

A Key

by William Penn

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the Light Within as a direct revelation of God's will, and encourages listeners to follow its leadings for salvation and spiritual growth.

Scripture: Matthew 5:44, John 1:9, John 14:6, Romans 13:1, 1 Corinthians 1:18, Ephesians 2:8, James 5:12, 1 John 1:5

Topics: "Quaker Theology", "Inner Light"

Description

William Penn preaches about the true principles of the Quakers, emphasizing the importance of the Light within every individual as the guiding force towards salvation and holiness. He addresses misconceptions and perversions of their beliefs, clarifying their stance on various topics such as the Light within, Scriptures, the Trinity, and good works. Penn highlights the Quakers' deep faith in Christ as the Divine Word and the necessity of obedience to His teachings for true faith and salvation. He also explains their views on baptism, the Lord's Supper, the resurrection, eternal rewards, civil honor, respect, and government, refuting false accusations and presenting their commitment to peace, love, and spiritual warfare.

Transcript

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By William Penn

"Opening the Way to Every Capacity; How to Distinguish the Religion Professed by the People Called Quakers, from the Perversions and Misrepresentations of their Adversaries; With a Brief Exhortation to All Sorts of People to Examine Their Ways, and Their Hearts, and Turn Speedily to the Lord."

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The Tract Association of Friends

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INTRODUCTION TOC

Observing the prevailing power of prejudice, and the easiness of mankind to be imposed upon, especially on the side of uncharitableness, we have the less wondered at the treatment which we, as a people, have suffered. The credulous have been excited to look upon us as heretics. while, blessed be God, our aim and bent have been the very power and work of religion upon our souls, that we might be God's workmanship, through Christ Jesus, His blessed Son: taking this to be the very life and soul of true religion, the effect and fruit of the Divine nature, which makes us Christians indeed here and fits us for glory hereafter. And because we have chosen retirement, moderation, self-denial--the spirit and substance of religion--and therefore sequestered ourselves from more outward communions, we have been disingenuously represented to the world; on which account I have published this little treatise, for the sake of others as well as in our own vindication, but theirs especially that are under prejudices.

It will be the business of this little KEY to explain the obscurity, and thereby open a way into so clear and plain an understanding of our true principles that we hope, with God's blessing all impartial inquirers will be satisfied of our holy and Christian profession. And this we also earnestly desire for their good, that as we have been called of God to be a people to His praise, through His Grace, none may be offended at the truth we testify of, but, seeing the excellency of it, walk in it, and obtain the true end of religion, the salvation of the soul .

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Section I

OF THE LIGHT WITHIN, WHAT IT IS, AND THE VIRTUE AND BENEFIT OF IT TO MAN TOC

Perversion: The Quakers hold that the natural light in the conscience of every man is sufficient to save all that follows it, and so they overthrow salvation by Christ. . .A mighty error indeed. if it were true.

Principle: But it is at best a great mistake: for their belief and assertion is that Christ, Who is the Word that was with God, and was God, and is so forever, has enlightened every man with His own Light, as He is that True Light. And that such as follow the leadings of that Light, with which He enlightens the understandings and consciences of men, shall not walk in darkness, that is in evil and ignorance of God, but shall have the Light of Life, that is, be in a holy and living state or condition toward God--a state of acceptance and salvation, which is from sin here as well as from wrath here after, for which Christ was given of God. So that they assert the Light of Christ to be sufficient to save, that is, to convince of sin, lead out of it, and quicken the soul in the ways of holiness, and not a natural light. This Light is something else than the bare understanding man has as a rational creature, since as such, man cannot be a light to himself, but has only the capacity of seeing by means of the Light which Christ the Word enlightens him. As the sun in the firmament is the light of our bodies, so the Light of the Divine Word is the sun of our souls, and they that walk in it will by it be led to blessedness.

Perversion 2: The Quakers hold, that the Light within them is God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit; so that every Quaker has whole God, Christ and Holy Spirit in him, which is gross blasphemy.

Principle: This is also a mistaking of their belief. They never said that every divine illumination, or manifestation of Christ in the hearts of men, was whole God, Christ, or the Spirit, which might render them guilty of that gross and blasphemous absurdity some would fasten upon them But that God, Who is Light, or the Word Christ, Who is Light, styled the second Adam, the Lord from heaven, and the quickening Spirit, Who is God over all, blessed forever, has enlightened mankind with a measure of saving Light, Who said, "I am the Light of the world; and they that follow me shall not abide in darkness, but have the Light of Life." So that the illumination is from God, or Christ the Divine Word; but not, therefore, that whole God or Christ is in every man anymore than the whole sun or air is in every house or chamber.

Perversion 3: By the Quaker's doctrine every man must be saved, for every man, they say, is savingly enlightened.

Principle: Not so. For though the Light or grace of God has and does more or less appear to all men, and brings salvation to as many as are taught by it to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world, yet it no way follows that men must obey. God tenders saving light or grace to all, and by it calls all, and strives and pleads with all, according to the measure and manifestation of it; but if they will not hearken, He is clear of their blood. His Light is saving that lights them, but it cannot be said to save them, while they rebel against it. In short, though men are lightened or visited with a saving Light or grace, yet the Quakers never concluded, nor can it be rightly concluded from their testimony, that such men must necessarily be saved, whether they obey or rebel.

Perversion 4: By the Quaker's Light or Spirit, they may be moved to any wickedness because they say such as are so led have the Light within them.

Principle: This never was their doctrine, nor is it consequent of it. For though they hold that all have Light, they never said that all obeyed it, or that evil men, as such, and in such things, were led by it. Much less could the Light be chargeable with the sins of those who refuse to be led by it. For herein they know the

Spirit of God and the motions of it from the spirit of this world and its fruits: that the Spirit of God condemns all ungodliness and moves and inclines to purity, mercy, righteousness, which are of God.

God's Spirit makes people free from sin, and brings all that regard the convictions and motions of it into a sense and sorrow for sin, and so into a state of reformation, without which all profession of religion is mere formality. Man's sin and destruction are of himself, but his help is in God alone, through Jesus Christ, our blessed Sacrifice and Sanctifier.

Section II

OF INFALLIBILITY AND PERFECTION TOC

Perversion 5: The Quakers must be infallible and perfect, if they have such an infallible Light in them.

Principle: This is also a great abuse of their true meaning. They say, the Principle is pure, perfect, unerrable in itself, else it were very unfit to lead men out of error and impurity. But they never did assert themselves such, merely because it was within them. But that all who are led by it, and live according to its manifestations, are so far perfect, and so far infallible in the right way as they are led by it and not farther. For it is not opinion, or speculation, or notions of what is true, or assent to propositions, though ever so soundly worded that makes a man a true believer: it is a conformity of mind and practice to the dictates of this Divine principle of Light and Life in the soul which denotes a person a child of God. For the children of God are led by the Spirit of God, but if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His. And let it be noted that though this Spirit be in man, yet it is not of man, but of God, through Jesus Christ.

Section III

OF THE SCRIPTURES, THEIR TRUTH AUTHORITY AND SERVICE TOC

Perversion 6: The Quakers deny Scripture, for they deny them to be the word of God.

Principle: They own and style the Scriptures as they own and style themselves: a declaration of those things most truly believed, given forth in former ages by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit: consequently they are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. We believe them and read them, and say it is the work we have to do in this world and the earnest desire of our souls to Almighty God that we may feel and witness the fulfilling of them in and upon ourselves; that so God's will may be done on earth as it is in heaven. But to call them the Word of God which they never call themselves, but by which they peculiarly denominate and call Christ and in no slight to them-- which we believe to be of Divine authority, and to embrace the best of books--and allow to be as much the word of God as a book can be--they do, in duty and reason bound, attribute to Christ only.

And yet as the word of God may in some sense signify the command of God, referring to the thing or matter commanded as the mind of God, it may be called the Word of the Lord, or Word of God; as on particular occasions, the prophets had the Word of the Lord to persons and places, that is to say, the mind or will of God, or that which was commanded them of the Lord to declare or do. So Christ uses it when He tells the Pharisees that they had made the word or command of God of none effect by their traditions. But because people are apt to think if they have the Scriptures they have all--for that they account them the word of God, and so look no farther, that is, to no other Word from whence these good words came--therefore this people have been constrained, and, they believe, by God's good Spirit again to point

them to the great Word, Christ Jesus, in Whom is life, and that life is the Light of men: that they might feel something nearer to them than the Scriptures--the Word in the heart, from whence all the Holy Scriptures came, which is Christ within them, the hope of their glory. And to be sure, He is the only right expounder, as well as the author, of the Holy Scripture, without whose Light, Spirit, or grace, they cannot be savingly read by those that read them.

Perversion 7: They deny them to be any means whereby to resist temptation.

Principle: This is a very uncharitable aspersion. True it is that they deny Scriptures of themselves to be sufficient to resist temptations, for then all that have them and read them would be sure to be preserved by them against temptations. But that they should deny them to be any means or instrument in God's hand, is either great ignorance or injustice in their adversaries. God has made use of the Scriptures, and daily does and will make use of them, for instruction, reproof, comfort, and edification, through the Spirit, to those that read them as they ought to do.

Section IV

OF THE HOLY SPIRIT OF GOD AND ITS OFFICE, WITH RESPECT TO MAN, AND OF THE MINISTRY TOC

Perversion 8: The Quakers assert the Spirit of God to be the immediate Teacher, and there is no other means now to be useful, as ministry, ordinances, etc.

Principle: They never spoke such language, and their daily practice confutes the reflection. They never denied the use of means, such means as are used in the life and power of God, and not from man's will and innovation. They cannot own that to be a Gospel ministry that is without a Gospel spirit, or that such can be sent of God who are not taught of God, or that they are fit to teach others what regeneration and the way to heaven are who have never been born again themselves, or that such can bring souls to God who are themselves strangers to the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost.

This unexperienced and lifeless ministry is the only ministry that the people called Quakers cannot own and receive, and therefore cannot maintain. For the ministry and the ministers that are according to Scriptures, they both own, respect and delight in, and are ready to assist and support in their service to God.

They deny all false means: Evangelical means and order they love to keep, for they diligently assemble themselves to wait upon God, to enable them to worship Him, where they both pray and prophesy, one by one, as prepared and moved in their hearts by His Spirit, and as anything is revealed to them. Otherwise they are silent before the Lord. Nor are they without spiritual songs, making melody in their hearts to God their Redeemer, by the same Holy Ghost, as often as they are comforted and moved by it, as was the primitive practice.

Section V

OF THE HOLY THREE, OR SCRIPTURE TRINITY TOC

Perversion 9: The Quakers deny the Trinity.

Principle: Nothing less. They believe in the holy three, or Trinity of Father, Word, and Spirit, according to Scripture. And that these things are truly and properly one; of one nature as well as will. But they are tender of quitting Scripture terms and phrases for schoolmen's, such as distinct and separate Persons or subsistences are, from whence people are apt to entertain gross ideas and notions of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. And they judge that a curious inquiry into those high and divine revelations, or into speculative subjects, though never so great truths in themselves, tends little to godliness and less to peace. which should be the chief aim of true Christians. Therefore, they cannot gratify that curiosity in themselves or others. Speculative truths are, in their judgment, to be sparingly and tenderly declared, and never to be made the measure and condition of Christian communion. Men are too apt to let their heads outrun their hearts, and their notions exceed their obedience, and their passions support their conceits, instead of a daily cross, a constant watch, and a holy practice.

Section VI

OF THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST TOC

Perversion 10: The Quakers deny Christ to be God.

Principle: A most untrue and unreasonable censure, for their great and characteristic principle being this, that Christ, as the Divine Word, lights the souls of all men that come into the world, with a spiritual and saving Light, which nothing but the Creator of souls can do. It sufficiently shows that they believe Him to be God, for they truly and expressly own Him to be so, according to Scripture: "In Him was Life, and that Life was the Light of men; and He is God over all, blessed forever."

Section VII

OF THE MANHOOD OF CHRIST TOC

Perversion 11: The Quakers deny the Human nature of Christ.

Principle: we never taught, said, or held so gross a thing, if by human nature be understood the manhood of Christ Jesus. For as we believe Him to be God over all, blessed forever, so we do truly believe Him to be truly and properly man, like us in all things, and once subject to all things for our sake, sin only excepted.

Section VIII

OF CHRIST JESUS, HIS DEATH AND SUFFERINGS TOC

Perversion 12: The Quakers expect to be justified and saved by the Light within them. and not by the death and sufferings of Christ.

Principle: This is both unfairly and untruly charged upon us. But the various senses of the word justification oblige me here to distinguish the use of it, for in the natural and proper sense it plainly implies making men just who were unjust, godly that were ungodly, upright that were depraved: as the apostle expresses himself, "And such were some of you but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of our Lord Jesus. and by the Spirit of our God." In the other use of the word, which some call a law-sense, it refers to Christ as a sacrifice and propitiation for sin, "Much more then, being now justified by His blood, ye shall be saved from wrath through Him." And "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the

Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." Which, though a great truth and most firmly believed by us, yet no man can be entitled to the benefit thereof but as he comes to believe and repent of the evil of his ways, and then it may be truly said that God justifies even the ungodly, and looks upon them through Christ as if they had never sinned, because their sins are forgiven them for His beloved Son's sake.

Not that God looks on people to be in Christ, who are not in Christ, that is, who are not in the faith, obedience, and self-denial of Christ, nor sanctified, nor led by His Spirit, but rebel, and instead of dying to sin through true repentance, indulge themselves daily in it; for they that are in Christ become new creatures, old things are passed away, and all things become new. Wherefore we say that whatever Christ then did, both living and dying, was of great benefit to the salvation of all who have believed and now do, and who hereafter shall believe in Him. But the way to come to that faith is to receive and obey the manifestation of His Divine Light and grace in their conscience, which leads men to believe and value, and not disown or undervalue Christ as the common sacrifice and Mediator. For we do affirm that to follow this holy Light, and to turn to it, is the only way to have true living faith in Christ as He appeared in the flesh and to receive Him as sacrifice and Mediator.

We believe that Christ came not to save men in their sins, but from their sins, and that those that open their hearts to inward convictions of His Light and grace, have their conscience sprinkled with His blood from dead works, to serve the living God. And so far only as men come by faith, repentance and amendment to be Christ's, Christ is theirs, so far as they are obedient to His grace and take up His cross and follow Him in the ways of meekness, holiness and self-denial. There is no condemnation in them that are in Christ Jesus, because such walk not after the flesh but after the spirit. We have seen a shoal here which we desire to avoid, and are earnest that others may beware also; that because Christ died a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, by which He put mankind into a capacity for salvation, they presume upon that sacrifice and sin on, not dying with Christ to the world, but living in it according to the spirit of it. Such as these may be assured that where Christ is gone, they shall never come, for God sent His Son to bless us, by turning every one of us from the evil of our way.

For it is not another than that Eternal Word, Light, Power Wisdom, and Righteousness, Which took flesh and appeared in that Holy Body, by Whom they have received, or can receive any true spiritual benefit; Whose doctrine pierced, Whose life preached, Whose miracles astonished, Whose blood atoned, and Whose death, resurrection and ascension, confirmed that blessed manifestation to be no less than the Word God manifested in the flesh for the salvation of the world, and if we now receive Him into our hearts, as the true Light, that leads in the way of life eternal.

Section IX

OF GOOD WORKS TOC

Perversion 13: Thus it is the Quakers set up works and meriting by works, whereby justification by faith in Christ is laid aside.

Principle: By no means. But they say with the Apostle James, that the true faith in Christ cannot be without works, any more than a body can live without a spirit; and that where there is no life there is no motion, and where there is no Divine life and motion, there can be no true faith, believing being a fruit of Divine life. And no sooner is true faith begotten in a soul, but it falls to working, which is both the nature, and in some respects, the end of it.

Nor yet do we say that our very best works, proceeding from the true faith itself, can merit. No, nor faith joined with them, because eternal life is the gift of God. All that man is capable of believing or performing can never be said to merit everlasting blessedness, because there can be no proportion between the best works in the life of man and eternal felicity. Wherefore, all that man can do, even with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, can never be said strictly to merit as a debt due to the creature. But on the other hand, that right faith and good works which arise out of it or will follow it, may and do obtain the blessed immortality which it pleases God to give and to privilege the sons of men with who perform the necessary condition, is a Gospel and necessary truth. And this the Quakers ground upon, and therefore boldly affirm to the world.

So that they deny all merit from the best of works, especially such as some conceive to be meritorious. But as they on one hand deny the meritoriousness of works, so on the other hand neither can they join in that lazy faith that works not out the salvation of the soul. Blessed is he that hears Christ's words and does them. Wherefore, it shall be said at the last day, not well professed, but "well done good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of the Lord, thou holy liver that lovedst me above all, and thy neighbor as thyself. enter, For thee and such as thou art was it prepared from the foundation of the world." Which recompense of his faithfulness is the infinite love of God revealed and given to man through Christ. For though the wages of sin be death, yet the gift of God is eternal life to such.

So that the people called Quakers do not hold that their good works justify them; for though none are justified that are not in some measure sanctified, yet all that man does is duty, and therefore cannot blot out old scores, for that is more grace and favor, upon repentance, through Christ the Sacrifice and Mediator. So that men are not justified because they are sanctified, but for His sake that sanctifies them, and works all their good works in them and for them, and presents them blameless, that is Christ Jesus, who is made unto them, as He was to the saints of old, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption, that he that glorieth might glory in the Lord.

Section X

OF WATER BAPTISM AND THE SUPPER TOC

Perversion 14: The Quakers deny the two great sacraments or ordinances of the Gospel, Baptism and the Supper.

Principle: Whatever is truly a Gospel ordinance, they desire to own and practice. But they observe no such language in the Scriptures as in the reflection. They do confess the practice of John's baptism and the Supper is to be found there; but practice only is no institution, nor a sufficient reason for continuation. That they were then proper, they believe, when the mysteries lay yet couched in figures and shadows. But it is their belief that no figures or signs are perpetual or of institution under the Gospel administration, when Christ, Who is the Substance of them, is come.

It were to overthrow the whole Gospel dispensation, and to make the coming of Christ of no effect, to render signs and figures of the nature of the Gospel, which is inward, spiritual and eternal. If it be said, but they were used after the coming of Christ, and His ascension too: they answer, so were many Jewish ceremonies. It is sufficient to them that water baptism was John's, and not Christ's; that Jesus never used it; that it was no part of Paul's commission, which if it were evangelical and of duration, it certainly would have been; that there is but one baptism, as well as one faith, and one Lord; and that baptism ought to be of the same nature with the kingdom of which it is an ordinance, and that is spiritual. The same holds also as to the supper, both alluding to old Jewish practices, and used as a signification of a near and

accomplishing work, namely, the Substance they represented.

If any say, but Christ commanded that one of them should continue in remembrance of Him, which the apostle to the Church of Corinth explains thus: that thereby they do show forth the Lord's death till He comes. We allege that He said so. told His disciples also He would come to them again; that some should not taste death till they saw Him coming in the kingdom: and that He Who dwelleth with them, should be in them; and that He would drink no more of this fruit till He should drink it anew with them in the kingdom of God, which is within. He was the heavenly bread that they had not yet known, nor His flesh and blood as they were to know them. So that though Christ came to end all signs, yet till He was known as the Great Bread of life from heaven, signs had their service to show forth in remembrance of Christ. Paul says expressly of the Jewish observations, that they were shadows of the good things to come, but the Substance was of Christ.

Hence it is that the Quakers cannot be said to deny them, but they, truly feeling in themselves the very thing which the outward water, bread and wine signify, leave them off, as fulfilled in Christ, Who is in them the hope of their glory, and henceforth they have but one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one bread, and one cup of blessing, and that is of the kingdom of God, which is within.

Section XI

OF THE RESURRECTION, AND ETERNAL RECOMPENSE TOC

Perversion 15: They acknowledge no resurrection of the dead, nor rewards to come.

Principle: In this also we are greatly abused. We deny not, but believe the resurrection according to Scripture, not only from sin, but also from death and the grave, but are conscientiously cautious in expressing the manner of the resurrection intended, because it is left a secret by the Holy Ghost in the Scripture, which makes the Quakers contented with that body which God shall please to give them hereafter, being assured that their corruptible shall put on incorruption, and their mortal shall put on immortality, but in such a manner as pleases God. In the meantime, they esteem it their duty, as well as wisdom, to acquiesce in His holy will. It is enough they believe a resurrection and that with a glorious and incorruptible body, for that was the ancient hope. Now, as to eternal rewards, they not only believe in them, but as the Apostle says of old, have the most reason to do so. It is their faith, their hope, their interest, and what they wait and have suffered for, and press, as an encouragement to faithfulness, upon one another.

Section XII

OF CIVIL HONOR AND RESPECT TOC

Perversion 16: The Quakers deny all civil honor and respect, but what is relative or equal between men.

Principle: We honor all men in the Lord, but not in the spirit and fashion of the world which passes away. And though we do not pull off our hats or give flattering titles, or use compliments, because we believe there is no true honor in using them, yet we treat all men with seriousness and gentleness, though it be with plainness, and our superiors with a modest distance, and are ready to do them any reasonable benefit or service, in which we think real honor consists. And as for expressing our respect to our superiors, we think it best done by obeying all just laws, according to the saying of the centurion unto Christ, and which Christ so much approved: reasonable commands and reasonable obedience. This is

honoring government and governors, and not empty titles and servile gestures.

Section XIII

OF CIVIL GOVERNMENT TOC

Perversion 17: The Quakers are enemies of all government; first, in that e rezone acts according to his own conceit; secondly, because they will not support civil government and so are useless if not dangerous to it; thirdly, because they refuse to give evidence upon oath.

Principle: This is a calumny, their lives and conversations sufficiently show. They believe magistracy to be an ordinance of God, and that he that rules well deserves to be valued and esteemed; and further, they are a people that love good order and good government among themselves.

It is true indeed that they cannot kill their own kind, and so are not fit for warriors with carnal weapons, because they believe their blessed Lord forbade the use of them to His followers, when He said "They that take the sword, shall perish with the sword." The use of the sword in war God suffered for the hardness of men's hearts: in fine, it came in with the Fall and must go out with it also. And as Christ, the repairer and restorer, comes to rule in the heart, love will take place of wrath, and forgiveness overcomes injury and revenge. For which cause, the weapons of this people's warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of the strongholds of sin. They take their beginnings in Christ. the beginning and the end of all true Christians. Let not this people be thought useless, or inconsistent with government, for introducing this harmless way to the distracted world-- for somebody must begin it--but rather embrace the principle and follow the example, believing with them that Christ, the blessed Shepherd of His flock, will preserve the faithful followers of His peaceable and forgiving doctrine.

It is their desire to be able to give evidence. But they cannot swear at all, Christ having commanded His followers that their yea and nay should serve instead, because what is more comes of evil. So that it is for Christ's sake that they cannot swear Who is the Truth and has taught them to speak truth without an oath.

POSTSCRIPT TOC

Hear, and be entreated for your soul's sake! O that ye knew God your Creator to be also your Redeemer. Who does as certainly visit you by the Spirit of the second Adam as ever He created you in the nature of the first: that as in one you fell, in the other you may arise, and become a chosen people to God. "This is my beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased, hear ye Him," said God the Father. And what says Christ the Son? "Learn of me. for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls." For out of Christ we cannot have peace. You must take up your cross daily and follow Him, or ye cannot be His disciples, His followers, His people, His friends: those in whom He is well pleased. Whose doctrine is the living teaching of His Spirit in your own hearts, and whose religion is not opinion, but experience, life from death; in short, holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. Be strict and true in the search. If your mind be set on heavenly things, well will it be with you forever: to live then will be Christ, and to die eternal gain. For blessed is that people whose God is the Lord.

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