

OF THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL

CCLXXI.

We must reject those who so highly boast of Moses laws, as to temporal affairs, for we have our written imperial and country laws, under which we live, and unto which we are sworn. Neither Naaman the Assyrian, nor Job, nor Joseph, nor Daniel, nor many other good and godly Jews, observed Moses laws out of their country, but those of the Gentiles among whom they lived. Moses law bound and obliged only the Jews in that place which God mad choice of. Now they are free. If we should keep and observe the laws and rites of Moses, we must also be circumcised, and keep the mosaical ceremonies; for there is no difference; he that holds one to be necessary, must hold the rest so too. Therefore let us leave Moses to his laws, excepting only the *Moralia*, which God has planted in nature, as the Ten Commandments, which concern God's true worshipping and service, and a civil life.

CCLXXII.

The particular and only office of the law is, as St Paul teaches, that transgressions thereby should be acknowledged; for it was added, because of transgressions, till seed should come, to whom the promise was made. These are the express and plain words of St Paul; therefore we trouble not ourselves with what the papists allege to the contrary, and spin out of human reason, extolling the maintainers and seeming observers of Moses law.

CCLXXIII.

God gives to the emperor the sword, the emperor delivers it to the judge, and causes thieves, murderers, etc., to be punished and executed. Afterwards, when God pleases, he takes the sword from the emperor again; even so does God touching the law; he leaves it to the devil, and permits him therewith to affright sinners.

CCLXXIV.

The law is used in two ways; first, for this worldly life, because God has ordained all temporal laws and statutes to prevent and hinder sin. But here some one may object: If the law hinder sin, then also it justifies. I answer: Oh! no, this does not follow; that I do not murder, commit adultery, steal, etc., is not because I love virtue and righteousness, but because I fear the

hangman, who threatens me with the gallows, sword, etc. It is the hangman that hinders me from sinning, as chains, ropes, and strong bands hinder bears, lions, and other wild beasts from tearing and rending in pieces all that come in their way.

Hence we may understand, That the same can be no righteousness that is performed out of fear of the curse, but sin and unrighteousness; for the law binds mankind, who by nature are prone to wickedness, that they do not sin, as willingly they would.

Therefore this is the first point concerning the law, that it must be used to deter the ungodly from their wicked and mischievous intentions. For the devil, who is an abbot and prince of this world, allures people to work all manner of sin and wickedness; wherefore God has ordained magistrates, elders, schoolmasters, laws and statutes, to the end, if they can do no more, that at least they may bind the claws of the devil, and hinder him from raging and swelling so powerfully in those who are his, according to his will and pleasure.

Secondly, we use the law spiritually, as thus: To make transgressions seem greater, as St Paul says, or to reveal and discover to people their sins, blindness, and ungodly doings, wherein they were conceived and born; namely, that they are ignorant of God, and are his enemies, and therefore have justly deserved death, hell, God's judgments, his everlasting wrath and indignation. But the hypocritical sophists in universities know nothing thereof, neither do those who are of opinion that they are justified by the law and their own works.

But to the end that God might put to silence, smother, suppress and beat down to the ground these mischievous and furious beasts, he has appointed and ordained a particular Hercules with a club, powerfully to lay hold on such beasts, take them captive, strike them down, and so dispatch them out of the way; that is, he gave the law upon the hill of Sinai, with such fearful thundering and lightning, that all people thereat were amazed and affrighted.

It is exceeding necessary for us to know this use of the law. For he that is not an open and a public murderer, an adulterer, or a thief, holds himself to be an upright and godly man; as did the Pharisee, so blinded and possessed spiritually of the devil, that he could neither see nor feel his sins, nor his miserable case, but exalted himself touching his good works and deserts. Such hypocrites and haughty saints can God by no better means humble and soften, than by and through the law; for that is the right club or hammer, the thunderclap from heaven, the axe of God's wrath, that strikes through, beats down, and batters such stock-blind, hardened hypocrites. For this cause, it is no small matter that we should rightly understand what the law is, whereto it serves, and what is its proper work and office. We do not reject the law and the works thereof, but on the contrary, confirm them, and teach that we ought to do good works, and that the law is very good and profitable, if we merely give it its right, and keep it to its own proper work and office.

The law opens not nor makes visible God's grace and mercy, or the righteousness whereby we obtain everlasting life and salvation; but our sins, our weakness, death, God's wrath and judgment.

The light of the gospel is a far different manner of light, enlightening affrighted, broken, sorrowful, and contrite hearts, and reviving, comforting, and refreshing them. For it declares that God is merciful to unworthy, condemned sinners, for the sake of Christ, and that a blessing thereby is presented unto them who believe; that is, grace, remission of sins, righteousness, and everlasting life.

When in this way we distinguish the law and the gospel, then we attribute and give to each its right work and office. Therefore, I pray and admonish all lovers of godliness and pure religion, especially those who in time are to be teachers of others, that with highest diligence they study this matter, which I much fear, after our time, will be darkened again, if not altogether extinguished.

CCLXXV.

Never was a bolder, harsher sermon preached in the world than that wherein St Paul abolished Moses and his law, as insufficient for a sinner's salvation.

Hence the continual dissension and strife which this apostle had with the Jews. And if Moses had not cashiered and put himself out of his office, with these words: "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee another prophet out of thy brethren, him shalt thou here;" who then would or could have believed the gospel, and forsaken Moses?

Hence the vehement accusation brought by the worthy Jews, who suborned certain men to accuse the beloved Stephen, saying: "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God." Likewise, "This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against the holy place and the law," etc. For to preach and teach that the observing of the law was not necessary to salvation, was to the Jews as horrible, as though one should stand up and preach among us Christians: Christ is not the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world. St Paul could have been content they had kept and observed the law, had they not asserted it was necessary to salvation. But the Jews would no more endure this, than the papists, with their fopperies, will now endure that we hold and observe the ceremonies, so that every one shall be at liberty either to observe or not observe them, according as occasion serves, and that the conscience therein may not be bound or ensnared, and that God's Word freely be preached and taught. But Jews and papists are ungodly wretches; they are two stockings made of one piece of cloth.

CCLXXVI.

Moses with his law is most terrible; there never was any equal to him in perplexing, affrighting, tyrannizing, threatening, preaching, and thundering; for he lays sharp hold on the conscience, and fearfully works it, but all by God's express command. When we are affrighted, feeling our sins, God's wrath and judgments, most certainly, in the law is no justification; therein is nothing celestial and divine, but 'tis altogether of the world, which world is the kingdom of the devil. Therefore it is clear and apparent that the law can do nothing that is vivifying, saving, celestial, or divine; what it does is altogether temporal; that

is, it gives us to know what evil is in the world, outwardly and inwardly. But, besides this, the Holy Ghost must come over the law, and speak thus in thy heart; God will not have thee affright thyself to death, only that through the law thou shouldest know thy misery, and yet not despair, but believe in Christ, who is the end of the law for righteousness.

CCLXXII.

St Paul now and then speaks scornfully of the law, but he means not that we should condemn the law; he would rather we should esteem and hold it precious. But where he teaches how we become justified before God, it was necessary for him so to speak; for it is far another thing when we talk how we may be justified before God, than when we talk about the law. When we have in hand the righteousness that justifies before God, we cannot too much disdain or undervalue the law.

The conscience must have regard to nothing but Christ; wherefore we must with all diligence, endeavor to remove Moses with his law far from us out of sight, when we intend to stand justified before God.

CCLXXVIII.

It is impossible for thy human strength, whosoever thou art, without God's assistance, when Moses sets upon thee with his law, accuses and threatens thee with God's wrath, and death, to possess such peace as if no law or sin had ever been.

When thou feelest the terror of the law, thou mayest say thus: Madam Law! I have no time to hear you speak; your language is very rough and unfriendly; I would have you know that your reign is over, therefore I am now free, I will endure your bondage no longer. When we thus address the law, we shall find the difference between the law of grace and the law of thundering Moses; and how great a divine and celestial gift it is to hope against hope, when there seems nothing to hope for; and how true the speech of St Paul is, where he says: "Through faith in Christ we are justified, and not through the works of the law." When, indeed, justification is not the matter in hand, we ought highly to esteem the law, extol it, and with St Paul, call it good, true, spiritual, and divine, as in truth it is.

God will keep his Word through the writing pen upon earth; the divines are the heads or quills of the pens, the lawyers the stumps. If the world will not keep the heads and quills, that is, if they will not hear the divines, they must keep the stumps, that is, they must hear the lawyers, who will teach them manners.

CCLXXIX.

I will have none of Moses with his law, for he is an enemy to my Lord and Saviour Christ. If Moses will go to law with me, I will give him his dispatch, and say: Here stands Christ.

At the day of judgment Moses will doubtless look upon me, and say: Thou didst understand me rightly, and didst well distinguish between me and the law of faith; therefore we are now friends.

We must reject the law when it seeks to affright the conscience, and when we feel God's anger against our sins, then we must eat, drink, and be cheerful, to spite the devil. But human wisdom is more inclined to understand the law of Moses, than the law of the Gospel. Old Adam will not out.

Together with the law, Satan torments the conscience by picturing Christ before our eyes, as an angry and stern judge, saying: God is an enemy to sinners, for he is a just God; thou art a sinner, therefore God is thy enemy. Here at is the conscience dejected, beaten down, and taken captive. Now he that can make a true difference in this case, will say: Devil! thou art deceived, it is not so as thou pretendest; for God is not an enemy to all sinners, but only to the ungodly and impenitent sinners and persecutors of his Word. For even as sin is two-fold, even so is righteousness two-fold.

CCLXXX.

Two learned men came to me, and asked whether the law of God revealed sin to people without the particular motion of the Holy Ghost? the one affirming that it was so, the other denying it. The first would prove his opinion out of St Paul, where he says: "By the law is the knowledge of sin;" but the other alleged, that this was the work and office of the Holy Ghost through the law; for many heard the preaching of the law, and yet did not acknowledge their sins.

I answered them: Ye are both in the right if ye well understood one another; your difference consists only in words; for the law must be understood two manner of ways; first, as a law described and heard; when it reveals not the strength or the sting of sin, it goes in at one ear and out at the other; it neither touches nor strikes the heart at all.

Secondly, when the law is taught, and the Holy Ghost comes thereunto, touches the heart, and gives strength to the Word, and the heart confesses sin, feels God's wrath, and says: Ah! this concerns me; I have sinned against God, and have offended. Then the law has well and rightly finished its work and office.

After these came a third, and said: `tis one matter to be simply a law, and another to be God's law; for the law of God must always have its operation and strength, which the law of man has not. To him I made this answer:

The law must be distinguished, understood, and divided three-fold: first, a written law, second, a verbal, third, a spiritual law. The written law, which is written in the book, is like a block, which, without motion, remains lying; that law does nothing except we read therein. The verbal law reveals and shows sin; yea, in the ungodly; for when adulterers hear the seventh commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," then they understand that this

reproves them; but they either condemn it, or else they persecute those by whom they are reproved. But the spiritual law cannot be without the motion of the Holy Ghost, which touches the heart, and moves it, so that a man not only ceases to persecute, but has sorrow for sins committed, and desires to be better.

The same person urged: St Paul says, that the word works in the hearers; I answered: the word which in that place St Paul speaks of, must be understood of the gospel; for even that Word, whether written or verbal, taught or preached, does nothing without the Holy Ghost, which must kindle it in their hearts, reviving and strengthening them.

CCLXXXI.

Every law or commandment contains two profitable points: first, a promise; second, a threatening; for every law is, or should be, good, upright, and holy, Rom. vii. It commands that which is good, and forbids that which is evil: it rewards and defends the good and godly, but punishes and resists the wicked; as St Paul says: "Rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good." And St Peter: "For the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well." And the imperial laws teach the same. Now, seeing there are promises and threatenings in temporal laws, how much more so are they fitting in God's laws, which require faith. The emperor's laws, indeed, require faith, true or feigned; for those who do not fear or believe that the emperor will punish or protect, observe not his laws, as we see, but those observe them that fear and believe, whether from the heart or not. Now, where in Scripture there is a promise without the law, there faith only is necessary: as, when Abraham was promised that his seed should multiply as the stars of heaven; he was not commanded at that time to accomplish any work, but he heard of a work which God would accomplish, and which he himself was not able to do. Thus is Christ promised unto us, and is described to have done a work which we cannot do; therefore in this case, faith is needful for us, because by works we cannot take hold thereof.

CCLXXXII.

The law, with its righteousness, is like a cloud without rain, which promises rain but gives none; even so does the law promise salvation, but gives it not, for the law was not assigned to that end, as St Paul says, Gal. iii.

CCLXXXIII.

The Gospel preaches nothing of the merit of works; he that says the Gospel requires works for salvation, I say, flat and plain, is a liar.

Nothing that is properly good proceeds out of the works of the law, unless grace be present; for what we are forced to do, goes not from the heart, nor is acceptable. The people under Moses were always in a murmuring state, would fain have stoned him, and were rather his enemies than his friends.

CCLXXXIV.

He that will dispute with the devil out of the law, will be beaten and taken captive; but he that disputes with him out of the Gospel, conquers him. The devil has the written bond against us; therefore, let no man presume to dispute with him of the law or sin. When the devil says to me: behold, much evil proceeds from thy doctrine, then I say to him: much good and profit come also from it. O! replies the devil, that is nothing to the purpose. The devil is an artful orator; he can make out of a mote a beam, and falsify that which is good; he was never in all his life so angry and vexed as he is now; I feel him well.

It baptism, if the sacrament, if the Gospel be false, and if Christ be not in heaven and governs not, then indeed I am in the wrong; but if these are of God's instituting and ordaining, and if Christ is in heaven and rules, then I am sure that the cause I have in hand is good; for what I teach and do openly in the church is altogether of the Gospel, of baptism, of the Lord's supper, of prayer, etc. Christ and his Gospel are here present; therein I must and will continue.

CCLXXXV.

If we diligently mark the world, we shall find that it is governed merely by its conceited opinions; sophistry, hypocrisy, and tyranny rule it; the upright, pure and clear divine Word must be their handmaid, and by them controlled. Therefore, let us beware of sophistry, which consists not only in a double tongue, in twisting words, which may be construed any way, but also blossoms and flourishes in all arts and vocations, and will likewise have room and place in religion, where it has usurped a fine, fictitious color.

Nothing is more pernicious than sophistry; we are by nature prone to believe lies rather than truth. Few people know what an evil sophistry is; Plato, the heathen writer, made thereof a wonderful definition. For my part, I compare it with a lie, which, like a snowball, the more it is rolled the greater it becomes.

Therefore, I approve not of such as pervert everything, undervaluing and finding fault with other men's opinions, though they be good and sound. I like not brains that can dispute on both sides, and yet conclude nothing certain. Such sophistications are mere crafty and subtle inventions and contrivances, to cozen and deceive people.

But I love an honest and well affected mind, that seeks after truth simply and plainly, and goes not about with fantasies and cheating tricks.

CCLXXXVI.

St Paul says: "What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin condemned sin in flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us," etc. That is, Christ is the sum of all; he is the right, the pure meaning and contents of the law. Whoso has Christ, has rightly fulfilled the law. But to take away the law altogether, which sticks in nature, and is written in our hearts

and born in us, is a thing impossible and against God. And whereas the law of nature is somewhat darker, and speaks only of works, therefore, Moses and the Holy Ghost more clearly declare and expound it, by naming those works which God will have us to do, and to leave undone. Hence Christ also says: "I am not come to destroy the law." Worldly people would willingly give him royal entertainment who could bring this to pass, and make out that Moses, through Christ, is quite taken away. O, then we should quickly see what a fine kind of life there would be in the world! But God forbid, and keep us from such errors, and suffer us not to live to see the same.

CCLXXXVII.

We must preach the law for the sake of evil and wicked, but for the most part it lights upon the good and godly, who, although they need it not, except so far as may concern the old Adam, flesh and blood, yet accept it. The preaching of the Gospel we must have for the sake of the good and godly, yet it falls among the wicked and ungodly, who take it to themselves, whereas it profits them not; for they abuse it, and are thereby made confident. It is even as when it rains in the water or on a desert wilderness, and meantime, the good pastures and grounds are parched and dried up. The ungodly out of the gospel suck only a carnal freedom, and become worse thereby; therefore, not the Gospel, but the law belongs to them. Even as when my little son John offends, if then I should not whip him, but call him to the table to me, and give him sugar plums, thereby I should make him worse, yea, quite spoil him.

The Gospel is like a fresh, mild, and cool air in the extreme heat of summer, a solace and comfort in the anguish of conscience. But as this heat proceeds from the rays of the sun, so likewise the terrifying of the conscience must proceed from the preaching of the law, to the end we may know that we have offended against the laws of God.

Now, when the mind is refreshed and quickened again by the cool air of the Gospel, then we must not be idle, lie down and sleep. That is, when our consciences are settled in peace, quieted and comforted through God's Spirit, we must prove our faith by such good works as God has commanded. But so long as we live in this vale of misery, we shall be plagued and vexed with flies, with beetles, and vermin, that is, with the devil, the world, and our own flesh; yet we must press through, and not suffer ourselves to recoil.

CCLXXXVIII.

In what darkness, unbelief, traditions, and ordinances of men have we lived, and in how many conflicts of the conscience we have been ensnared, confounded, and captivated under popedom, is testified by the books of the papists, and by many people now living. From all which snares and horrors we are now delivered and freed by Jesus Christ and his Gospel, and are called to the true righteousness of faith; insomuch that with good and peaceable consciences we now believe in God the Father, we trust in him, and have just cause to boast that we have sure and certain remission of our sins through the death of Christ Jesus, dearly bought and purchased. Who can sufficiently extol these treasures of the conscience, which everywhere are spread abroad, offered and presented merely by grace? We are now

conquerors of sin, of the law, of death, and of the devil; freed and delivered from all human traditions. If we would but consider the tyranny of auricular confession, one of the least things we have escaped from, we could not show ourselves sufficiently thankful to God for loosing us out of that one snare. When popedom stood and flourished among us, then every king would willingly have given ten hundred thousand guilders, a prince one hundred thousand, a nobleman one thousand, a gentleman one hundred, a citizen or countryman twenty or ten, to have been freed from that tyranny. But now seeing that such freedom is obtained for nothing, by grace, it is not much regarded, neither give we thanks to God for it.

CCLXXXIX.

The Old Testament is chiefly a law-book, teaching what we should do or not do, and showing examples and acts how such laws are observed and transgressed. But besides the law, there are certain promises and sentences of grace, whereby the holy patriarchs and prophets were preserved then, as we are now. But the New Testament is a book wherein is written the gospel of God's promises, and the acts of those that believed, and those that believed not. And it is an open and public preaching and declaration of Christ, as set down in the sentences of the Old Testament, and accomplished by him. And like as the proper and chief doctrine of the New Testament is grace and peace, through the forgiveness of sins declared in Christ, so the proper and chief doctrine of the Old Testament is, through the law, to discover sin, and to require good works and obedience.

We must take good heed that we make not a Moses out of Christ, nor out of Christ as Moses, as often has been done. But where Christ and his apostles, in the Gospel, give out commands and doctrines expounding the law, these are as important as the other works and benefits of Christ. Yet to only know Gospel precepts, is not to know the Gospel; but when the voice sounds which says, Christ is thine own, with life and works, with death and resurrection, with all what he is, and all he has, by this we see that he forces not, but teaches amicably, saying: "Bless are the poor," etc., "Come to me all ye that are weary and heavy laden," etc. and the apostles use the words: "I admonish," "I exhort," "I pray," etc.; so that we see in every place that the Gospel is not a law-book, but a mild preaching of Christ's merits, given to be our own, if we believe.

Hence it follows that no law is given to the faithful whereby they become justified before God, as St. Paul says, because they are already justified and saved by faith; but they show and prove their faith by their works, they confess and teach the gospel before people freely and undauntedly, and thereupon venture their lives; and whatsoever they take in hand, they direct to the good and profit of their neighbor, and so follow Christ's example. For, where works and love do not break through and appear, there faith is not.

We must make a clear distinction; we must place the Gospel in heaven, and leave the law on earth; we must receive of the Gospel a heavenly and a divine righteousness; while we value the law as an earthly and human righteousness, and thus directly and diligently separate the righteousness of the gospel from the righteousness of the law, even as God has separated and distinguished heaven from earth, light from darkness, day from night, etc., so that the

righteousness of the Gospel be the light and the day, but the righteousness of the law, darkness and night. Therefore all Christians should learn rightly to discern the law and grace in their hearts, and know how to keep one from the other, in deed and in truth, not merely in words, as the pope and other heretics do, who mingle them together, and, as it were, make thereof a cake not fit to eat.

CCXC.

Augustine pictured the strength, office, and operation of the law, by a very fit similitude, to show, that it discovers our sins, and God's wrath against sin, and places them in our sight. "The law," says he, "is not in fault, but our evil and wicked nature; even as a heap of lime is still and quiet, until water be poured thereon, but then it begins to smoke and burn, not from the fault of the water, but from the nature and kind of the lime, which will not endure water; whereas, if oil, instead, be poured upon it, then it lies still, and burns not; even so it is with the law and the Gospel."

CCXCI.

On this matter of the righteousness of the law, St Paul thoroughly bestirred himself against God's professing people, as in Rom. ix., x., xi., he strives with powerful, well-based arguments; it produced him much sorrow of heart.

The Jews argument was this: Paul kept the law at Jerusalem, therefore, said they, we must also keep it. Answer: True, Paul for a certain time kept the law, by reason of the weak, to win them; but, in this our time, it is not so, and agrees not in any way therewith; as the ancient father well said: Distinguish times, and we may easily reconcile the Scriptures together.

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