

THE BOOKS OF HOMILIES: Book 2—XXI. An Homily against disobedience and willful rebellion: Parts 3 & 4

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[0 : 0 0] An homily against disobedience and willful rebellion. The third part. As I have in the first part of this treatise showed unto you the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures as concerning the obedience of true subjects to their princes, even as well to such as be evil as unto the good, and in the second part of the same treaty confirmed the said doctrine by notable examples, likewise taken out of the Holy Scriptures, so remaineth it now that I partly do declare unto you in this third part what an abominable sin against God and man rebellion is, and how dreadfully the wrath of God is kindled and inflamed against all rebels, and what horrible plagues, punishments and deaths, and finally eternal damnation doth hang over their heads, as how on the contrary part good and obedient subjects are in God's favour, and be partakers of peace, quietness and security, with other God's manifold blessings in this world, and by his mercies, through our Saviour Christ, of life everlasting also in the world to come.

How horrible a sin against God and man rebellion is, cannot possibly be expressed according unto the greatness thereof, for he that nameth rebellion, nameth not a singular or one only sin, as is theft, robbery, murder, and such like, but he nameth the whole puddle and sink of all sins against God and man, against his prince, his country, his countrymen, his parents, his children, his kinsfolks, his friends, and against all men universally.

All sins, I say, against God and all men, heap together, nameth he that nameth rebellion. For concerning the offence of God's majesty, who seeth not that rebellion riseth first by contempt of God and of his holy ordinances and laws, wherein he so straightly commandeth obedience, forbiddeth disobedience and rebellion, and besides the dishonour done by rebels unto God's holy name by their breaking of the oath made to their prince, with the attestation of God's name and calling of his majesty to witness, who heareth not the horrible oaths and blasphemies of God's holy name that are used daily amongst rebels, that is either amongst them or heareth the truth of their behaviour?

Who knoweth not that rebels do not only themselves leave all works necessary to be done upon workdays undone, whilst they accomplish their abominable work of rebellion and do compel others, that will gladly be well occupied to do the same, but also how rebels do not only leave the Sabbath day of the Lord unsanctified, the temple and church of the Lord unresorted unto, but also do by their works of wickedness most horribly profane and pollute the Sabbath day, serving Satan and, by doing of his work, making it the devil's day instead of the Lord's day, besides that they compel good men that would gladly serve the Lord, assembling in his temple and church upon this day as becometh the Lord's servants, to assemble and meet armed in the field to resist the fury of such rebels.

Yea, and many rebels, lest they should leave any part of God's commandments in the first table of his law unbroken, or any sin against God undone, do make rebellion for the maintenance of their images and idols, and of their idolatry committed or to be committed by them, and in despite of God cut and tear and sunder his holy word, and tread it under their feet, as of late ye know was done.

[3 : 11] As concerning the second table of God's law, and all sins that may be committed against man, who seeth not that they be all contained in rebellion? For first the rebels do not only dishonour their prince, the parent of their country, but also do dishonour and shame their natural parents, if they have any, do shame their kinred and friends, do disherit and undo forever their children and heirs.

Thefts, robberies, and murders, which of all sins are most loathed by most men, are in no men so much, nor so perniciously or mischievously as in rebels. For the most errant thieves and cruelest murderers that ever were, so long as they refrain from rebellion, as they are not many in number, so spreadeth their wickedness and damnation unto a few.

They spoil but a few, they shed the blood but of a few, in comparison. But rebels are the cause of infinite robberies, and murders of great multitudes, and of those also whom they should defend from the spoil and violence of other.

And as rebels are many in number, so doth their wickedness and damnation spread itself unto many. And if whoredom and adultery amongst such persons as are agreeable to such wickedness are, as they indeed be, most damnable, What are the forcible oppressions of matrons and men's wives, and the violating and deflowering of virgins and maids, which are most rife with rebels?

How horrible and damnable think you are they! Now besides that rebels, by breach of their faith given an oath made to their prince, be guilty of the most damnable perjury, it is wondrous to see what false colours and feigned causes, by slanderous lies made upon their prince and the counsellors, rebels will devise to cloak their rebellion with all.

[4 : 48] Which is the worst and most damnable of all false witness-bearing that may be possible? For what should I speak of coveting or desiring of other men's wives, houses, lands, goods, and servants in rebels, who by their wills would leave unto no man anything of his own?

Thus you see that all God's laws are by rebels violated and broken, and that all sins possible to be committed against God or man be contained in rebellion, which sins, if a man lists to name by the accustomed names of the seven capital or deadly sins, as pride, envy, wrath, covetousness, sloth, gluttony, and lechery, he shall find them all in rebellion and amongst rebels.

For first, as ambition and desire to be aloft, which is the property of pride, stirreth up many men's minds to rebellion, so cometh it of a Luciferian pride and presumption that a few rebellious subjects should set themselves up against the majesty of their prince, against the wisdom of the counsellors, against the power and force of all nobility, and the faithful subjects and people of the whole realm.

As for envy, wrath, murder, and desire of blood, and covetousness of other men's goods, lands, and livings, they are the inseparable accidents of all rebels, and peculiar properties that do usually stir up wicked men unto rebellion.

Now such as by riotousness, gluttony, drunkenness, excessive apparel, and unthrifty games have wasted their own goods unthriftily, the same are most apt unto and most desirous of rebellion, whereby they trust to come by other men's goods unlawfully and violently.

[6 : 18] And where other gluttons and drunkards take too much of such meats and drinks as are served to tables, rebels waste and consume in short space, all corn in barns, fields, or elsewhere, whole garners, whole storehouses, whole cellars, devour whole flocks of sheep, whole droves of oxen and kine.

And as rebels that are married, leaving their own wives at home, do most ungraciously, so much more do unmarried men, worse than any stallions or horses, being now by rebellion set at liberty from correction of laws which bridle them before, which abuse by force other men's wives and daughters, and ravish virgins and maidens, most shamefully, abominably, and damnably.

Thus all sins, by all names that sins may be named, and by all means that all sins may be committed and wrought, do all wholly upon heaps follow rebellion, and are to be found altogether amongst rebels.

Now whereas pestilence, famine, and war are by the holy scriptures declared to be the greatest worldly plagues and miseries that likely can be, it is evident that all the miseries which all these plagues have in them, do wholly altogether follow rebellion, wherein, as all their miseries be, so is there much more mischief then in them all.

For it is known that in the resorting of great companies of men together, which in rebellion happeneth both upon the part of true subjects and of the rebels, by their close lying together, and corruption of the air, and place where they do lie with orgy, and much filth in the hot weather, and by unwholesome lodging, and lying often upon the ground, specially in cold and wet weathers in winter, by their unwholesome diet and feeding at all times, and often by famine and lack of meat and drink in due time, and again by taking too much at other times, it is well known, I say, that as well plagues and pestilences, as all other kinds of sickness and maladies, by these means grow upon and amongst men, whereby more men are consumed at the length, than are by dint of sword suddenly slain in the field.

[8 : 12] So that not only pestilences, but also all other sickness, diseases and maladies do follow rebellion, which are much more horrible than plagues, pestilences and diseases sent directly from God, as hereafter shall appear more plainly.

And as for hunger and famine, they are the peculiar companions of rebellion, for while rebels do in short times spoil and consume all corn and necessary provision, which men with their labours had gotten and appointed upon for their finding the whole year after, and also do let all other men, husbandmen and others, from their husbandry and other necessary works, whereby provision should be made for times to come, who seeth not that extreme famine and hunger must need shortly ensue and follow rebellion?

Now whereas the wise king and godly prophet David judged war to be worse than either famine or pestilence, for that these too are often suffered by God for man's amendment, and be not sins of themselves, but wars have always the sins and mischiefs of men upon the one side or other joined with them, and therefore is war the greatest of these worldly mischiefs, but of all wars civil war is the worst, and far more abominable yet is rebellion than any civil war, being unworthy the name of any war, so far it exceedeth all wars in all naughtiness, in all mischief, and in all abomination, and therefore our saviour Christ denounceth desolation and destruction to that realm that by sedition and rebellion is divided in itself.

Now as I have showed before that pestilence and famine, so is it yet more evident that all the calamities, miseries and mischiefs of war be more grievous, and do more follow rebellion than any other war, as being far worse than all other wars.

For not only those ordinary and usual mischiefs and miseries of other wars do follow rebellion, as corn and other things necessary to man's use to be spoiled, houses, villages, towns, cities to be taken, sacked, burned, and destroyed, not only many wealthy men, but whole countries to be impoverished and utterly beggared, many thousands of men to be slain and murdered, women and maids to be violated and deflowered, which things, when they are done by foreign enemies, we do much mourn, as we have great causes, yet are all these miseries without any wickedness wrought by any our countrymen, but when these mischiefs are wrought in rebellion by them that should be friends, by countrymen, by kinsmen, by those that should defend their country and countrymen from such miseries, the misery is nothing so great as is the mischief and wickedness, when the subjects unnaturally do rebel against their prince, whose honour and life they should defend, though it were with loss of their own lives, countrymen to disturb the public peace and quietness of their country, for defence of whose quietness they should spend their lives, the brother to seek and often to work the death of his brother, the son of the father, the father to seek or procure the death of his sons, being at man's age, and by their faults to disherit their innocent children and kinsmen, their heirs forever, for whom they might purchase livings and lands, as natural parents do take care and pains to be at great costs and charges, and universally, instead of all quietness, joy and felicity, which do follow blessed peace and due obedience, to bring in all trouble, sorrow, disquietness of minds and bodies, and all mischief and calamities, to turn all good order upside down, to bring all good laws in contempt, and to tread them under feet, to oppress all virtue and honesty, and all virtuous and honest persons, and to set all vice and wickedness, and all vicious and wicked men at liberty to work their wicked wills, which were before bridled by wholesome laws, to weaken, to overthrow, and to consume the strength of the realm, their natural country, as well by the spending and wasting of the money and treasure of the prince and realm, as by murdering of the people of the same, their own countrymen, who should defend the honour of their prince, and liberty of their country against the invasion of foreign enemies, and so finally to make their country, thus by their mischief weakened, ready to be a prey and spoil to all outward enemies that will invade it, to the utter and perpetual captivity, slavery, and destruction of all their countrymen, their children, their friends, their kinsfolks left alive, whom by their wicked rebellion they procure to be delivered into the hands of foreign enemies, as much as in them doth lie.

[12 : 28] In foreign wars our countrymen, in obtaining the victory, win the praise of valiantness, yea, and though they were overcome and slain, yet win they an honest commendation in this world, and die in a good conscience, for serving God, their prince, and their country, and be children of eternal salvation.

But in rebellion, how desperate and strong soever they be, yet win they shame here, in fighting against God, their prince, and country, and therefore justly do fall headlong into hell if they die, and live in shame and fearful conscience, though they escape.

But commonly they be rewarded with shameful deaths, their heads and carcasses set upon poles, or hanged in chains, eaten with kites and crows, judged unworthy the honour of burial, and so their souls, if they repent not, as commonly they do not, the devil harrieth them into hell in the midst of their mischief.

For which dreadful execution St. Paul showeth the cause of obedience, not only for fear of death, but also in conscience to God would, for fear of eternal damnation in the world to come.

Wherefore, good people, let us, as the children of obedience, fear the dreadful execution of God, and live in quiet obedience, to be the children of everlasting salvation. For as heaven is the place of good obedient subjects, and held the prison and dungeon of rebels against God and their prince, so is that realm happy, where most obedient of subjects doth appear, being the very figure of heaven, and contrarywise, where most rebellions and rebels be, there is the express similitude of hell, and the rebels themselves are the very figures of fiends and devils, and their captain the ungracious pattern of Lucifer and Satan, the prince of darkness, of whose rebellions they be followers, so shall they of his damnation in hell undoubtedly be partakers, and, as undoubtedly, children of peace, the inheritors of heaven with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, to whom be all honour and glory for ever and ever.

[14 : 22] Amen. For your further instruction, good people, to show unto you how much almighty God doth abhor disobedience and willful rebellion, especially when rebels advance themselves so high that they arm themselves with weapon, and stand in field to fight against God, their prince, and their country.

It shall not be out of the way to show some examples set out in scriptures, written for our eternal erudition. We may soon know, good people, how heinous offence the treachery of rebellion is, if we call to remembrance the heavy wrath and dreadful indignation of almighty God against such subjects, as do only but inwardly grudge, mutter, and murmur against their governors, though their inward treason, so privily hatched in their breasts, come not to open declaration of their doings, as hard it is, whom the devil hath so far enticed against God's word, to keep themselves there.

No, he meaneth still to blow the coal, to kindle their rebellious hearts, to flame into open deeds, if he be not with grace speedily withstand. Some of the children of Israel, being murmurers against their magistrates appointed over them by God, were stricken with foul leprosy.

Many were burnt up with fire suddenly sent from the Lord. Some time a great sort of thousands were consumed with the pestilence. Some time they were stinged to death with a strange kind of fiery serpents.

And which is most horrible, some of the captains with their band of murmurers, not dying by any usual or natural death of men, but the earth opening, they with their wives, children, and families, were swallowed quick down into hell.

[15 : 56] Which horrible destructions of such Israelites as were murmurers against Moises, appointed by God to be their head and chief magistrate, are recorded in the book of Numbers, and other places of the scriptures, for perpetual memory and warning to all subjects, how highly God is displeased with the murmuring and evil speaking of subjects against their princes, for that, as the scripture recordeth, their murmur was not against their prince only, being a mortal creature, but against God himself also.

Now, if such strange and horrible plagues did fall upon such subjects as did only murmur and speak evil against their heads, what shall become of those most wicked imps of the devil that do conspire, arm themselves, assemble great numbers of armed rebels, and lead them with them against their prince and country, spoiling and robbing, killing and murdering all good subjects that do withstand them, as many as they may prevail against?

But those examples are written to stay us, not only from such mischiefs, but also from murmuring or speaking once an evil word against our prince, which, though any should do never so secretly, yet do the holy scriptures show that the very birds of the air will berate them, and these so many examples before noted out of the same holy scriptures, do declare that they shall not escape horrible punishment therefore.

Now concerning actual rebellion, amongst many examples thereof set forth in the holy scriptures, the example of Absalom is notable, who, entering into conspiracy against King David his father, both used the advice of very witty men, and assembled a very great and huge company of rebels.

The witch Absalom, though he were most goodly of persons, of great nobility, being the king's son, in great favour of the people, and so dearly beloved of the king himself, so much that he gave commandment that, notwithstanding his rebellion, his life should be saved, when for these considerations most men were afraid to lay their hands upon him.

[17 : 47] A great tree, stretching out his arm, as it were for that purpose, caught him by the great and long bush of his goodly hair, lapping about it as he fled hastily bareheaded under the said tree, and so hanged him up by the hair of his head in the air, to give an eternal document, that neither comeliness of personage, neither nobility, nor favour of the people, no, nor favour of the king himself, can save a rebel from due punishment.

God, the king of all kings, being so offended with him that, rather than he should lack due execution for his treason, every tree, by the way, will be a gallows or gibbet unto him, and the hair of his own head will be unto him, instead of an halter to hang him up with, rather than he should lack one.

A fearful example of God's punishment, good people to consider. Now Achitophel, though otherwise an exceedingly wise man, yet the mischievous counsellor of Absalom, in this wicked rebellion, for lack of an hangman, a convenient servitor for such a traitor, went and hanged up himself, a worthy end of all false rebels, who, rather than they should lack due execution, will, by God's just judgment, become hangmen unto themselves.

Thus happened it to the captains of that rebellion, beside forty thousand of rascal rebels, slain in the field and in the chase. Likewise is it to be seen, in the holy scriptures, how that great rebellion, which the traitor Seba moved in Israel, was suddenly appeased, the head of the captain traitor, by the means of a seely woman, being cut off.

And as the holy scriptures do show, so doth daily experience prove, that the counsels, conspiracies, and attempts of rebels, never took effect, neither came to good, but to most horrible end.

[19 : 26] For though God do oftentimes prosper just and lawful enemies, which be no subjects, against their foreign enemies, yet did he never long prosper rebellious subjects, against their prince, were they never so great in authority, or so many in number.

Five princes or kings, for so the scripture termeth them, with all their multitudes, could not prevail against Chador Leomo, unto whom they had promised loyalty and obedience, and had continued in the same certain years.

But they were all overthrown and taken prisoners by him. But Abraham, with his family and kinsfolks, and handful of men in respect, owing no subjection unto Chador Leomo, overthrew him and all his host in battle, and recovered the prisoners and delivered them.

So that, though war be so dreadful and cruel a thing as it is, yet doth God often prosper a few in lawful wars, with foreign enemies against many thousands, but never yet prospered his subjects, being rebels against their natural sovereign, were they never so great or noble, so many, so stout, so witty, and politic, but always they came by the overthrow, and to a shameful end.

So much doth God abhor rebellion more than other wars, though otherwise being so dreadful, and so great a destruction to mankind. Though not only great multitudes of the rude and rascal commons, but sometime also men of great wit, nobility, and authority, have moved rebellions against their lawful princes, whereas true nobility should most abhor such villainous, and true wisdom should most attest such frantic rebellion, though they would pretend sundry causes, as the redress of the commonwealth, which rebellion of all other mischiefs doth most destroy, or reformation of religion, whereas rebellion is most against all true religion, though they have made a great show of holy meaning by beginning their rebellions with a counterfeit service of God, as did wicked Absalom begin his rebellion with sacrificing unto God, though they display and bear about ensigns and banners, which are acceptable unto the rude ignorant common people, great multitudes of whom by such false pretenses and shows they do deceive and draw unto them.

[21 : 27] Yet were the multitudes of the rebels never so huge and great, the captains never so noble, politic, and witty, the pretenses feigned to be never so good and holy, yet the speedy overthrow of all rebels, of what number, state, or condition soever they were, or what colour or cause soever they pretended, is and ever hath been such, that God thereby doth show that he alloweth neither the dignity of any person, nor the multitude of any people, nor the weight of any cause, as sufficient for the which the subjects may move rebellion against their princes.

Turn over and read the histories of all nations, look over the chronicles of our own country, call to mind so many rebellions of old time, and some yet fresh in memory. Ye shall not find that God ever prospered any rebellion against their natural and lawful prince, but contrarywise that the rebels were overthrown and slain, and such as were taken prisoners dreadfully executed.

Consider the great and noble families of dukes, marquesses, earls, and other lords, whose names ye shall read in our chronicles. Now clean, extinguished, and gone, and seek out the causes of the decay.

Ye shall find that not lack of issue an heir's mail hath so much wrought that decay and waste of noble bloods and houses, as hath rebellion. And for so much as the redress of the commonwealth hath of old been the usual feigned pretense of rebels, and religion now of late beginneth to be a colour of rebellion.

Let all godly and discreet subjects consider well of both, and first concerning religion. If peaceable King Solomon was judged of God to be more meet to build his temple, whereby the ordering of religion is meant, than his father King David, though otherwise a most godly king, for that David was a great warrior, and had shed much blood, though it were in his wars against the enemies of God, of this may all godly and reasonable subjects consider, that a peaceable prince, specially our most peaceable and merciful queen, who hath hitherto shed no blood at all, no, not of her most deadly enemies, is more like and far meeter, either to set up or to maintain true religion, than our bloody rebels, who have not shed the blood of God's enemies, as King David had done, but do seek to shed the blood of God's friends, of their own countrymen, and of their own most dear friends and kinsfolk, yea, the destruction of their most gracious prince and natural country, for defence of whom they ought to be ready to shed their blood, if need should so require.

[23 : 51] What a religion it is, that such men and by such means would restore, may easily be judged, even as good a religion surely as rebels be good men and obedient subjects, and as rebellion is a good mean of redress and reformation, being itself the greatest deformation of all that may possibly be.

But as the truth of the gospel of our Saviour Christ, being quietly and soberly taught, though it do cost them their lives that do teach it, is able to maintain the true religion, so hath a frantic religion need of such furious maintenances as is rebellion, and of such patrons as are rebels, being ready not to die for the true religion, but to kill all that shall or dare speak against their false superstition and wicked idolatry.

Now concerning pretenses of any redress of the commonwealth made by rebels, every man that hath but half an eye may see how vain they be, rebellion being, as I have before declared, the greatest ruin and destruction of all commonwealths that may be possible, and whoso looketh on the one part upon the persons and government of our Queen's most honourable counsellors, by the experiment of so many years proved honourable to Her Majesty, and most profitable and beneficial unto our country and countrymen, and, on the other part, considereth the persons, state, and conditions of the rebels themselves, the reformers, as they take upon them, of the present government.

He shall find that the most rash and harebrained men, the most greatest unthrifths, that have most lewdly wasted their own goods and lands, those that are over the ears in debt, and such as for thefts, robberies, and murders, dare not in any well-governed commonwealth, where good laws are enforced, show their faces, such as are of most lewd and wicked behaviour in life, and all such as will not or cannot live in peace, are always most ready to move rebellion, or to take part with rebels.

And are not these meat men, trow you, to restore the commonwealth decayed, who have so spoiled and consumed all their own wealth and thrift, and very light to mend other men's manners, who have so vile vices and abominable conditions themselves?

[25 : 53] Surely that which they falsely call reformation, is indeed not only a defacing or a deformation, but also an utter destruction of all commonwealth, as would well appear might the rebels have their wills, and doth right well and too well appear by their doing in such places of the country where rebels do rout, where though they tarry but a very little while, they make such reformation, that they destroy all places, and undo all men where they come, that the child yet unborn may rue it, and shall many years hereafter curse them.

Let no good and discreet subjects therefore follow the flag or banner displayed to rebellion and borne by rebels, though it have the image of the plough painted therein, with God speed the plough written under in great letters, knowing that none hinder the plough more than rebels, who will neither go to the plough themselves, nor suffer other that would go unto it.

And though some rebels bear the picture of the five wounds painted against those who put their only hope of salvation in the wounds of Christ, not those wounds which are painted in a clout by some lewd painter, but in those wounds which Christ himself bear in his precious body, though they, little knowing what the cross of Christ meaneth, which neither carver nor painter can make, do bear the image of the cross painted in a rag against those that have the cross of Christ printed in their hearts, yea, though they paint withal in their flags, hox signo vincis, by this sign thou shalt get the victory, by a most fond imitation of the posy of Constantinus Magnus, that noble Christian emperor and great conqueror of God's enemies, a most unmeet ensign for rebels, the enemies of God, their prince and country, or what other banner soever they shall bear, yet let no good and godly subject, upon any hope of victory or good success, follow such standard bearers of rebellion.

For as examples of such practices are to be found as well in the histories of old, as also of later rebellions in our fathers and our fresh memory, So notwithstanding these pretenses made and banners born, are recorded withal unto perpetual memory the great and horrible murders of infinite multitudes and thousands of the common people slain in rebellion, the dreadful executions of the authors and captains, the pitiful undoing of their wives and children, and inheriting of the heirs of the rebels forever, the spoiling, wasting, and destruction of the people and country where rebellion was first begun, that the child then yet unborn might rue and lament it, with the final overthrow and shameful deaths of all rebels, set forth as well in the histories of foreign nations, as in the chronicles of our own country, some thereof being yet in fresh memory, which, if they were collected together, would make many volumes and books, but on the contrary part, all good luck, success, and prosperity that ever happened unto any rebels of any age, time, or country may be contained in very few lines or words.

Wherefore, to conclude, let all good subjects, considering how horrible a sin against God, their prince, their country, and countrymen, against all God's and man's laws, rebellion is, being indeed not one several sin, but all sins against God and man heaped together, considering the mischievous life and deeds and the shameful ends and deaths of all rebels hitherto, and the pitiful undoing of their wives, children, and families, and inheriting of their heirs forever, and above all things, considering the eternal damnation that is prepared for all impenitent rebels in hell with Satan, the first founder of rebellion, and grand captain of all rebels, let all good subjects, I say, considering these things, avoid and flee all rebellion, as the greatest of all mischiefs, and embrace due obedience to God and our prince, as the greatest of all virtues, that we may both escape all evils and miseries that do follow rebellion in this world, and eternal damnation in the world to come, and enjoy peace, quietness, and security, with all other God's benefits and blessings which follow obedience in this life, and finally may enjoy the kingdom of heaven, the peculiar place of all obedient subjects to God and their prince in the world to come, which I beseech God, the King of all kings, grant unto us for the obedience of his Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, unto whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one God and King immortal, all honour, service, and obedience of all his creatures is due for ever and ever.

[30 : 09] Amen.