's New Testament*, pp. 361, 362.

167. *Works of Martin Luther*, 6.479; *The new Testament* (Nov. 1534), fol. cccxlviii, sig. xi(v); cf. *Tyndale's New Testament*, p. 362.

(5:13), “Light” (5:15), “Alms” (6:1), “Fasting” (6:16), “Fear” (10:28), “Yoke” (11:28), “Leaven” (13:33), “Treasure” (13:44), “Transfiguration” (17:2), and “Tribute” (17:24).

Many topical notes are simple descriptions or brief sentences: “Two masters” (5:24), “Kingdom of heaven” (5:33), “Judge not” (7:1), “Strait gate” and “Narrow way” (7:14), “Men’s precepts” (15:9), “Blind leaders” (15:14), “Chief commandment” (22:37), “Destruction of the temple” (24:2), “False prophets:” (24:11). In the latter portion of the book, such phrases mark particular events in the sufferings of Christ: “He is anointed” (26:7), “He is betrayed” (26:50), “He is falsely accused” (26:60), “He is scourged” (27:26), “He is crucified” (27:35), “He is buried” (27:59). The final note in Matthew, associated with the Great Commission, is simply “All power” (28:28).

There are simple, factual notes related to the text. For example, the expression “the sixth hour” (Matthew 20:5), is explained in the margin: “The Jews reckon one, when the sun is up an hour.”

Another class of notes are those that might be called “expository.” These notes go beyond the mere mention of places, people, and topics. They include applications drawn from the text, designed to reinforce the message, or employ the text to refute common errors held by the ignorant or theological adversaries. Such notes are fewer in number than the others.

Within the book of Romans, Tyndale includes marginal notes to emphasize the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Additionally, he stresses the necessity of deeds working through love as the fruit of faith. One further note reflects Tyndale’s ongoing concern for both preachers and readers to embrace proper principles of biblical interpretation. Regarding the “gift of prophecy,” Romans 12:6, he explains, “Prophecy is taken here for the expounding of scriptures: which in dark places must be expounded that it agree to the open places and general articles of the faith.” Once more he is stressing the self-interpreting nature of scripture, whereby the clearer passages govern the understanding of the more difficult or obscure texts. Further, based upon the analogy of faith, no interpretation is allowable, if it contravenes the “general articles of the faith.”

THE FIRST BOOK OF MOSES, CALLED GENESIS, REVISED (1534)

As indicated, Tyndale revised his New Testament translation, after translating Old Testament books from Hebrew. Further, after working more extensively with the Hebrew scriptures, he issued a revised translation of the book of Genesis in 1534. The most important change was

his use of the word *covenant*, in places where he had previously rendered the Hebrew term as appointment.¹⁶⁸

This translation of the word *covenant* has wider implications in relation to Tyndale’s theology as a whole (and in relation to the development of covenant theology), an important topic, but beyond the focus of this present study.¹⁶⁹ Nevertheless, this textual revision illustrates the care given by Tyndale to accurate rendering of the terminology in the Bible. Such revisions are consistent with his ongoing assertions that the words in the Bible must be understood by their scriptural context and meaning, without other definitions imposed upon them. After working with the two testaments of the Bible, in their original languages, Tyndale perceived clearer connections between them, and therefore made minor revisions to the original editions of his translations.

The first edition of Genesis had only a handful of marginal notes. Oddly enough, for the revision, he eliminated anti-Papal notes, and added numerous short marginal references to people, places, and events, to aid the reader in locating specific passages. He also added a few brief theological (or devotional) notes. For example, adjacent to the second chapter, with reference to the day of rest, he comments, “Blessed and sanctified: dedicated and appointed it to preach the word of God in, to prayer and to do all manner works of mercy in.”¹⁷⁰

In keeping with his emphasis on the covenant, he adds an appropriate marginal notation to the *protoevangelium*

168. “One change, however, is indeed significant, and that is the thorough alteration of ‘bond’ and ‘testament’ in chapters 9 and 17 (and elsewhere ‘appointment’) to ‘covenant’... It could, indeed, be argued that Tyndale hesitated until 1534 to revise his 1526 New Testament in order to have translated the Pentateuch first, and even revised Genesis. He alone at that time had seen, as he explains in his preface to the 1534 New Testament, that the New Testament is flooded with the Old, as it were: the Old and the New Testaments make one gospel.” David Daniell, editor, *Tyndale’s Old Testament* (Yale, 1992), pp. xxiii–xxiii.

169. Regarding Tyndale’s covenantal theology, see Ralph S. Werrell, *The Theology of William Tyndale* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2006); also Carl R. Trueman, *Luther’s Legacy: Salvation and English Reformers 1525–1556* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 109–119. Elsewhere, Werrell says, “The scriptural root from which Tyndale draws his theology is the Blood of Christ, and we cannot look at any doctrine without referring to Christ’s blood... [M]an’s salvation is dependent on the Triune Covenant. For that covenant between the Three Persons of the Trinity reveals the importance of Christ’s blood for the whole of Tyndale’s theology” (Werrell, *The Roots of William Tyndale’s Theology*, p. 178.)

170. *The firste Boke of Moses called Genesis. Newly corrected and amended by W.T. (1534)*, fol. ii, sigs. Bi(r-v). This is further supported in that Tyndale saw the essence of the sabbath in its edifying activities, to minister the word, and perform works of service to the brethren and the needy.

in the third chapter: “A covenant that Christ which came of Eve and was her seed, should overcome the power of the devil and deliver all true believers in Christ and haters of the devil’s works, from all danger of Satan, of sin and of hell. The woman’s curse is, to bear children with pain and to be under the governance of her husband.”¹⁷¹

The covenant with Noah, chapter 9, is sealed with the rainbow: “The rainbow is a sacrament, a sign, a witness and a sure earnest of the covenant made between us and God.”¹⁷²

THE TESTAMENT OF MASTER WILLIAM TRACIE (1535)

In 1530, a Gloucester gentleman, William Tracie (or Tracy), composed his last will and testament, committing his soul to the Lord, in reliance upon the finished work of Christ Jesus. In his will, Tracie expressed his assurance based solely upon the merits of Christ, the only mediator between God and man. Thus, he openly excluded in his will any provisions to secure prayers or exercises for his departed soul. Regarding his burial, he included a citation from Augustine, noting that the purpose of burial observances is “rather the solace of them that live, than the wealth of comfort of them that are dead.”¹⁷³

Because Tracie’s will contained a concise statement of justification through Christ alone, by faith alone, his testament began circulating as a Protestant manifesto within England. Perceiving the testament of Tracie as a threat to both their doctrine and livelihood, papal clerics denounced Tracie, excommunicated him posthumously, exhumed his decaying body, and burnt the corpse.

The violent reaction of the papists evoked a response from both William Tyndale and his collaborator John Frith, another English Protestant living in exile on the Continent, and who was arrested upon a return to England.¹⁷⁴ Both men wrote defenses of Tracie’s testament,

in the form of expositions of the will, demonstrating that Tracie’s beliefs were principal tenets of the gospel, explained more fully in scripture.

The combined publication, including Tyndale and Frith’s expositions, appended to Tracie’s testament, was not published until 1535. By that time, Frith had been burned at the stake in England for heresy (in 1533), and Tyndale was imprisoned, awaiting his own martyrdom.

Tracie’s testament is quite brief: scarcely over two pages in the small format of the original publication; and Tyndale’s defense adds fifteen pages more. Tyndale reiterates principal themes of the gospel found in his other writings, but the chief value of this exposition is the concise manner in which he defends the finished work of Christ as the only basis for the salvation of sinners. Few readers would possess personal copies of the scriptures, so the manifesto gave Tyndale an opportunity to rehearse numerous passages from the biblical text, in support of Tracie’s Protestant beliefs.

Given that Tracie’s quotation from Augustine pertained to burial of the dead, Tyndale adds that “a Christian should be honourably buried namely for the honour and hope of the resurrection.” Because of the assurance of Christ’s satisfaction for sin, a Christian man has a true hope in the resurrection, and need not fear such a place as purgatory.¹⁷⁵

A BRIEF DECLARATION OF THE SACRAMENTS (1548)

At the time of his arrest, Tyndale was composing a *Brief Declaration of the Sacraments*, as well as translating more books of the Old Testament. The manuscript of the *Brief Declaration* was not published until over a decade after his death, in 1548.

In order to explain the meaning of the sacraments, Tyndale begins with a consideration of the customs of Hebrews in the Old Testament: how they used names and monuments to memorialize notable events (for example, Gen. 32:50), as well as the employing signs, tokens, and ceremonies to confirm promises or covenants. An example of the use of a memorial name is Jacob’s designation of Peniel, “face of God,” because he personally wrestled with God at that place. Such names were given to hold the significance of the place in memory.

Examples of covenants ratified with ceremonies and tokens include Abraham’s covenant of peace with Abimelech at Beersheba (Gen. 26:22–32); and the covenant between Jacob and Laban, memorialized with the heap of stones and the name of Gilead (Gen. 31:44–47).

Tyndale stresses that the purpose of the names and tokens is to call to remembrance the solemnities

171. *The firste Boke of Moses* (1534), fol. iiiii, sigs. Biii(r-v).

172. *The firste Boke of Moses Genesis* (1534), fol. xii, sig. Ciii(r-v).

173. John Foxe, *The Acts and Monuments* (Josiah Pratt, ed.; London: Religious Tract Society, fourth edition, n.d.), 5:31–32. For internet research, readers may consult the online edition of Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments* at: <https://www.dhi.ac.uk/foxe/index.php>

174. For a brief account of Frith’s connection and correspondence with Tyndale, see Daniell, *William Tyndale*, pp. 217–220. For additional details, see Mozley, *William Tyndale*, pp. 245–260. John Foxe provides an account of Frith’s martyrdom in his *Acts and Monuments*, 5:1–18.

175. *The testament of master Wylliam Tracie esquier, expounded both by Willism Tindall and Iho[n] Frith. Wherin thou shalt perceyue what charitie y[e] chaunceler of Worcester burned whan he toke vp the deek carkas and made asshes of hit after hit was buried.* Antwerp, 1535; cf. *Works*, 3:280–282.

associated with them. These names and tokens are signposts and seals, pointing to the events and/or promises that they represent.

Within this historical context, signs and seals are particularly notable when the Lord employs them to reinforce his promises. Examples of divine signs are the rainbow, given with the pledge that God would never again drown the world (Gen. 9), God changing the name of Abram to Abraham (Gen. 17), and the institution of circumcision as a seal of God's covenant with Abraham and his posterity.

While all sacraments are signs, not all signs are sacraments. The important thing to understand is the purpose of *signs* generally, because this purpose is central to a proper understanding of the sacraments. Although circumcision "was the chief and most principal sign, for so are such ceremonies called in the Hebrew, because they yet signify other things than appeareth to the outward sense, yet God gave them diverse other signs, both to stir up faith in the promise made them, and also to keep the benefit of the mercy of God in mind."¹⁷⁶

Tyndale next rehearses numerous signs shown to the people, in both the Old and New Testaments, to illustrate that such signs frequently accompany the revelation of God given by the prophets. Hence signs become something of an expectation among the Jews, such that Paul states, 1 Cor. 1:22, that the Jews asked or required a sign.¹⁷⁷

Concerning the sacramental signs, Tyndale previously stated that sacraments are signs instituted by God to set forth and bring to remembrance redemptive promises of God.¹⁷⁸ Tyndale consistently makes it clear that the signs themselves do not save, but can only serve to confirm the covenant or promise with which they are associated. "For it is the covenant only and not the sign that saveth us, though the sign be commanded to be put on at due time to stir up faith of the covenant that saveth us."¹⁷⁹

As the principal sign, circumcision certifies the Lord's covenant with Abraham, "to be his God, and the God of his posterity, and their shield and defender: and Abraham promised for him and his seed to be his people, and to believe and trust in him, and to keep his commandments: which covenant God caused to be written in the flesh of Abraham, and in the males of all his posterity..." Even so, the outward sign was not a mechanical conveyance of salvation, for those "having the flesh circumcised, yet not believing nor loving God, whereunto the outward circumcision bound them, were uncircumcised before God, and God not bound to them, but had good right thereby to punish them: so that

neither circumcision, or to be uncircumcised, is aught worth (as St. Paul says, Rom. 2), save for the keeping of the law; for if circumcision help not to keep the law, so serveth it for nought, but for to condemn."¹⁸⁰

When Tyndale speaks of the law, he frequently means the chief duties of the law: love for God and our neighbour. Hence, the discussion of the sign of circumcision is inseparably connected to the theme of a circumcised heart—a new spirit within, whereby the believer has the law of God written on the heart by the Spirit of God. Likewise, since baptism has now come in the room of circumcision, Tyndale asserts, "as the circumcised in the flesh and not in the heart, hath no part in God's good promises: even so the baptized in the flesh and not in the heart hath no part in Christ's blood."¹⁸¹

The connection between the Passover and the Lord's Supper is illustrated in the meanings of these signs.

And this sign Pesah beside that it was a seal of the promise to be delivered the same night, to stablish the faith, and commanded to be observed ever after yearly to keep the benefit in memory, it was also a very prophecy of the passion of Christ, describing the very manner and fashion of his death, and the effect and virtue thereof also. In whose stead is the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ come, as baptism in the room or stead of circumcision.¹⁸²

176. *A briefe declaration of the sacraments expressing the fyrst orygynall how they came vp, a[n]d were institute with the true and mooste syncere meaning and vnderstandyng of the same very necessarye for all men, that wyl not erre in the true vse and receauyng therof* (1548), Avi(r-v); cf. *Works*, 1.351. As noted by the nineteenth-century editor of Tyndale's works, the expression "the Hebrew," in context, refers to Hebrew usage or custom, not a particular text or term in the Hebrew language.

177. *A briefe declaration*, sig. Avi(v)–Aviii(r); cf. *Works*, 1.351–353. Among the signs referenced by Tyndale in this passage are the dedication of the firstborn (Ex. 13); the sabbath (Ex. 20); the blowing of trumpets (Num. 10); the fringes on the garments (Num. 15); the heap of stones from the Jordan River (Josh. 4); Ahijah's tearing the cloak of Jeroboam (1 Kings 11); Elisha's directives to Joash (2 Kings 13); Isaiah's unclad prophesying (Isa. 20); Jeremiah's bound prophesying (Jer. 27); the signs given to Zacharias, Mary, and the shepherds (Luke 1–2); and the Passover (Ex. 12).

178. "This word sacrament is as much to say as an holy sign, and represents always some promise of God..." (*The Obedience of the Christian Man*, fol. Cxii(v); cf. Daniell edition, p. 108. "[T]he signs that God ordained either signified the benefits done, or promises to come..." (marginal note on Ex. 12:11), *Tyndale's Old Testament*, p. 105).

179. *A briefe declaration*, sigs. Av(r-v); cf. *Works*, 1.350.

180. *A briefe declaration*, sigs. Aiii(v), Aiiii(v); cf. *Works*, 1.349.

181. *A briefe declaration*, sig. Avi(r); cf. *Works*, 1.351.

182. *A briefe declaration*, sig. Aviii(v); cf. *Works*, 1.354.

Regarding Luke 22: 19, 20, “This is my body that is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. And this cup is the new testament in my blood, which shall be shed for you,” Tyndale says, “it was instituted to keep the death of Christ in mind, and to testify wherefore he died, even to save us from sin, death and hell, that we should seek none other means to be delivered with. For there is none other, Acts 4.”¹⁸³

In a succinct summary of the treatise to this point, Tyndale summarizes:

[A]s the Hebrews wrote their stories and covenants and signs, giving their signs such names as could not but keep them in mind: and as God the Father did follow the ensample of the people (or they following him) and commanded his promises, covenants and prophecies, to be written in gests [*gestures*], signs and ceremonies, giving them names that could not but keep his covenants in mind. Even so Christ wrote the covenant of his body and blood in bread and wine, giving them that name, that ought to keep the covenant in remembrance. And hereof ye see, that our sacraments are books of stories only; and that there is none other virtue in them than to testify the covenants and promises made in Christ's blood. And hereof ye perceive that where nought is understood by the sacraments, or ceremonies, there they be clean[ly] unprofitable.¹⁸⁴

This last application is critical. For the participants to obtain spiritual profit from the sacraments, they must possess understanding of the meaning of the signs, and embrace the promises in faith. The sacraments are not magical rites, nor do they convey benefits mechanically, *ex opera operato* (as the Romaniſts teach).

This requirement of a true understanding, for spiritual profit from the sacraments, provides Tyndale another occasion to warn against the danger of substituting human imagination, in place of a right understanding which is drawn only from the word of God.

And as the circumcision in the flesh, their hearts still uncircumcised, but hating the law of God and believing

183. *A briefe declaration*, sig. Biii(v); cf. *Works*, 1,356. Citation of Luke 22:19–20 from the 1534 edition of Tyndale's New Testament.

184. *A briefe declaration*, sigs. Biv(v)–Bv(r); cf. *Works*, 1,357, 358. “[T] his sacrament, through rehearsing of the covenant, and breaking of the bread, and pouring out the wine, much more lively express the whole story, and keep it better in memory, by daily repeating thereof, and hath more might and vehemency to heal the conscience stung with fresh sin.” (Cf. *Works*, 1,359.)

185. *A briefe declaration*, sigs. Bv(r–v); cf. *Works*, 1,358.

186. *A briefe declaration*, sigs. Cii(r–v); cf. *Works*, 1,362.

in their own imaginations, were circumcised to their damnation: and as the baptized in the flesh only, the heart still unclean, neither believing in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins, neither love their neighbour for Christ's sake are baptized also unto their greater damnation ... even so all that come to the sacrament for any other purpose than it was ordained and instituted for, that is to say, to seek absolution of their sin, with a set purpose to sin no more as nigh as they can, and to call to memory the benefits of the passion of Christ, with the mediation to weak[en] the flesh, and to strength[en] the spirit against her: and to give thanks again, that is to say, to call to mind, how much he is bounden for Christ's sake to love his neighbour, to help his need, and to bear his infirmity and to forgive him, if he have offended and desire forgiveness, promising to amend, whereunto Christ bindeth all that will be partakers of his blood: the same, I say, even come to their greater damnation.¹⁸⁵

To reinforce this point, he adds that the observation of religious ceremonies, combined with a false faith based upon human imagination, is mere idolatry.

And he that, being of a lawful age, observeth a ceremony and knoweth not the intent, to him is the ceremony not only unprofitable, but also hurtful, and cause of sin: in that he is not careful and diligent to search for it: and he there observeth them with a false faith of his own imagination, thinking, as all idolaters do and ever have done, that the outward work is a sacrifice and service to God. The same sinneth yet more deeper and more damnable. Neither is idolatry any other thing than to believe that a visible ceremony is a service to the invisible God, whose service is spiritual, as he is a spirit. And [this] is none other thing than to know that all is of him, and to trust in him only for all things, and to love him for his great goodness and mercy above all: and [love] our neighbours as ourselves for his sake, unto which spiritual serving of God, and to lead us to the same, the old ceremonies were ordained.¹⁸⁶

Further, he asserts,

Wherefore, if any man think he believe in Christ, and have not the law written in his heart to consent that his duty is to love his brother for Christ's sake, as Christ loved him, and to endeavour himself so to do, the faith of that same man is vain, and built upon sand of his own imagination, and not upon the rock of God's word: for his word, unto which he hath bound himself, is that

they only which turn to God to keep his laws shall have mercy for Christ's sake.¹⁸⁷

Here, we see typical Tyndale: the importance of the law written on the heart, the resulting love for the brethren, the vanity of human imagination, and the sole sufficiency of the word of God as the source of the knowledge of God.

In the latter part of his treatise on the sacraments, Tyndale undertakes a discussion of the elements in the Lord's Supper. He describes three different views on the nature of the elements: Popish, Lutheran, and Reformed (although he does not designate them with those terms). While he is willing to allow for differing opinions on the precise nature of the elements (especially not wishing to condemn Lutherans), he takes clear aim at the Romish mass, not merely for the opinion of transubstantiation, but for the accessory practices that combine to make the Mass a meritorious sacrifice, with bodily service that constitutes "nought else but idolatry."¹⁸⁸ He likewise decries the violence of those who persecute and murder others for holding different opinions about the nature of the Supper.¹⁸⁹

At one point, Tyndale extends his discussion about the Hebrew use of signs, providing examples to illustrate a hermeneutical point: how figures of speech are used in the Bible. He notes that the Hebrew people, "are wont ever to name the memorial and signs of things with the very name or the thing signified." Some of these biblical examples were referenced earlier to illustrate the use of signs; here they are cited, in order to illustrate the use of the language, to demonstrate the relationship between the sign and the thing signified. In Genesis 32:2, Jacob named the place *Mahanaim*, "because that his posterity in time to come, when they heard of the field, which was none host, yet so called, should ask why it was so named, that their elders might thereby have occasion to teach that Jacob saw there an host of angels." Similarly, the name *Peniel* (Gen. 32:30) was given "that the people in time to come should ask why it was called God's face, and their elders could answer, because Jacob saw there God face to face." Further examples of place names are given from Genesis 33:17 (*Succoth*), 33:20 (*El Eloth Israel*), 35:7 (*El Bethel*), and 50:11 (*Abel Mizraim*).¹⁹⁰

In a parallel manner, other signs are designated by the things they signify, in metaphoric expressions. For example, in Exodus 12:11, the sacrificial lamb is called the *pesah*, "a passing by, because the angel did pass by the houses and hurted not where it was slain and the blood stricken on the posts, that the name should keep the thing in memory." In Exodus 30, "the sin or sin-offering

is called atonement. And it was yet but a sign certifying the conscience that the atonement was made, and that God had forgiven the sin." In 1 Samuel 7:20, Samuel set up a stone on end, "and called it the *help-stone*, because God had there helped them, and given them a great victory of the Philistines."¹⁹¹

While providing this discussion of signs within the *Brief Declaration of the Sacraments*, Tyndale omits a helpful illustration found in his other works. Elsewhere he speaks of the sign affixed outside a tavern, or alehouse, with the symbol of a bush (or vine), indicating that the establishment sells wine. Such a sign is similar to the use of logos or trademarks found on modern-day restaurants, allowing patrons to recognize the services offered within, based upon a glance at the sign on the exterior of the building. Tyndale mentions the bush sign on the tavern to illustrate the relationship between the sign and the thing signified. In the *Obedience of the Christian Man*, he states that the sign is useless, if man lacks an understanding of what it represents. Likewise, attendance upon the sacraments is unprofitable, if a man is devoid of their meaning and faith in the promises they represent. Without understanding and faith, "though thou hearest a thousand masses in a day," it is no more help than, "in a dead thirst, to behold a bush at a tavern door, if thou knewest not thereby that there were wine within to be sold."¹⁹²

In his *Exposition of 1 John*, Tyndale uses the illustration to reinforce that limitations of signs. They are not the object of faith; they cannot provide relief, but can only point to the source of healing or sustenance. Speaking of the Spirit's anointing, Tyndale says, "[O]utward oil can neither heal the soul nor make her feel, save as a sign, nor as a bush at tavern door quencheth a man's thirst, neither is it a thing to put trust in."¹⁹³

The most arresting use of the illustration is found in his *Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue*, where Tyndale posits the case of a madman who mistakes the sign for the thing it signifies. "And that trust and confidence which the ceremonies preached, to be given unto God's word and Christ's blood, that same they turned unto the ceremony itself: as though a man were so mad to forget that the bush at the tavern-door did signify wine to be

187. *A briefe declaration*, sig. Ciii(r); cf. *Works*, 1.363.

188. *A briefe declaration*, sig. Dv(v)–Dvi(v); cf. *Works*, 1.373, 374.

189. *A briefe declaration*, sig. Eviii(r); cf. *Works*, 1.385.

190. *A briefe declaration*, sigs. Dvii(v)–Dviii(v); cf. *Works*, 1.375–76.

191. *A briefe declaration*, sig. Dviii(v)–Ei(v); cf. *Works*, 1.377, 378.

192. Fol. lxxxix, sig. Mi(v); cf. *Works*, 1.253; Daniell, 109.

193. *The exposition of the fyrste Epistle of seynt Jhon*, sig. Eii(r); cf. *Cf. Works*, 2.p. 184.

sold within, but would believe that the bush itself would quench his thirst.”¹⁹⁴ The suggestion of a man so mad, as to seek relief from a sign, instead of the sustenance that the sign represents, is an apt portrayal of the Popish view of the sacraments.

Tyndale also reiterates another critical point. Although the sacraments are valuable as signs and seals of God’s promises, the sacramental signs themselves are not essential to salvation. “Neither our salvation so greatly standeth in that [*baptism*] or any other sacrament, that we could not be saved without them.”¹⁹⁵ Rather, as he previously stated, “The washing preacheth unto us, that we are cleansed with Christ’s bloodshedding, which was an offering and a satisfaction for the sin of all that repent and believe, consenting and submitting themselves unto the will of God.”¹⁹⁶ “Baptism is a witness between God and us that we have promised to mortify the lusts and sin that remaineth in the flesh, etc.”¹⁹⁷

Having discussed scriptural concept of signs, Tyndale moves to the language of the Lord’s Supper.

Now the testament is that his blood was shed for our sins, but it is impossible that the cup or his blood should be that promise. Wherefore the sense must needs be, that it is the memorial and seal of the testament only. And therefore where Matthew and Mark say, This cup is my blood of the new testament, the sense must needs be also, that it is the memorial or seal thereof, only calling, after the use of the Hebrews, the sign with the name of that which is signified, that is to say, calling the wine, which only signifieth the blood, with the name of the blood. And then it followeth that the bread is called his body, after the same manner, because it is the sign of his body.¹⁹⁸

For Tyndale, the nature of the elements in the Supper is important, but his opposition to the Romish mass is based more particularly on the ramifications of transubstantiation, and the idolatry promulgated by the mass.

[I]f they will rage farther with their blind reasons of their subtle sophistry and devilish idolatry, and say,

194. *Answer* (1531), fol. xlvi, sig. F6(v); *Answer* (O’Donnell & Wicks), p. 75; cf. *Works*, 3.76.

195. *A briefe declaration*, sig. Bvi(r); cf. *Works*, 1.359.

196. *Obedience*, fol. xc(r); Daniell ed., p. 109; *Works*, 1.253.

197. Marginal note in “Prologue” to Romans, *The new Testament* (1534), fol. cccxii(v); cf. *Tyndale’s New Testament*, p. 218.

198. *A briefe declaration*, sig. Eii(v); cf. *Works*, 1.379.

199. *A briefe declaration*, sigs. Eiii(v)–Ev(r); cf. *Works*, 1.381.

200. *A briefe declaration*, sig. Dvi(v); cf. *Works*, 1.374.

Where Christ’s blood is, there is his body: and where his body is, there is his soul, and where his soul is, there is the Godhead and the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and there men ought to pray, and say, O Father which art present with thy Son Christ, under bread and wine, or in form of bread and wine: if (I say) they so rave, then as the old prophet for like idolatry denieth God to dwell in the temple, or to have pleasure in sacrifice of blood of goats, sheep and calves, even so deny I the body of Christ to be any more in the sacrament, than God was in the golden calves which Jeroboam set up to be prayed to, the one in Bethel, and the other in Dan: for though God be present everywhere, yet if heaven of heavens cannot compass him to make him a dwelling-place (as the scripture testifieth), and much less the temple that was at Jerusalem, how should he have a dwelling-place in a little wafer or crumb of bread?¹⁹⁹

As in previous writings, Tyndale stresses that God is not served by the bodily service of men; God has no need of human rituals and ceremonies. Indeed the sacraments serve men, helping to foster their faith toward God.

Faith in Christ’s blood, and in the Father through him, is God’s service in the spirit. And so have they which believe not the bodily presence, served God a long time, and thereto been helped by the sacrament. The other part [the Romaniſts have] fallen therefrom through preaching the body present, serving God with bodily service (which is idolatry) and to make God an idol or image, in that they trust in the goodness of their works (as they which service tyrants) and not in the goodness of God through trust in the blood of Christ....²⁰⁰

In his closing remarks, Tyndale issues a plea for a view of the Supper rooted upon biblical authority, and followed by all true churches: avoiding idolatry; clinging to the sole mediation of Christ; and preserving the doctrine of Christ and the apostles, and the analogy of faith provided by the entirety of scriptural teaching.

Wherefore, to avoid this endless brawling, which the devil no doubt hath stirred up, to turn the eyes of our souls from the everlasting covenant made us in Christ’s blood and body, and to nuzzle us in idolatry, which is trust and confidence in false worshipping of God, and for to quench, first the faith to Christ-ward, and then the love due to our neighbour: therefore methinketh that the part that hath professed the faith of Christ, and the love of his neighbour, ought of duty to bear each other,

as long as the other opinion is not plain wicked through false idolatry, nor contrary to the salvation that is in Christ, nor against the open and manifest doctrine of Christ and his apostles, nor contrary to the general articles of the faith of the general church of Christ, which are confirmed with open scripture; in which articles never a true church in any land dissenteth.²⁰¹

Overall, Tyndale's view of the sacraments reflect the cohesive nature of the Bible and the sacraments:

Tyndale's theology emphasized the unity between the Old and the New Testaments, and showed there was a unity between circumcision and baptism; and, between the Passover and the Lord' Supper. In many other ways Tyndale believed Christianity could only be understood as a continuation of the Old Testament—the main difference being that the blood of the Old Testament sacrifices had been replaced by Christ's blood shed once and for all on the cross. For the blood of the Old Testament sacrificed on the altar in the temple prefigured the blood of Christ, who was sacrificed on the altar of the cross.²⁰²

THE IMPACT OF WILLIAM TYNDALE

Having briefly surveyed Tyndale's doctrine of scripture, we turn to consider how it fulfilled his goal of furthering the knowledge of the word. The immediate impact of Tyndale upon English-speaking peoples is undeniable. In the era of the printing press, he was the first to translate the scriptures into English from the original languages; and though he did not live to complete his translation of the entire Bible, the work was continued by his peers and successors, leading to Matthew's Bible, the Geneva Bible, and the common version of 1611.

Additionally, Tyndale's early writings were among the first Protestant expositions to obtain circulation in England, helping to stimulate the emerging religious Reformation in England (in contrast to King Henry's political machinations). Even so, the influence of Tyndale did not cease at the English border. His works also spread quickly to Scotland; and it is here that we discover a remarkable illustration of the impact of Tyndale, respecting the right use of scripture and the scriptural rule of worship.

Patrick Hamilton was a contemporary of Tyndale. In his *History of the Reformation in Scotland*, John Knox marks the martyrdom of Patrick Hamilton, in

1528, as the formal commencement of the Scottish Reformation.²⁰³

Prior to his martyrdom, Hamilton studied on the Continent, taking residence at the newly-founded University of Marburg, led by Francis Lambert. Some biographers posit a time of fellowship in Marburg with three men who soon became martyrs for the faith: Hamilton, John Frith, and William Tyndale.²⁰⁴ Although it is difficult to establish precise details of any personal dealings they had with one another, Peter Lorimer describes the scene:

[T]he instructions and society of Lambert and his colleagues were not the only advantages which Hamilton enjoyed during his residence at Marburg. William Tyndale, the admirable translator of the English Bible, and John Frith, his young friend and coadjutor, had come to reside on the same spot that very year [1527].... Frith had lately joined him from England, and the two friends were now busily employed in the translation of the Old Testament, and the composition of several original works.

About this same time, prior to his return to Scotland, Hamilton was granted the privilege of preparing a series of theses for public discussion at the University of Marburg. These theological propositions, originally composed in Latin, were later translated into English, and published by John Frith as a testimony, after Hamilton's martyrdom. The long title of the theses is *Diverse fruitful gatherings of scripture and declaring of faith and works of the law*; the work is commonly called *Patrick's Places*.²⁰⁵

In his theses, Hamilton describes the nature of the law and the gospel in terms that seem typically Lutheran. There is, however a noticeable departure from Lutheranism in one place, with respect to the moral law. In Hamilton's synopsis of the Decalogue, the second

201. *A briefe declaration*, sigs. Evii(r-v); cf. *Works*, 1.384.

202. Ralph S. Werrell, *The Roots of William Tyndale's Theology*, p. 138.

203. *John Knox's History of the Reformation in Scotland* (edited by William Croft Dickinson; London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1949), 1.11; cf. *Works of John Knox* (edited by David Laing; Edinburgh, 1895), 1.13ff.

204. Peter Lorimer, *Precursors of Knox* (Edinburgh: Thomas Constable and Co., 1858), p. 93. See also James Edward McGoldrick, *Luther's Scottish Connection* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1989), pp. 42–43.

205. McGoldrick, *Luther's Scottish Connection*, pp. 42–54. Reprinted versions of Patrick's places are generally accessible, such as Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, 4.563–578, and *Knox's Works*, 1.19–35. The text in Knox is arranged in a slightly different manner, and Foxe includes proof texts not found in the original.

commandment appears isolated from the first, “Thou shalt make thee none image to worship it”; and the tenth commandment, against coveting, is summarized in a single line, “Thou shalt not desire ought that belongeth to thy neighbour.”²⁰⁶ How did Hamilton arrive at this formulation, in contrast to the typical Lutheran view? After all, Hamilton was studying and presenting these theses at the new Lutheran institution, the University of Marburg.²⁰⁷ Hamilton’s synopsis of the Decalogue suggests some influence from or discussion with Tyndale (and/or Frith), regarding the Ten Commandments. At that time, Tyndale and Frith were preparing the translation on the Pentateuch (later published in 1530), in which Tyndale’s translation from Hebrew restores the distinct place of the second commandment.

There is another telling moment, after Hamilton’s

206. Hamilton, *Dyuers fruitful gatherynge of scripture and declarynge of fayth and workes of the lawe*, sig. Aii. In Knox’s *History*, he lists the commandments numerically, making the division even clearer (*Works of John Knox*, 1.21). Hamilton’s division of the law is noted by Gerhard Müller, who writes, “Patrick includes the ban on images as being the second commandment, and so, unlike Luther, does not follow the mediaeval tradition which had let this commandment fall into abeyance” (“Protestant Theology in Scotland and Germany in the Early Days of the Reformation,” *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, vol. 22 (1985), p. 105).

207. To make matters more intriguing, one cannot totally discount a contributing (though not decisive) influence from Francis Lambert, who desired the removal of images from places of worship, and whose outlook eventually shifted away from strict Lutheranism. Lambert attended the Marburg Colloquy in 1529 as an observer, and became convinced that the “Swiss” arguments regarding the Lord’s Supper were more scriptural. Lambert formally repudiated the Lutheran view of the sacrament in *De Symbolo Foederis Nvnquam rumpendi, quam Communionem uocant* [Concerning the Symbol of the Indestructible Covenant, which They Call Communion] in 1530, published shortly before his death that same year, due to the plague. Lambert wrote a description of Hamilton (in Latin), which can be found in Peter Lorimer, *Precursors of Knox* (Edinburgh: Thomas Constable and Co., 1857), p. 240. For a biography of Lambert in English, see: Roy Lutz Winters, *Francis Lambert of Avingnon* (Philadelphia: United Lutheran Publishing House, 1938).

208. Emphasis added. The account of the “trial” is based on the narrative furnished by Robert Lindsay of Pitcottie, *The Historie and Cronicles of Scotland* (Edited by Æ. J. G. Mackay; Edinburgh: 1899), 1.308–312.

209. Knox, *Works*, 1.192; cf. *Selected Writings of John Knox* (Dallas: Presbyterian Heritage, 1995), p. 16. Compare, from his *Brief Exhortation to England*, “The glistening beauty of vain ceremonies, the heaping of things pertaining nothing to edification (by whomsoever they were invented, justified, or maintained), ought at once to be removed, and so trodden under the obedience of God’s word, that continually this sentence of your God be present in your heart and mouth: ‘Not that which appeareth good in thy eyes shalt thou do to the Lord thy God, but what the Lord thy God hath commanded thee, that shalt thou do: add nothing to it; diminish nothing from it.’” *Works*, 5.515; *Selected Writings*, p. 595.

subsequent arrest in Scotland, shortly before his execution in 1528. At a crucial moment during the interrogation, Hamilton was examined regarding his view of images. A Friar says disapprovingly, “You say it was not lawful [orig., *leesome*] to worship imagery.” Hamilton responds, “I say nothing further but that God speaks to Moses in the twentieth chapter of Exodus in the *second* commandment, ‘Thou shalt not make thyself any graven image: Thou shalt not bow down to them, nor worship them’; and also David in his psalms curses them that are the makers of images, and the out-setters, maintainers, and worshipers of the same.”

The Friar exclaims, “Heretic, know you not that imagery is the books and lead [*guide*] of common people, to put them in remembrance of the hail [*all*] saints that wrait [*wrote*] for their salvation.” Hamilton replies: “Brother, it ought to be the preaching of the true word of God that should put the people in remembrance of Christ and their salvation.”²⁰⁸

Hamilton’s language here is uncharacteristic of strict Lutheranism. He makes a clear reference to the “second commandment” against images. And his rejection of images as books for the laity reads more like a reformed catechism than a Lutheran one.

Note well: through Hamilton’s initial witness regarding the Decalogue, the Scottish Reformation was launched in a more Reformed (less Lutheran) direction. This is prior to the preaching of George Wishart and John Knox in the land. Moreover, when Knox appears on the scene (nearly two decades later), with an emphasis against idolatry, he draws scriptural support from the same arguments that Tyndale emphasized a generation before.

In his first public debate, Knox references Deuteronomy 4 and 12, in his denunciation of idolatry.

[T]hat God’s word damns your ceremonies, it is evident; for the plain and strait commandment of God is, ‘Not that thing which appears good in thy eyes shalt thou do to the Lord thy God, but what the Lord thy God has commanded thee; that do thou; add nothing to it; diminish nothing from it.’ Now unless you are able to prove that God has commanded your ceremonies, this his former commandment will damn both you and them.²⁰⁹

Here Knox sounds like an echo of Tyndale, who previously wrote,

For God commendeth by Moses, Deuteronomy 12, saying: what I command you that observe and do, and put

nothing to, nor take ought therefrom: yea and Moses warneth straightly in an hundred places that we do that only which God commandeth and which seemeth good and righteous in his sight and not in our own sight. For nothing bringeth the wrath of God so soon and so sore on a man, as the idolatry of his own imagination.²¹⁰

Knox was also quick to denounce worship and service to God that originated from human imagination: “All worshipping, honouring, or service invented by the brain of man in the religion of God, without his own express commandment, is idolatry.” And he makes use of the example of King Saul’s sacrifice and sparing of Agag (1 Samuel 13), to illustrate the folly of pleading good intent as an excuse, for bringing worship to God apart from the manner designated in his word.²¹¹ While Knox’s treatment is more extensive, it sounds like an amplified echo from Tyndale’s *Obedience*.

Without God’s word do nothing. And to his word add nothing, neither pull anything therefrom, as Moses everywhere teacheth thee. Serve God in the spirit, and thy neighbor with all outward service. Serve God as he hath appointed thee and not with thy good intent and good zeal. Remember Saul was cast away of God forever for his good intent. God requireth obedience unto his word and abhorreth all good intents and good zeals which are without God’s word. For they are nothing else than plain idolatry and worshipping of false gods.²¹²

Even if Knox is not drawing directly from Tyndale here, it is important to see that Tyndale’s outlook is mirrored at key points early in the Scottish Reformation. By the time of Knox, the use of the Deuteronomy passages and the example of Saul appear as stock elements in defense of the sufficiency of scripture to combat false worship or innovations introduced under the rationale of good intent.

TYNDALE AND THE WESTMINSTER STANDARDS

For confessional Presbyterians, there may be a natural question about how Tyndale’s bibliology compares with the Westminster Standards. Although Tyndale lived a century before the Westminster Assembly, his doctrine of scripture anticipates the Westminster Confession in every significant facet of the first chapter, “Of the Holy Scriptures.” His translations and expositions of the scriptures provide a testimony to his belief in the necessity and place of God’s revelation to man in the Bible (section 1). Man’s understanding is so darkened

by sin, that the scriptures are the only source of saving knowledge.

Regarding the canon of scripture (sections 1 and 3), Tyndale’s translations from the text of the Greek and Hebrew originals, as well as his defense of books in the New Testament criticized by Luther, show his commitment to the 66 books of the Bible; and he never used the Apocryphal books to support any doctrine in his theological writings.²¹³

From his earliest writings, on the *Parable of the Wicked Mammon* and *The Obedience of the Christian Man*, he asserts the exclusive authority and sufficiency of scripture. These topics are covered in sections 4, 5 and 10 of the first chapter of the Westminster Confession, and there is nothing in those sections contrary to the previous teachings of Tyndale. Even the controverted expression about “good and necessary consequence” (1:6) has precedence in Tyndale, when he asserts: “[W]hatsoever we ought to believe or do, that same is written expressly or drawn out of that which is written.”²¹⁴

Tyndale’s repeated teachings on hermeneutics emphasize the perspicuity and self-interpreting nature of scripture (cf. Confession, 1:7, 9). His rejection of the Romish fourfold sense of scripture harmonizes with the confessional statement that the full sense of any scripture “is not manifold, but one” (Confession 1:9).

Tyndale’s belief in the self-authenticating nature of scripture (Confession 1:5) is apparent in his arguments

210. *Obedience*, fol. cxx; cf. Daniell edition, p. 145; *Works*, 1.292.

211. Knox, *A Vindication of the Doctrine that the Sacrifice of the Mass is Idolatry*, in *Works*, 3.34–38. *Selected Writings*, pp. 23–26. While readers might be tempted to explain Knox’s views on worship as the result of his association with Calvin, it must be remembered that Knox made these statements in 1547, prior to his years in the galleys, and prior to his ministry in Edwardian England—all of which preceded his opportunity to converse with Calvin during his subsequent time on the Continent (1554–1559).

212. *Obedience*, fol. cxlix(r-v); cf. Daniell edition, p. 179.

213. “Tyndale never mentioned the *Apocrypha* in his writings.” “Although he did translate the Apocryphal *Epistles* [readings] along with the Old Testament *Epistles* in the Sarum rite and attached them to his New Testament, so that people could follow all the *Epistles* being read during the Mass.” Werrell, *The Roots of William Tyndale’s Theology*, p. 178; the second quotation is in the footnote to the first.

214. *Answer* (1531), sigs. B5(v)–B6(r); *Answer* (O’Donnell & Wicks), p. 24; cf. *Works*, 3.26. Emphasis added. The Westminster Confession has sometimes been criticized for the expression regarding good and necessary consequence, for it holds that men are not only responsible for the bare statements of scripture, but for logical deductions flowing from scripture. For example, Christ rebuked the Pharisees in Matthew 22:32, using a good and necessary deduction based upon the name of God. Tyndale seems to concur, that there is a logic found in scripture itself. For an illustration of those objecting to the Westminster teaching, see the Baptist London Confession of 1689, where the sentence was rephrased.

against usurped ecclesiastical authority. While Tyndale was familiar with philosophers and church fathers, he virtually ignores them, and certainly does not use their testimony to establish the veracity of the word.²¹⁵ Indeed, Tyndale repeatedly speaks of the necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit, in illumination and regeneration, to impart a true understanding of the scripture and faith.

The exclusive authority of scripture also carries over into related topics, such as the subject of good works. The proper place of good works is a prominent theme throughout the writings of Tyndale, although the limits of space have not permitted an extended consideration of good works here. Nevertheless, a very Tyndalian statement opens the sixteenth chapter of the Westminster Confession: "Good works are only such as God hath commanded in his holy Word, and not such as, without the warrant thereof, are devised by men, out of blind zeal, or upon pretence of good intention." Tyndale was relentless in his criticisms of human devices (or "imaginings") and good intent (or ignorant zeal) as a defense for any service rendered unto God.

The believer's service to God and good works are inseparably connected to the second commandment. Tyndale's restoration of the second commandment, to its rightful place in the Decalogue, is the lynchpin of any serious treatment of worship and service to God.²¹⁶ On this subject, the Westminster Confession and Catechisms parallel Tyndale's basic paradigm. The scriptural rule of worship (the regulative principle of worship) rests largely upon a proper understanding of the second commandment. Tyndale contended that, at root, all theological constructions about God, or worship directed to God, must be drawn from the scriptures; if not, those thoughts and practices were humanly-devised "images": that is image-service, or idolatry. No plea of zeal or good intent is a sufficient to cover such offenses.

Chapter 21 of the Confession asserts that "the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted

215. "Tyndale did not share the humanist love for the Greek classics, nor the philosophical systems of Aristotle, Plato, or other Greek philosophers. Unlike other Reformers who claimed to reject Greek philosophy Tyndale is the only one whose rejection of it appears to be total; even as St Paul, in *Colossians 2:8*, warned his readers. The times he revealed a knowledge of Greek philosophy were where he ridiculed its findings and showed how useless it was in a scriptural context. For Tyndale the Word of God is all that is necessary for the Christian to know the truth and understand God's revelation of truth." (Werrell, *The Roots of William Tyndale's Theology*, p. 62).

216. For example, see questions 108–110 of the Westminster Larger Catechism.

217. *An exposition (1533)*, fol. ix(v), sig. Bi(v); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), p. 134; *Works*, 2.12.

by himself, and so limited to his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped *according to the imaginations and devices of men*, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representations or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture." The Larger Catechism, Q. 109 lists the prohibitions of the second commandment as including, "all devising, counselling, commanding, using, and anywise approving, any religious worship not instituted by God himself... the making any representation of God, of all, or of any of the three Persons, *either inwardly in our mind, or outwardly in any kind of image...*" (emphasis added). These statements are in harmony with the previous teachings of Tyndale against human imagination as the source of error and idolatry.

Additionally Tyndale's language regarding the sacraments, as signs and seals of God's promises, is also reflected within the relevant sections of the Confessional standards. An entire study could be made on this topic alone. Of course, by the time of the Westminster Assembly, the Reformed terminology regarding signs and seals was commonplace, so it does not prove a direct influence from him; but the harmony is undeniable.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

That Tyndale's views align so well with the Westminster Standards should not be surprising, because he is expounding the claims and contents of scripture. What should be disturbing, however, is how foreign his approach seems, when compared with contemporary trends in churches that call themselves evangelical and Reformed.

Are people looking at outside sources and cultural artifacts in order to understand scripture, rather than carefully comparing scripture with scripture? Are preachers and hearers content to rehearse Bible stories without pointed applications like those in Tyndale's expositions? Are artificial theological presuppositions being forced upon the text of the Bible, rather than drawing beliefs and practices exclusively from the scriptures? Are humanly-devised forms of worship and service being introduced under the color of good intent? Or, are churches resorting to popish ceremonies under the guise of liturgical renewal? If so, then let us heed Tyndale's call, directing us back to the scriptures, for the true church of Christ "is the multitude of all them that believe in Christ for the remission of sin, and of a thankfulness for that mercy, *love the law of God purely and without glosses...*"²¹⁷

Tyndale has gone before us. His lived a sacrificial life, and obtained a martyr's crown; he being dead yet speaks, admonishing us to make right use of the scriptures. He was among those slain on the battlefield, to "leave the victory unto their dear friends for whose sakes they took the fight upon them." It remains for us to conquer, by continuing the fight to "obtain their purpose and maintain that they fought for."²¹⁸

Tyndale urges us to cast aside our own imaginations and refuse false constructions when approaching the Bible, allowing the scriptures to be their own interpreter; to embrace Christ, with faith in his blood as the only atonement for sin—not being deceived or content with a mere "story faith," but trusting Christ alone as he is offered in the gospel. We are called to love the Lord with all our heart, mortify sin in our lives, and worship and serve God only as he has directed in his word. This larger vision of Tyndale is desperately needed in the present hour. And, in its ultimately simplicity, this *sola scriptura* message is within the grasp of every plow-boy who can read or hear the word of God.

Though a man had a precious jewel and a rich, yet if he wist not the value thereof nor wherefore it served, he were neither the better nor richer of a straw. Even so though we read the scripture and babble of it never so much, yet if we know not the use of it, and wherefore it was given, and what is therein to be sought, it profiteth us nothing at all. It is not enough therefore to read and talk of it only, but we must also desire God day and night instantly to open our eyes, and to make us understand and feel wherefore the scripture was given, that we may apply the medicine of the scripture, every man to his own sores, unless that we intend to be idle disputers, and brawlers about vain words, ever gnawing upon the bitter bark without and never attaining unto the sweet pith within, and persecuting one another for defending of lewd imaginations and fantasies of our own invention.²¹⁹



NOTE ON THE CITATIONS FROM TYNDALE'S WRITINGS

Most citations from Tyndale's writings have been taken from the original editions, but rendered in contemporary spelling and capitalization, with only slight adjustments in punctuation as occasionally seemed necessary for expressing the sense of the original. Readers are encouraged to consult the original sources, when possible. For convenience, parallel references are supplied in the footnotes to various editions of Tyndale's writings,

including editions that are more generally accessible. Verse references did not typically appear in English Bibles until after the publication of the Geneva Bible (1560), and thus do not appear in Tyndale's original translations. References to verses in Tyndale's translations in this study have been supplied by the present author for the convenience of modern readers.

Tyndale's goal was to be intelligible to a plow-boy, and the present author has sought to pursue this goal by using modern spelling. The reader might inquire why citations are not simply taken from the Parker Society edition of Tyndale's *Works*, since it is the most widely available text, and uses updated spelling. Unfortunately, the Parker Society edition clutters the text with a plethora of Victorian semi-colons, and other excessive punctuation, to a degree that the flow of Tyndale's prose is often reduced to a snail's pace. More important, however, the Parker Society edition was produced when some of the earliest editions of Tyndale's writings were unavailable, forcing the editors to render the text without the best sources. Beyond that, the editors of the nineteenth-century edition made some silent changes, by omitting scattered passages that offended Victorian sensibilities.

There is another serious deficiency to the Parker Society edition: the arrangement of the material. Although the contents extend to three volumes, the set includes only portions of Tyndale's writings, and they are arranged topically, making it difficult for readers to perceive the original order of the material, and the progress of the author's labors. Because of the limited scope of the volumes, Tyndale's Bible translations are almost entirely omitted; thus, in places where Tyndale's prologues to the biblical text are given, the prologues are divorced from the scriptural texts they were meant to accompany. It makes for a disjointed presentation.

There is presently an ongoing project to produce a scholarly edition (in original orthography) of Tyndale's theological writings. These volumes are extremely useful to scholars, but their format and cost make it certain that these books will never reach a general readership—the "plow-boys" of our day whom Tyndale sought to reach. What is really needed is a fresh edition of Tyndale's theological writings, presented in chronological order, in modern spelling, similar to David Daniell's editions of *Tyndale's Testaments* and the *Obedience of the Christian Man*.■

218. *An exposition* (1533), fol. xv, sig. Bvii(v); cf. *The exposition* (Warner, ed.), p. 143; *Works*, 2.20.

219. *The fyrst boke of Moses called Genesis* (1534), sig. Aii; cf. Daniell, *Tyndale's Old Testament*, p. 7.

In Brief: William Perkins, The Properties of the Ministry of the Word. Continued from page 102.

The scepter of Christ whereby He smites the nations, is in His mouth (Isa. 11:4); that is, in the ministry of the Word (Jer. 15:19). And it is the same ministry which shakes heaven and earth (Hag. 2:6). By this it appears that to take a text and to make a discourse upon something in the said text, showing much invention of wit, and much reading, and human learning, is not to preach Christ in a lively manner. It will be said: what then? I answer with Paul, *who is sufficient either for the speaking or doing of these things?* Yet something may be shown. Know therefore that the effectual and powerful preaching of the Word, stands in three things. The first is true and proper interpretation of the Scripture, and that by itself: for Scripture is both the gloss and the text. The second is savory and wholesome doctrine gathered out of the Scriptures truly expounded. The third is the application of the said doctrine, either to the information of the judgment, or to the reformation of the life. This is the preaching that is of power. Let all the sons of the prophets think upon these things and study to be doers of them.

Furthermore, two questions are here resolved. The first is whether images be necessary in the congregations of the people of God? **ANS.** There are Christian images and pictures, and they are very necessary. And these images are sermons of Christ and the right administration of the sacraments. For in them Christ is described and painted out unto us. As for the painted and carved images of the Papiſts, we utterly detest them as idols. They allege that they are *laymen's books*: but Habakuk says, *they are doctors of lies* (Hab. 2:18). And where the lively preaching of the word is, there is no need of them. And therefore images were not established in churches in these west parts till after 700 years. As long as the church had golden teachers, there were no wooden images: but when golden teachers did degenerate, and become wooden teachers, then came both golden and wooden images. It is further said, why may not we paint Christ in our churches with colors as with words in sermons? **ANS.** The one the Lord allows, namely, the description of Christ in speech. But the carving or painting of images in churches, and that for religious use, He condemns (Exod. 20: 6).

The second question is whether there be now in the church of God any sacrifice or oblation of Christ? **ANSWER.** There is after a sort. For there is a lively representation of the passion of Christ in the preaching of the Word and in the administration of the Lord's Supper, as if Christ were yet in crucifying, and as though His blood were now distilling from His hands and sides. As for the sacrifice of the Mass, it is an abomination and a mere mockery. For there the priest, when he says, *Accept these gifts*, etc., is become a Mediator between Christ and God: and the body and blood of Christ is offered in an unbloody manner; that is, blood is offered without blood: and the priest, when he has offered Christ, eats up all that he has

offered. Yet for this damnable oblation many stand: and the reason is because they are bewitched and enchanted with pretended shows of Fathers, Councils, Antiquity, Succession, etc.

Lastly, here we learn what is the duty of all believers; namely, to behold Christ crucified. *O daughters of Sion, behold your king* (Cant. 3:11). But where must we behold him? Not in roods and crucifixes after the Popish manner; but we must look on Him as He propounds Himself unto us in the Word and sacraments. For thus is He the true object of our faith. And how must we behold him? By the eye of faith, which makes us both see Him and feel Him (as it were) crucified in us. Here note that implicit faith (which is to believe as the church believes) is a blind faith: for by it we cannot contemplate and behold Christ. And the common fault is here to be noted, whereby men neglect and pass by this contemplation of Christ. There is among us the evil eye that devours all it sees: there is the adulterous eye: but where is the eye of faith to behold Christ? Where is the force of this eye to be seen which makes the thing which it beholds to be ours, and us like unto it? We love to trick and paint our bodies, and some to set fine complexions on their faces (and therefore complexions at this day are made a kind of merchandise); but away with such vanities. If ye love to be painted: I will tell you what ye shall do. The office of the ministers is to describe and paint out Christ unto us: let them paint Christ crucified in the heart, and set up His image there, and then shalt thou have a favorable complexion in the eye both of God and man.

That this contemplation of Christ by faith may take more place, and be the better practiced, consider the use of it. First, by beholding Christ crucified, we see our misery and wickedness. For our sins are the swords and spears which have crucified Him (Zech. 12:10). Secondly, this sight brings us true and lively comfort: for beholding Christ crucified, we see paradise as it were in the midst of hell: we see the handwriting against us cancelled (Col. 2:14); we see the remission of our sins written with the heart blood of Christ and sealed with the same. Thirdly, this sight of Christ makes a universal change of us. The chameleon takes to it the colors of the things which it sees and are near unto it: and the believing heart takes to it the disposition and mind that was in Christ crucified, by viewing and beholding of Christ. This sight makes us mourn and bleed in our hearts for our offences, when we consider that Christ was crucified for them: and it makes us love Christ when we consider the love of God in Christ crucified.

Lastly, this thing must be a terror to all the ungodly. For they have no care to behold Christ, but by their lewd lives they crucify him: and for this cause in the day of judgment they shall see with heavy hearts Christ to be their judge whom they have pierced (Rev. 1:7). Better therefore it is, now in the day of grace, to behold Him with the eye of faith to our comfort, than now to despise Him and then to behold Him to our everlasting shame, with the eye of confusion. ■