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THE BOOKS OF HOMILIES: Book 1—III. Of the salvation of all mankind

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For the Easter season, I am reading the Books of Homilies, using John Griffiths' 1859 edition (https://prydain.files.wordpress.com/2012/09/the_two_books_of_homilies.pdf).

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Transcript

A sermon of the salvation of mankind by only Christ our Savior from sin and death everlasting. That is to say, the remission, pardon, and forgiveness of his sins and trespasses in such things as he hath offended. And this justification or righteousness, which we so receive by God's mercy and Christ's merits, embraced by faith, is taken, accepted, and allowed of God for our perfect and full justification.

For the more full understanding hereof, it is our parts and duty ever to remember the great mercy of God, how that, all the world being wrapped in sin by breaking of the law, God sent his only Son, our Savior Christ, into this world to fulfill the law for us, and by shedding of his most precious blood, to make a sacrifice and satisfaction, or as it may be called, amends to his Father for our sins, to assuage his wrath and indignation conceived against us for the same. In so much that infants, being baptized and dying in their infancy, are by this sacrifice washed from their sins, brought to God's favor, and made his children, and inheritors of his kingdom of heaven. And they which in act or deed do

sin after their baptism, when they turn again to God unfeignedly, they are likewise washed by this sacrifice from their sins, in such sort that there remaineth not any spot of sin that shall be imputed to their damnation.

This is that justification or righteousness which St. Paul speaketh of, when he saith, No man is justified by the works of the law, but freely by faith in Jesus Christ. And again he saith, We believe in Christ Jesus, that we be justified freely by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law, because that no man shall be justified by the works of the law. And although this justification be free unto us, yet it cometh not so freely unto us, that there is no ransom paid therefore at all.

But here may man's reason be astonished, reasoning after this fashion, If a ransom be paid for our redemption, then it is not given us freely. For a prisoner that payeth his ransom is not let go freely. For if he go freely, then he goeth without ransom.

For what is it else to go freely, than to be set at liberty without payment of ransom? This reason is satisfied by the great wisdom of God in this mystery of our redemption, Who hath so tempered his justice and mercy together, that he would neither by his justice condemn us unto the everlasting captivity of the devil, and his prison of hell, remedieless for ever without mercy, nor by his mercy deliver us clearly without justice or payment of a just ransom. But with his endless mercy he joined his most upright and equal justice. His great mercy he showed unto us in delivering us from our former captivity, without requiring of any ransom to be paid, or amends to be made upon our parts, which thing by us had been impossible to be done.

And whereas it lay not in us that to do, he provided a ransom for us, that was, the most precious body and blood of his own most dear and best beloved son, Jesus Christ, who besides his ransom fulfilled the law for us perfectly. And so the justice of God and his mercy did embrace together, and fulfilled the mystery of our redemption. And of this justice and mercy of God knit together speaketh St. Paul in the third chapter to the Romans.

All have offended, and have need of the glory of God, but are justified freely by his grace, by redemption which is in Jesus Christ, whom God hath set forth to us for a reconciler and peacemaker through faith in his blood, to show his righteousness. And in the tenth chapter, Christ is the end of the law and to righteousness to every man that believeth. And in the eighth chapter, that which was impossible by the law, inasmuch as it was weak by the flesh, God sending his own Son in the similitude of sinful flesh, by sin, damned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, which walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

In these four said places the apostle toucheth specially three things, which must go together in our justification. Upon God's part, his great mercy and grace. Upon Christ's part, justice, that is, the satisfaction of God's justice, or the price of our redemption by

the offering of his body and shedding of his blood, with fulfilling of the law perfectly and thoroughly.

And upon our part, true and lively faith in the merits of Jesus Christ, which yet is not ours, but by God's working in us, so that in our justification is not only God's mercy and grace, but also his justice, which the apostle calleth the justice of God, and it consisteth in paying our ransom and fulfilling of the law. And so, the grace of God doth not shut out the justice of God in our justification, but only shutteth out the justice of man, that is to say, the justice of our works, as to be merits of deserving our justification. And therefore St. Paul declareth here nothing upon the behalf of man concerning his justification, but only a true and lively faith, which nevertheless is the gift of God, and not man's only work without God.

And yet that faith doth not shut out repentance, hope, love, dread, and the fear of God, to be joined with faith in every man that is justified, but it shutteth them out from the office of justifying, so that although they be all present together in him that is justified, yet they justify not all together. Nor that faith also doth not shut out the justice of our good works, necessarily to be done afterward of duty towards God, for we are most bounden to serve God in doing good deeds commanded by him in his holy scripture all the days of our life, but it excludeth them, so that we may not do them to this intent, to be made good by doing of them. For all the good works that we can do be unperfect, and therefore not able to deserve our justification, but our justification doth come freely by the mere mercy of God, and of so great and free mercy that, whereas all the world was not able of their selves to pay any part towards their ransom, it pleased our heavenly Father of his infinite mercy, without any our desert or deserving, to prepare for us the most precious jewels of Christ's body and blood, whereby our ransom might be fully paid, the law fulfilled, and his justice fully satisfied, so that Christ is now the righteousness of all them that truly do believe in him.

He for them paid their ransom by his death, he for them fulfilled the law in his life, so that now in him and by him every true Christian man may be called a fulfiller of the law, forasmuch as that which there in firmity lacketh, Christ's justice hath supplied. Ye have heard of whom all men ought to seek their justification and righteousness, and how also this righteousness cometh unto men by Christ's death and merits. Ye heard also how that three things are required to the obtaining of our righteousness, that is, God's mercy, Christ's justice, and a true and a lively faith, out of the which faith springeth good works.

Also before was declared at large that no man can be justified by his own good works, because that no man fulfilleth the law according to the full request of the law. And St. Paul in his epistle to the Galatians proveth the same, saying thus, If there had been any law given which could have justified, verily righteousness should have been by the law. And again he saith, If righteousness be by the law, then Christ died in vain.

And again he saith, You that are justified in the law are fallen away from grace. And furthermore he writeth to the Ephesians on this wise, By grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, for it is the gift of God, and not of works, lest any man should glory. And to be short, the sum of all Paul's disputation is this, that if justice come of works, then it cometh not of grace, and if it come of grace, then it cometh not of works.

And to this end tendeth all the prophets, as St. Peter saith in the tenth of the Acts. Of Christ all the prophets, saith St. Peter, do witness, that through his name all they that believe in him shall receive the remission of sins. And after this wise to be justified, only by this true and lively faith in Christ, speaketh all the old and ancient authors, both Greeks and Latins, of whom I will specially rehearse three, Hillary, Basil, and Ambrose.

St. Hillary saith these words plainly in the ninth canon upon Matthew, Faith only justifieth. And St. Basil, a Greek author, writeth thus, This is a perfect and a whole rejoicing in God, when a man avaunteth not himself for his own righteousness, but knowledgeth himself to lack true justice and righteousness, and to be justified by the only faith in Christ. And Paul, saith he, doth glory in the contempt of his own righteousness, and that he looketh for the righteousness of God by faith.

These be the very words of St. Basil. And St. Ambrose, a Latin author, saith these words, This is the ordinance of God, that he which believeth in Christ should be saved without works, by faith only, freely receiving remission of his sins. Consider diligently these words, Without works, by faith only, freely we receive remission of our sins.

What can be spoken more plainly than to say that freely, without works, by faith only, we obtain remission of our sins? These and other like sentences, that we be justified by faith only, freely and without works, we do read oft times in the most best and ancient writers, as besides Hilary, Basil and St. Ambrose before rehearsed, we read the same in Origen, St. Chrysostom, St. Cyprian, St. Augustine, Prosper, Ecumenius, Phocius, Bernardus, Anselm, and many other authors, Greek and Latin. Nevertheless, this sentence, that we be justified by faith only, is not so meant of them, that the said justifying faith is alone in man, without true repentance, hope, charity, dread, and fear of God, at any time or season. Nor, when they say that we be justified freely, they mean not that we should or might afterward be idle, and that nothing should be required on our parts afterward.

Neither they mean not so to be justified without our good works, that we should do no good works at all, like it shall be more expressed at large hereafter. But this saying, that we be justified by faith only, freely and without works, is spoken for to take away clearly all merit of our works, as being unable to deserve our justification at God's hands, and thereby most plainly to express the weakness of man and the goodness of God, the great infirmity of ourselves and the might and power of God, the imperfectness of our own works and the most abundant grace of our Saviour Christ, and thereby wholly for to

ascribe the merit and deserving of our justification unto Christ only, and His most precious bloodshedding. This faith the Holy Scripture teacheth.

This is the strong rock and foundation of Christian religion. This doctrine all old and ancient authors of Christ's church do approve. This doctrine advanceth and setteth forth the true glory of Christ, and beateth down the vain glory of man.

This whosoever denieth is not to be counted for a true Christian man, nor for a set of forth of Christ's glory, but for an adversary of Christ and His gospel, and for a set of forth of man's vain glory. And although this doctrine be never so true, as it is most true indeed, that we be justified freely without all merit of our own good works, as St. Paul doth express it, and freely by this lively and perfect faith in Christ only, as the ancient authors used to speak it, yet this true doctrine must be also truly understood and most plainly declared, lest carnal men should take unjustly occasion thereby to live carnally after the appetite and will of the world, the flesh, and the devil. And because no man should err by mistaking of this doctrine, I shall plainly and shortly so declare the right understanding of the same, that no man shall justly think that he may thereby take any occasion of carnal liberty to follow the desires of the flesh, or that thereby any kind of sin shall be committed, or any ungodly living the more used.

First, you shall understand that in our justification by Christ it is not all one thing, the office of God unto man, and the office of man unto God. Justification is not the office of man, but of God. For man cannot make himself righteous by his own works, neither in part, nor in the whole.

For that were the greatest arrogancy and presumption of man that Antichrist could set up against God, to affirm that a man might by his own works take away and purge his own sins, and so justify himself. But justification is the office of God only, and is not a thing which we render unto Him, but which we receive of Him, not which we give to Him, but which we take of Him, by His free mercy, and by the only merits of His most dearly beloved Son, our only Redeemer, Saviour, and Justifier, Jesus Christ. So that the true understanding of this doctrine, we be justified freely by faith without works, or that we be justified by faith in Christ only, is not that this our own act, to believe in Christ, or this our faith in Christ, which is within us, doth justify us, and deserve our justification unto us.

For that were to count ourselves to be justified by some act or virtue that is within ourselves. But the true understanding and meaning thereof is that although we hear God's word and believe it, although we have faith, hope, charity, repentance, dread, and fear of God within us, and do never so many good works thereunto, yet we must renounce the merit of all our said virtues of faith, hope, charity, and all our other virtues and good deeds, which we either have done, shall do, or can do, as things that be far too weak and insufficient and imperfect to deserve remission of our sins. And therefore we

must trust only in God's mercy, and in that sacrifice which our High Priest and Saviour Christ Jesus, the Son of God, once offered for us upon the cross, to obtain thereby God's grace and remission, as well of our original sin in baptism, as of all actual sin committed by us after our baptism, if we truly repent and turn unfeignedly to Him again.

So that, as St. John the Baptist, although he were never so virtuous and godly a man, yet in this matter of forgiving of sin, he did put the people from him, and appointed them unto Christ, saying thus unto them, Behold, yonder is the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world. Even so, as great and as godly a virtue as the lively faith is, yet it putteth us from itself, and remitteth or appointeth us unto Christ, for to have only by Him remission of our sins or justification, so that our faith in Christ, as it were, saith unto us thus, It is not I that take away your sins, but it is Christ only, and to Him only I send you for that purpose, forsaking therein all your good virtues, words, thoughts, and works, and only putting your trust in Christ. It hath been manifestly declared unto you that no man can fulfil the law of God, and therefore by the law all men are condemned, whereupon it followed necessarily that some other thing should be required for our salvation than the law, and that it is a true and a lively faith in Christ, bringing forth good works in the life according to God's commandments.

And also you heard the ancient authors' minds of this saying, Faith in Christ only justifieth man, so plainly declared, that you see that the very true meaning of this proposition, or saying, We be justified by faith in Christ only, according to the meaning of the old ancient authors, is this, We put our faith in Christ, that we be justified by Him only, that we be justified by God's free mercy, and the merits of our Saviour Christ only, and by no virtue or good work of our own that is in us, or that we can be able to have or to do, for to deserve the same, Christ himself only being the cause meritorious thereof. Here you perceive many words to be used, to avoid contention in words with them that delight to brawl about words, and also to show the true meaning, to avoid evil taking and misunderstanding, and yet peradventure all will not serve with them that be contentious, but contenders will ever forge matters of contention, even when they have none occasion thereto. Notwithstanding, such be the less to be passed upon, so that the rest may profit, which will be more desirous to know the truth than when it is plain enough to contend about it, and with contentious and captious cavillations to obscure and darken it.

Truth it is that our own works do not justify us, to speak properly of our justification, that is to say, our works do not merit or deserve remission of our sins, and make us, of unjust, just before God, but God of his mere mercy, through the only merits and deservings of his Son Jesus Christ, doth justify us. Nevertheless, because faith doth directly send us to Christ for remission of our sins, and that by faith given us of God, we embrace the promise of God's mercy, and of the remission of our sins, which thing none other of our virtues or works properly doeth, therefore scripture useth to say that faith without works doth justify, and forasmuch that it is all one sentence in effect to say faith

without works, and only faith doth justify us. Therefore the old ancient fathers of the church, from time to time, have uttered our justification with this speech, only faith justifieth us, meaning none other thing than St. Paul meant when he said, faith without works justifieth us.

And because all this is brought to pass through the only merits and deservings of our Saviour Christ, and not through our merits, or through the merit of any virtue that we have within us, or of any work that cometh from us, therefore in that respect of merit and deserving, we forsake as it were altogether again faith, works, and all other virtues. For our own imperfection is so great through the corruption of original sin, that all is imperfect that is within us, faith, charity, hope, dread, thoughts, words, and works, and therefore not apt to merit and deserve any part of our justification for us. And this form of speaking we use in the humbling of ourselves to God, and to give all the glory to our Saviour Christ, which is the best worthy to have it.

Here you have heard the office of God in our justification, and how we receive it of Him freely by His mercy, without our deserts, through true and lively faith. Now you shall hear the office and duty of a Christian man unto God, what we ought on our part to render unto God again for His great mercy and goodness. Our office is not to pass the time of this present life unfruitfully and idly, after that we are baptised or justified, not caring how few good works we do to the glory of God and profit of our neighbours, much less it is our office, after that we be once made Christ's members, to live contrary to the same, making ourselves members of the devil, walking after his enticements and after the suggestions of the world and the flesh, whereby we know that we do serve the world and the devil, and not God.

For that faith which bringeth forth, without repentance, either evil works or no good works, is not a right, pure and lively faith, but a dead, devilish, counterfeit and feigned faith, as St. Paul and St. James call it. For even the devils know and believe that Christ was born of a virgin, that He fasted forty days and forty nights without meat and drink, that He wrought all kinds of miracles, declaring Himself very God. They believe also that Christ for our sake suffered most painful death, to redeem us from everlasting death, and that He rose again from death the third day.

They believe that He ascended into heaven, and that He sitteth on the right hand of the Father, and at the last end of this world shall come again and judge both the quick and the dead. These articles of our faith the devils believe, and so they believe all things that be written in the New and Old Testament be true. And yet for all this faith they be but devils, remaining still in their damnable estate, lacking the very true Christian faith.

For the right and true Christian faith is not only to believe that Holy Scripture and all the foresaid articles of our faith are true, but also to have a sure trust and confidence in God's merciful promises to be saved from everlasting damnation by Christ, whereof doth

follow a loving heart to obey His commandments. And this true Christian faith neither any devil hath, nor yet any man, which, in the outward profession of his mouth, and in his outward receiving of the sacraments, in coming to the church, and in all outward appearances, seemeth to be a Christian man, and yet in his living and deeds showeth the contrary. For how can a man have this true faith, this sure trust and confidence in God, that by the merits of Christ his sins be forgiven, and he reconciled to the favour of God, and to be partaker of the kingdom of heaven by Christ, when he liveth ungodly, and denieth Christ in his deeds? Surely no such ungodly man can have this faith and trust in God.

For as they know Christ be the only Saviour of the world, so they know also that wicked men shall not enjoy the kingdom of God. They know that God hateth unrighteousness, that He will destroy all those that speak untruly, that those that have done good works, which cannot be done without a lively faith in Christ, shall come forth into the resurrection of life, and those that have done evil shall come unto the resurrection of judgment. And very well they know also that to them that be contentious, and to them that will not be obedient unto the truth, but will obey unrighteousness, shall come indignation, wrath, and affliction, etc.

Therefore, to conclude, considering the infinite benefits of God showed, and given unto us mercifully without our deserts, who hath not only created us of nothing, and from a piece of vile clay of his infinite goodness, hath exalted us, as touching our soul, unto his own similitude and likeness. But also, whereas we were condemned to hell and death everlasting, hath given his own natural Son, being God eternal, immortal, and equal unto himself in power and glory, to be incarnated, and to take our mortal nature upon him, with the infirmities of the same, and in the same nature to suffer most shameful and painful death for our offences, to the intent to justify us, and to restore us to life everlasting, so making us also his dear beloved children. Brethren, unto his only Son, our Saviour Christ, and inheritors, forever with him, of his eternal kingdom of heaven.

These great and merciful benefits of God, if they be well considered, do neither minister unto us occasion to be idle, and to live without doing any good works, neither yet stirreth us by any means to do evil things. But contrarywise, if we be not desperate persons, and our hearts harder than stones, they move us to render ourselves unto God wholly, with all our will, hearts, might, and power, to serve him in all good deeds, obeying his commandments during our lives, to seek in all things his glory and honour, not our sensual pleasures and vain glory, ever more dreading willingly to offend such a merciful God and loving Redeemer in word, thought, or deed. And the said benefits of God, deeply considered, do move us for his sake also to be ever ready to give ourselves to our neighbours, and, as much as lieth in us, to study with all our endeavour to do good to every man.

These be the fruits of the true faith, to do good, as much as lieth in us, to every man,

and above all things, and in all things, to advance the glory of God, of whom only we have our sanctification, justification, salvation, and redemption, to whom be ever glory, praise, and honour, world without end. Amen.