

# OpenTheo

## **THE BOOKS OF HOMILIES: Book 2—X. Of them which take offence at certain places of holy Scripture**

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### **Transcript**

An information for them which take offence at certain places of the holy Scripture. He also perceiving what an hindrance and let they be to him and his kingdom, doeth what he can to drive the reading of them out of God's church. And for that end he hath always stirred up, in one place or other, cruel tyrants, sharp persecutors, and extreme enemies unto God and his infallible truth, to pull with violence the holy Bibles out of the people's hands, and have most spitefully destroyed and consumed the same to ashes in the fire, pretending most untruly that the much hearing and reading of God's word is an occasion of heresy, carnal liberty, and the overthrow of all good order in all well-ordered commonweals.

If to know God aright be an occasion of evil, then must we needs grant that the hearing and reading of the holy Scriptures is the cause of heresy, carnal liberty, and the subversion of all good orders. But the knowledge of God and of ourselves is so far off from being an occasion of evil, that it is the readiest, yea, the only mean to bridle carnal

liberty, and to kill all our fleshly affections. And the ordinary way to attain this knowledge is with diligence to hear and read the holy Scriptures.

For the holy Scriptures, saith St. Paul, were given by the inspiration of God. And shall we Christian men think to learn the knowledge of God and of ourselves in any earthly man's work or writing, sooner or better than in the holy Scriptures written by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost? The Scriptures were not brought unto us by the will of man, but holy men of God, as witnesseth St. Peter, spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit of God. The Holy Ghost is the schoolmaster of truth, which leadeth his scholars, as our Saviour Christ saith of him, into all truth.

And whoso is not led and taught by this schoolmaster, cannot but fall into deep error, how goodly soever his pretences, what knowledge and learning soever he hath of all other works and writings, or how fair soever a show or face of truth he hath in the estimation and judgment of the world. If some man will say, I would have a true pattern and a perfect description of an upright life approved in the sight of God, can we find, think ye, any better or any such again as Christ Jesus is and his doctrine? Whose virtuous conversation and godly life the Scripture so lively painteth and setteth forth before our eyes, that we, beholding that pattern, might shape and frame our lives, as nigh as may be, agreeable to the perfection of the same? Follow ye me, saith St. Paul, as I follow Christ. And St. John in his epistle saith, Whoso abideth in Christ must walk, even so as he walked before him.

Where shall we learn the order of Christ's life but in the Scripture? Another would have a medicine to heal all diseases and maladies of the mind. Can this be found or gotten otherwise than out of God's own book, his sacred Scriptures? Christ taught so much when he said to the obstinate Jews, Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think to have eternal life. If the Scriptures contain in them everlasting life, it must needs follow that they have also present remedy against all that is in hindrance and let unto eternal life.

If we desire the knowledge of heavenly wisdom, why had we rather learn the same of man than of God himself, who, as St. James saith, is the giver of wisdom? Yea, why will we not learn it at Christ's own mouth, who, promising to be present with his church till the world's end, doth perform his promise, in that he is not only with us by his grace and tender pity, but also in this, that he speaketh presently unto us in the holy Scriptures, to the great and endless comfort of all them that have any feeling of God at all in them? Yea, he speaketh now in the Scriptures more profitably to us, than he did by word of mouth to the carnal Jews, when he lived with them here upon earth. For they, I mean the Jews, could neither hear nor see those things which we may now both hear and see, if we will bring with us those ears and eyes that Christ is heard and seen with, that is, diligence to hear and read his holy Scriptures, and true faith to believe his most comfortable promises. If one could show but the print of Christ's foot, a great number, I think, would fall down and worship it.

But to the holy Scriptures, where we may see daily, if we will, I will not say the print of his feet only, but the whole shape and lively image of him. Alas, we give little reverence, or none at all. If any could let us see Christ's coat, a sort of us would make hard shift, except we mought come nigh to gaze upon it, yea, and kiss it too.

And yet all the clothes that ever he did wear, can nothing so truly nor so lively express him unto us, as do the Scriptures. Christ's image, made in wood, stone, or metal, some men, for the love they bear to Christ, do garnish and beautify the same with pearl, gold, and precious stone. And should we not, good brethren, much rather embrace and reverence God's holy books, the sacred Bible, which do represent Christ unto us more truly than can any image.

The image can but express the form or shape of his body, if it can do so much. But the Scripture doth in such sort set forth Christ, that we may see him both God and man. We may see him, I say, speaking unto us, healing our infirmities, dying for our sins, rising from death for our justification.

And to be short, we may in the Scriptures so perfectly see whole Christ with the eye of faith, as we, lacking faith, could not with these bodily eyes see him. Though he stood now present here before us. Let every man, woman, and child, therefore, with all their heart, thirst, and desire God's holy Scriptures, love them, embrace them, have their delight and pleasure in hearing and reading them.

So as at length we may be transformed and changed into them. For the holy Scriptures are God's treasure house, wherein are found all things needful for us to see, to hear, to learn, and to believe, necessary for the attaining of eternal life. Thus much is spoken, only to give you a taste of some of the commodities which ye may take by hearing and reading the holy Scriptures.

For, as I said in the beginning, no tongue is able to declare and utter all. And, although it is more clear than the noon day that to be ignorant of the Scriptures is the cause of error, as Christ saith to the Sadducees, Ye are not knowing the Scriptures, and that error doth hold back and pluck men away from the knowledge of God. And, as St. Jerome saith, not to know the Scriptures is to be ignorant of Christ.

Yet this notwithstanding, some there be that think it not meet for all sorts of men to read the Scriptures, because they are, as they think, in sundry places stumbling blocks to the unlearned. First, for that the phrase of the Scripture is sometimes so homely, gross, and plain, that it offendeth the fine and delicate wits of some courtiers. Furthermore, for that the Scripture also reporteth, even of them that have their commendation to be the children of God, that they did diverse acts, whereof some are contrary to the law of nature, some repugnant to the law written, and other some seem to fight manifestly against public honesty.

All which things, say they, are unto the simple an occasion of great offence, and cause many to think evil of the Scriptures, and to discredit their authority. Some are offended at the hearing and reading of the diversity of the rites and ceremonies of the sacrifices and oblations of the law. And some worldly-witted men think it a great decay to the quiet and prudent governing of their commonwealths, to give ear to the simple and plain rules and precepts of our Saviour Christ and His Gospel, as being offended that a man should be ready to turn his right ear to him that strike him on the left, and to him which would take away his coat, to offer him also his cloak, with such other sayings of perfection in Christ's meaning.

For carnal reason, being always an enemy to God, and not perceiving the things of God's Spirit, doth abhor such precepts, which yet, rightly understand it, infringeth no judicial policies, nor Christian men's governments. And some there be which, hearing the Scriptures, to bid us to live without carefulness, without study or forecasting, do deride the simplicity of them. Therefore, to remove and put away occasions of offence, so much as may be, I will answer orderly to these objections.

First I shall rehearse some of those places that men are offended at for the homeliness and grossness of speech, and will show the meaning of them. In the Book of Deuteronomy it is written that Almighty God made a law that if a man died without issue, his brother or an ex-kinsman should marry his widow, and the child that were first born between them should be called his child that was dead, that the dead man's name ought not to be put out in Israel. And if the brother or an ex-kinsman would not marry the widow, then she before the magistrates of the city should pull off his shoe and spit in his face, saying, So be it done to that man that will not build his brother's house.

Here, dearly beloved, the pulling off of his shoe and spitting in his face were ceremonies to signify unto all the people of that city that the woman was not now in fault that God's law in that point was broken, but the whole shame and blame thereof did now redound to that man which openly before the magistrates refused to marry her. And it was not a reproach to him alone, but to all his posterity also, for they will call ever after the house of him whose shoe is pulled off. Another place out of the Psalms, I will break, saith David, the horns of the ungodly, and the horns of the righteous shall be exalted.

By an horn in the Scripture is understand power, might, strength, and sometime rule and government. The prophet then saying, I will break the horns of the ungodly, meaneth that all the power, strength, and might of God's enemies shall not only be weakened and made feeble, but shall at length also be clean broken and destroyed, though for a time for the better trial of his people, God suffereth the enemies to prevail and have the upper hand. In the hundred and thirty second Psalm it is said, I will make David's horn to flourish.

Here David's horn signifieth his kingdom. Almighty God therefore by this manner of

speaking promiseth to give David victory over all his enemies and to establish him in his kingdom spite of all his enemies. And in the three score Psalm it is written, Moab is my wash pot, and over Edom will I cast out my shoe, etc.

In that place the prophet showeth how graciously God hath dealt with his people, the children of Israel, giving them great victories upon their enemies on every side. For the Moabites and Idumeans being two great nations, proud people, stout and mighty, God brought them under and made them servants to the Israelites, servants I say to stoop down to pull off their shoes and wash their feet. Then Moab is my wash pot, and over Edom will I cast out my shoe, is as if he had said, the Moabites and the Idumeans, for all their stoutness against us in the wilderness, are now made our subjects, our servants, yea underlings, to pull off our shoes and wash our feet.

Now I pray you, what uncomely manner of speech is this, so used in common phrase among the Hebrews? It is a shame that Christian men should be so light-headed, to toy as ruffians do of such manner speeches, uttered in good grave signification by the Holy Ghost. More reasonable it were for vain men to learn and reverence the form of God's words, than to gawd at them to his damnation. Some again are offended to hear that the godly fathers had many wives and concubines, although after the phrase of the scripture a concubine is an honest name, for every concubine is a lawful wife, but every wife is not a concubine.

And that ye may the better understand this to be true, ye shall note that it was permitted to the fathers of the Old Testament to have at one time more wives than one, for what purpose ye shall afterward hear? Of which wives, some were free women born, some were bondwomen and servants. She that was free born had a prerogative above those that were servants and bondwomen. The free born woman was by marriage made the ruler of the house under her husband, and is called the mother of the household, the mistress or the dame of the house, after our manner of speaking, and had by her marriage an interest, a right, and an ownership in his goods unto whom she was married.

Other servants and bondwomen were given by the owners of them, as the manner was then, I will not say always, but for the most part, unto their daughters at the day of their marriage, to be handmaidens unto them. After such a sort did Pharaoh king of Egypt give unto Sarah Abraham's wife, Agar the Egyptian, to be her maid. So did Laban give unto his daughter Leah at the day of her marriage, Zilphar, to be her handmaid.

And to his other daughter Rahel he gave another bondmaid, named Bilhah. And the wives that were the owners of their handmaids gave them in marriage to their husbands upon diverse occasions. Sarah gave her maid Agar in marriage to Abraham.

Leah gave in like manner her maid Zilphar to her husband Jacob. So did Rahel his other wife give him Bilhah her maid, saying unto him, Go in unto her, and she shall bear upon my knees, which is as if she had said, Take her to wife, and the children that she shall

bear will I take upon my lap, and make of them as if they were mine own. These handmaidens or bondwomen, although by marriage they were made wives, yet they had not this prerogative to rule in the house, but were still underlings, and in subjection to their mistress, and were never called mothers of the household, mistresses or dames of the house, but are called sometime wives, sometime concubines.

The plurality of wives was by a special prerogative suffered to the fathers of the Old Testament, not for satisfying their carnal and fleshly lusts, but to have many children, because every one of them hoped and begged oft times of God in their prayers, that that blessed seed which God promised should come into the world to break the serpent's head, mought come and be born of his stock and kinred. Now of those which take occasion of carnality and evil life by hearing and reading in God's book what God hath suffered even in those men, whose commendation is praised in the Scripture, hath that Noah, whom St. Peter calleth the eighth preacher of righteousness, was so drunk with wine, that in his sleep he uncovered his own privities. The just man Lot was in like manner drunken, and in his drunkenness lay with his own daughters, contrary to the law of nature.

Abraham, whose faith was so great, that for the same he deserved to be called of God's own mouth a father of many nations, the father of all believers, besides with Sarah his wife, had also carnal company with Agar, Sarah's handmaid. The patriarch Jacob had to his wives two sisters at one time. The prophet David and King Solomon his son had many wives and concubines, etc.

Which things we see plainly to be forboden us by the law of God, and are now repugnant to all public honesty. These in such like in God's book, good people, are not written that we should or may do the like, following their examples, or that we ought to think that God did allow every of these things in those men. But we ought rather to believe and to judge that Noah in his drunkenness offended God highly, Lot lying with his daughters committed horrible incest.

We ought then to learn by them this profitable lesson, that if so godly men as they were, which otherwise felt inwardly God's Holy Spirit inflaming their hearts with the fear and love of God, could not by their own strength keep themselves from committing horrible sin, but did so grievously fall, that without God's great mercy they had perished everlastingly. How much more ought we then, miserable wretches, which have no feeling of God within us at all, continually to fear, not only that we may fall as they did, but also be overcome and drowned in sin, which they were not, and so by considering their fall, take the better occasion to acknowledge our own infirmity and weakness, and therefore more earnestly to call upon almighty God with hearty prayer incessantly for his grace, to strengthen us and to defend us from all evil. And though through infirmity we chance at any time to fall, yet we may by hearty repentance and true faith speedily rise again, and not sleep and continue in sin as the wicked doth.

Thus, good people, should we understand such matters expressed in the divine scriptures, that this holy table of God's word be not turned to us to be a snare, a trap, and a stumbling stone, to take hurt by the abuse of our understanding, but let us esteem them in such a reverent humility, that we may find our necessary food therein, to strengthen us, to comfort us, to instruct us, as God of his great mercy hath appointed them in all necessary works, so that we may be perfect before him in the whole course of our life, which he grant us who hath redeemed us, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost be all honour and glory for evermore. Amen. Ye have heard, good people, in the homily last read unto you, the great commodity of holy scriptures.

Ye have heard how ignorant men, void of godly understanding, seek quarrels to discredit them. Some of their reasons have ye heard answered. Now we will proceed, and speak of such politic wise men which be offended, for that Christ's precepts should seem to destroy all order in governance, as they do allege, for examples such as these be.

If any man strike thee on the right cheek, turn the other unto him also. If any will contend to take thy coat from thee, let him have cloak and all. Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth.

If thine eye, thine hand, thy foot offend thee, pull out thine eye, cut off thy hand, thy foot, and cast it from thee. If thine enemy, saith St. Paul, be hungered, give him meat. If he thirst, give him drink.

So doing, thou shalt heap hot burning coals upon his head. These sentences, good people, unto a natural man seem mere absurdities, contrary to all reason. For a natural man, as St. Paul saith, understandeth not the things that belong to God, neither can he, so long as old Adam dwelleth in him.

Christ therefore meaneth that he would have his faithful servant so far from vengeance and resisting wrong, that he would rather have him ready to suffer another wrong, than by resisting to break charity, and to be out of patience. He would have our good deeds so far from carnal respects, that he would not have our niest friends know of our well-doing, to win a vain glory, and though our friends and kinsfolks be as dear as our right eyes and our right hands, yet if they would pluck us from God, we ought to renounce them and forsake them. Thus, if ye will be profitable hearers and readers of the Holy Scriptures, ye must first deny yourselves, and keep under your carnal senses, taken by the outward words, and search the inward meaning.

Reason must give place to God's Holy Spirit. Ye must submit your worldly wisdom and judgment unto his divine wisdom and judgment. Consider that the Scripture, in what strange form soever it be pronounced, is the word of the living God.

Let that always come to your remembrance, which is so oft repeated of the prophet Esai.

The mouth of the Lord, saith he, hath spoken it. The almighty and everlasting God, who with his only word created heaven and earth, hath decreed it.

The Lord of hosts, whose ways are in the seas, whose paths are in the deep waters, that Lord and God by whose word all things in heaven and in earth are created, governed, and preserved, hath so provided it. The God of gods and Lord of all lords, yea God that is God alone, incomprehensible, almighty and everlasting, he hath spoken it. It is his word.

It cannot therefore be but truth, which proceedeth from the God of all truth. It cannot be but wisely and prudently commanded, what almighty God hath devised, how vainly soever, through want of grace, we miserable wretches do imagine and judge of his most holy word. The prophet David, describing an happy man, saith, Blessed is the man that hath not walked after the counsel of the ungodly, nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of the scornful.

There are three sorts of people, whose company the prophet would have him to flee and avoid which shall be an happy man and partaker of God's blessing. First, he may not walk after the counsel of the ungodly. Secondly, he may not stand in the way of sinners.

Thirdly, he must not sit in the seat of the scornful. By these three sorts of people, ungodly men, sinners and scorers, all impiety is signified and fully expressed. By the ungodly he understandeth those which have no regard of almighty God, being void of all faith, whose hearts and minds are so set upon the world, that they study only how to accomplish their worldly practices, their carnal imaginations, their filthy lust and desire, without any fear of God.

The second sort he calleth sinners, not such as do fall through ignorance or frailness. For then who should be found free? What man ever lived upon earth Christ only accepted, but he hath sinned. The just man falleth seven times and riseth again.

Though the godly do fall, yet they walk not unpurposedly in sin. They stand not still to continue untarian sin. They sit not down like careless men, without all fear of God's just punishment for sin.

But defying sin, through God's great grace and infinite mercy, they rise again and fight against sin. The prophet then calleth them sinners, whose hearts are clean turned from God, and whose whole conversation of life is nothing but sin. They delight so much in the same, that they choose continually to abide and dwell in sin.

The third sort he calleth scorers, that is, a sort of men whose hearts are so stuffed with malice, that they are not contented to dwell in sin, and to lead their lives in all kind of wickedness, but also they do contemn and scorn in other all godliness, true religion, all honesty and virtue. Of the two first sorts of men I will not say but they may take repentance and be converted unto God. Of the third sort I think I may, without danger of



God's judgment, pronounce that never any yet converted unto God by repentance, but continued on still in their abominable wickedness, heaping up to themselves damnation against the day of God's inevitable judgment.

Examples of such scorers we read of in the second book of Chronicles. No, no. The scripture saith the people laughed them to scorn, and mocked the king's messengers.

And in the last chapter of the same book it is written, And led them, their wives and their children, captives unto Babylon. And what estimation had Christ's doctrine among the scribes and Pharisees? What reward had he among them? The gospel reporteth thus, The Pharisees, which were covetous, did scorn him in his doctrine. O then ye see that worldly rich men scorn the doctrine of their salvation.

The worldly wise men scorn the doctrine of Christ as foolishness to their understanding. These scorers have ever been, and ever shall be, till the world's end. For St. Peter prophesied that such scorers should be in the world before the latter day.

Take heed therefore, my brethren, take heed. Be not ye scorers of God's most holy word. Provoke him not to pour out his wrath now upon you, as he did then upon these gibbers and mockers.

Be not willful murderers of your own souls. Turn unto God while there is yet time of mercy. Ye shall else repent it in the world to come, when it shall be too late, for there shall be judgment without mercy.

This most suffice to admonish us, and cause us henceforth to reverence God's holy scriptures. But all men have not faith. This therefore shall not satisfy and content all men's minds.

But as some are carnal, so they will still continue and abuse the scripture carnally to their greater damnation. The unlearned and unstable, saith St. Peter, pervert the holy scriptures to their own destruction. Jesus Christ, as St. Paul saith, is to the Jews an offence, to the Gentiles foolishness.

But to God's children, as well of the Jews as of the Gentiles, he is the power and wisdom of God. The holy man Simeon saith that he is set forth for the fall and rising again of many in Israel. As Christ Jesus is a fall to the reprobate, which yet perish through their own default, so is his word, yea the whole book of God, a cause of damnation unto them through their incredulity.

And as he is a rising up to none other than those which are God's children by adoption, so is his word, yea the whole scripture, the power of God to salvation to them only that do believe it. Christ himself, the prophets before him, the apostles after him, all the true ministers of God's holy word, yea every word in God's book, is unto the reprobate, the savour of death unto death. Christ Jesus, the prophets, the apostles and all the true

ministers of his word, yea every jot and tittle in the holy scripture, have been, is and shall be forevermore the savour of life unto eternal life unto all those whose hearts God hath purified by true faith.

Let us earnestly take heed that we make no jesting stock of the books of holy scriptures. The more obscure and dark the sayings be to our understanding, the further let us think ourselves to be from God and his holy spirit, who was the author of them. Let us with more reverence endeavour ourselves to search out the wisdom hidden in the outward bark of the scripture.

If we cannot understand the sense and the reason of the saying, yet let us not be scorers, jesters and deriders, for that is the uttermost token and show of a reprobate, of a plain enemy to God and his wisdom. They be not idle fables to jest at, which God doth seriously pronounce, and for serious matters let us esteem them. And though in sundry places of the scriptures be set out diverse rites and ceremonies, oblations and sacrifices, let us not think strange of them, but refer them to the times and people for whom they served, although yet to learned men they be not unprofitable to be considered, but to be expounded as figures and shadows of things and persons afterward openly revealed in the new testament.

Though the rehearsal of the genealogies and pedigrees of the fathers be not to much edification of the plain ignorant people, yet is there nothing so impertinently uttered in all the whole book of the Bible, but may serve to spiritual purpose in some respect to all such as will bestow their labours to search out the meanings. These may not be condemned because they serve not to our understanding, nor make not to our edification, but let us turn our labour to understand, and to carry away such sentences and stories as be more fit for our capacity and instruction. And whereas we read in diverse psalms how David did wish to the adversaries of God sometime shame, rebuke, and confusion, sometime the decay of their offspring in issue, sometime that they might perish and come suddenly to destruction, as he did wish to the captains of the Philistines, cast forth, saith he, thy lightning, and tear them, shoot out thine arrows, and consume them, with such other manners of imprecations.

Yet ought we not to be offended at such prayers of David, being a prophet as he was, singly beloved of God, and wrapped in spirit with an ardent zeal to God's glory? He spake them not as of a private hatred and in the stomach against their persons, but wished spiritually the destruction of such corrupt errors and vices which reigned in all devilish persons set against God. He was of like mind as St. Paul was when he did deliver Hymenaeus and Alexander with the notorious fornicator to Satan, to their temporal confusion, that their spirit might be saved against the day of the Lord. And when David did profess in some places that he hated the wicked, yet in other places of his psalms he professeth that he hated them with a perfect hate, not with a malicious hate to the hurt of the soul, which perfection of spirit, because it cannot be performed in us, so corrupted

in affections as we be, we ought not to use in our private causes the like words in form, for that we cannot fulfil the like words in sense.

Let us not therefore be offended, but search out the reason of such words, before we be offended, that we may the more reverently judge of such sayings, those strange to our carnal understandings, yet to them that be spiritually minded, judge to be zealously and godly pronounced. God therefore for his mercy's sake, bought safe to purify our minds through faith in his Son Jesus Christ, and to instil the heavenly drops of his grace into our hard stony hearts, to supple the same, that we be not contemners and deriders of his infallible word, but that with all humbleness of mind and Christian reverence, we may endeavour ourselves to hear and to read his sacred scriptures, and inwardly so to digest them, as shall be to the comfort of our souls and the sanctification of his holy name. To whom, with the Son and the Holy Ghost, three persons and one living God, be all lord, honour and praise for ever and ever.

Amen.