

# OpenTheo

## **THE BOOKS OF HOMILIES: Book 2—XXI. An Homily against disobedience and willful rebellion: Parts 5 & 6**

May 11, 2021



### **Alastair Roberts**

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](https://prydain.files.wordpress.com/2012/09/the_two_books_of_homilies.pdf)).

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### **Transcript**

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You shall understand that by ignorance of God's word wherein they kept all men, specially the common people, they wrought and brought to pass all these things, making them believe that all they said was true, all that they did was good and godly, and that to hold with them in all things, against father, mother, prince, country, and all men, was most meritorious. And indeed, what mischief will not blind ignorance lead simple men unto? By ignorance the Jewish clergy induced the common people to ask the delivery of Barabbas the seditious murderer, and to sue for the cruel crucifying of our Saviour Christ, for that he rebuked the ambition, superstition, and other vices of the high priests and clergy. For as our Saviour Christ testifieth that those who crucified him wist not what they did, so doth the holy apostle St. Paul say, If they had known, if they had not been ignorant, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory.

But they knew not what they did. Our Saviour Christ himself also foreshowed that it should come to pass by ignorance, that those who should persecute and murder his true apostles and disciples should think they did God acceptable sacrifice and good service, as it also is verified even at this day. And in this ignorance have the bishops of Rome kept the people of God, especially the common sort, by no means so much as by the withdrawing of the word of God from them, and by keeping it under the veil of an unknown strange tongue.

For as it served the ambitious humour of the bishops of Rome to compel all nations to use the natural language of the city of Rome, where they were bishops, which showed a certain acknowledging of subjection unto them, so yet served it much more their crafty purpose thereby to keep all people so blind, that they, not knowing what they prayed, what they believed, what they were commanded by God, might take all their commandments for God's. For as they would not suffer the holy scriptures or church

service to be used or had in any other language than the Latin, so were very few even of the most simple people taught the Lord's prayer, the articles of the faith and the ten commandments, otherwise than in Latin, which they understood not, by which universal ignorance all men were ready to believe whatsoever they said, and to do whatsoever they commanded. For to imitate the apostles' phrase, if the emperor's subjects had known out of God's word their duty to their prince, they would not have suffered the bishop of Rome to persuade them to forsake their sovereign lord the emperor against their oath of fidelity, and to rebel against him, only for that he cast images, unto the which idolatry was committed, out of the churches, which the bishop of Rome bare them in hand to be heresy.

If they had known of God's word but as much as the ten commandments, they should have found that the bishop of Rome was not only a traitor to the emperor his liege lord, but to God also, an horrible blasphemer of his majesty. In calling his holy word and commandment heresy, and that which the bishop of Rome took for a just cause to rebel against his lawful prince, they might have known to be a doubling and tripling of his most heinous wickedness, heaped with horrible impiety and blasphemy. But lest the poor people should know too much, he would not let them have as much of God's word as the ten commandments wholly and perfectly, withdrawing from them the second commandment, that bereath his impiety by a subtle sacrilege.

Had the emperor's subjects likewise known and been of any understanding in God's word, would they at other times have rebelled against their sovereign lord, and by their rebellion have halpened to depose him, only for that the bishop of Rome did bare them in hand that it was simony and heresy too, for the emperor to give any ecclesiastical dignities or promotions to his learned chaplains, or other of his learned clergy, which all Christian emperors before him had done without controlment. Would they, I say, for that the bishop of Rome bare them so in hand, have rebelled by the space of more than forty years together against him, with so much shedding of Christian blood and murder of so many thousands of Christians, and finally have deposed their sovereign lord, had they known and had in God's word any understanding at all. Specially, had they known that they did all this to pluck from their sovereign lord and his successors forever the ancient right of the empire, to give it unto the Romish clergy and to the bishop of Rome, that he might for the confirmation of one archbishop, and for a Romish rag, which he calleth a paul, scarce worth twelve pence, receive many thousand crowns of gold, and of other bishops likewise great sums of money for their bulls, which is simony indeed.

Would, I say, Christian men and subjects by rebellion have spent so much Christian blood, and have deposed their natural most noble and most valiant prince, to bring the matter finally to this pass, had they known what they did, or had any understanding in God's word at all. And as these ambitious usurpers, the bishops of Rome, have overflowed all Italy and Germany with streams of Christian blood, shed by the rebellions of ignorant subjects against their natural lord, the emperors, whom they have stirred

thereunto by such false pretenses, so is there no country in Christendom, which by their like means and false pretenses, hath not been oversprinkled with the blood of subjects by rebellion against their natural sovereigns, stirred up by the same bishops of Rome. And to use one example of our own country, the bishop of Rome did pick a quarrel to King John of England, about the election of Stephen Langton to the bishopric of Canterbury, wherein the king had ancient right, being used by his progenitors, all Christian kings of England before him, the bishops of Rome having no right, but had begun then to usurp upon the kings of England, and all other Christian kings, as they had before done against their sovereign lords, the emperors, proceeding even by the same ways and means, and likewise cursing them, and cursing King John, and discharging his subjects of their oath of fidelity unto their sovereign lord.

Now had Englishmen at that time known their duty to their prince set forth in God's word, would a great many of the nobles and other Englishmen, natural subjects, for this foreign and unnatural usurper his vain curse of the king, and for his feign discharging of them of their oath of fidelity to their natural lord, upon so slender or no ground at all, have rebelled against their sovereign lord the king? Would English subjects have taken part against the king of England and against Englishmen, with the French king and Frenchmen being incensed against this realm by the bishop of Rome? Would they have sent for and received the Dauphin of France, with a great army of Frenchmen, into the realm of England? Would they have sworn fidelity to the Dauphin of France, breaking their oath of fidelity to their natural lord the king of England, and have stand under the Dauphin's banner displayed against the king of England? Would they have expelled their sovereign lord the king of England out of London, the chief city of England, and out of the greatest part of England, upon the south side of Trent, even unto Lincoln, and out of Lincoln itself also, and have delivered the possession thereof unto the Dauphin of France, whereof he kept the possession a great while? Would they, being Englishmen, have procured so great shedding of English blood and other infinite mischiefs and miseries unto England their natural country, as did follow those cruel wars and traitorous rebellion, the fruits of the bishop of Rome's blessings? Would they have driven their natural sovereign lord the king of England to such extremity, that he was enforced to submit himself unto that foreign false usurper, the bishop of Rome, who compelled him to surrender up the crown of England into the hands of his legate, who in token of possession kept it in his hands diverse days, and then delivered it again to King John upon that condition, that the king and his successors, kings of England, should hold the crown and kingdom of England of the bishops of Rome and his successors, as the vassals of the said bishops of Rome for ever, in token whereof the kings of England should also pay a yearly tribute to the said bishop of Rome as his vassals and legemen? Would Englishmen have brought their sovereign lord and natural country into this thralldom and subjection to a false foreign usurper, had they known and had any understanding in God's word at all? Out of the witch most lamentable case, and most miserable tyranny, raveny and spoil of the most greedy Romish wolves ensuing hereupon, the kings and

realm of England could not rid themselves by the space of many years after, the bishop of Rome by his ministers continually not only spoiling the realm and kings of England of infinite treasure, but also with the same money hiring and maintaining foreign enemies against the realm and kings of England, to keep them in such his subjection, that they should not refuse to pay whatsoever those insatiable wolves did greedily gape for, and suffer whatsoever those most cruel tyrants would lay upon them? Would Englishmen have suffered this? Would they by rebellion have caused this, trow you, and all for the bishop of Rome's causeless curse, had they in those days known and understood that God doth curse the blessings and bless the cursings of such wicked usurping bishops and tyrants, as it appeared afterward in King Henry VIII his days, and King Edward VI, and in our gracious sovereign's days that now is, where neither the Pope's curses, nor God's manifold blessings are wanting? But in King John's time, the bishop of Rome understanding the brute blindness, ignorance of God's word, and superstition of Englishmen, and how much they were inclined to worship the Babylonical beast of Rome, and to fear all his threatenings and causeless curses, he abused them thus, and by their rebellion brought this noble realm and kings of England under his most cruel tyranny, and to be a spoil of his most vile and insatiable covetousness and raveny for a long time, and a great deal too long a time. And to join unto the reports of histories matters of later memory, could the bishop of Rome have raised the late rebellions in the north and west countries, in the time of King Henry and King Edward our gracious sovereign's father and brother, but by abusing of the ignorant people? Or is it not most evident the bishop of Rome hath of late attempted by his Irish patriarchs and bishops, sent from Rome with his bulls, whereof some were deprehended, to break down the bars and hedges of the public peace in Ireland, only upon confidence easily to abuse the ignorance of the wild Irishmen? Or who seeth not, that upon like confidence, yet more lately, he hath likewise procured the breach of the public peace in England, with the long and blessed continuance whereof he is sore grieved, by the ministry of his disguised chaplains, creeping in layman's apparel into the houses, and whispering in the ears of certain northern borderers, being men most ignorant of their duty to God and their prince, of all people of the realm, whom therefore as most meet and ready to execute his intended purpose, he hath, by the said ignorant mass-priests, as blind guys leading the blind, brought those seely blind subjects into the deep ditch of horrible rebellion, damnable to themselves, and very dangerous to the state of the realm, had not God of his mercy miraculously calmed that raging tempest, not only without any shipwreck of the commonwealth, but almost without any shedding of Christian and English blood at all? And it is yet much more to be lamented, that not only common people, but some other youthful or unskilled princes, also suffer themselves to be abused by the bishop of Rome, his cardinals and bishops, to the oppressing of Christian men their faithful subjects, either themselves, or else by procuring the force and strength of Christian men to be conveyed out of one country, to oppress true Christians in another country, and by these means open an entry unto moors and infidels, into the possession of Christian realms and countries. Other Christian princes, in the meantime, by the bishop of Rome's

procuring also, being so occupied in civil wars, or so troubled with rebellions, that they have neither leisure nor ability to confer their common forces to the defence of their fellow Christians, against such invasions of the common enemies of Christendom, the infidels and miscreants.

Would to God we might only read and hear out of histories of the old, and not also see and feel these new and present oppressions of Christians, rebellions of subjects, effusion of Christian blood, destruction of Christian men, decay and ruin of Christendom, increase of paganism, most lamentable and pitiful to behold, being procured in these our days, as well as in times past, by the bishop of Rome and his ministers, abusing the ignorance of God's word, yet remaining in some Christian princes and people. By which sour and bitter fruits of ignorance, all men ought to be moved to give ear and credit to God's word, showing as most truly, so most plainly, how great a mischief ignorance is, and again how great and how good a gift of God knowledge and God's word is. And to begin with the Romish clergy, who though they do brag now, as did some time the Jewish clergy, that they cannot lack knowledge, yet doth God by his holy prophets both charge them with ignorance, and threaten them also, for that they have repelled the knowledge of God's word and law from themselves and from his people, that he will repel them, that they shall be no more his priests.

God likewise chargeth princes as well as priests, that they should endeavour themselves to get understanding and knowledge in his word, threatening his heavy wrath and destruction unto them if they fail thereof. And the wise man saith to all men universally, princes, priests, and people, where is no knowledge, there is no good nor health to the soul, and that all men be vain in whom is not the knowledge of God and his holy word, that they who walk in darkness what not whither they go, and that the people that will not learn shall fall into great mischiefs, as did the people of Israel, who for their ignorance in God's word were first led into captivity, and when by ignorance afterward they would not know the time of their visitation, but crucified Christ our Saviour, persecuted his holy apostles, and were so ignorant and blind that, when they did most wickedly and cruelly, they thought that they did God good and acceptable service, as do many by ignorance think even at this day. Finally, through their ignorance and blindness, their country, towns, cities, Jerusalem itself, and the holy temple of God were all most horribly destroyed, the most chiefest part of their people slain, and the rest led into most miserable captivity, but he that made them had no pity upon them, neither would spare them, and all for their ignorance.

And the holy scriptures do teach that the people that will not see with their eyes, nor hear with their ears, to learn and to understand with their hearts, cannot be converted and saved. And the wicked themselves, being damned in hell, shall confess ignorance in God's word to have brought them thereunto, saying, We have erred from the way of the truth, and the light of righteousness hath not shined unto us, and the sun of understanding hath not risen unto us. We have wearied ourselves in the way of

wickedness and perdition, and have walked cumbrous and crooked ways, but the way of the Lord have we not known.

And as well our Saviour himself, as his apostle St. Paul do teach, that the ignorance of God's word cometh of the devil, is the cause of all error and misjudging, as falleth out with ignorant subjects, who can rather aspire a little mote in the eye of the prince or a counsellor than a great beam in their own. And universally it is the cause of all evil, and finally of eternal damnation, God's judgement being severe towards those who, when the Lord the light of Christ's gospel is come into the world, do delight more in darkness of ignorance than in the light of knowledge in God's word. For all are commanded to read or hear, to search and study the holy scriptures, and are promised understanding to be given them from God if they so do.

All are charged not to believe either any dead man, nor if any angel should speak from heaven, much less if the Pope do speak from Rome, against or contrary to the word of God, from the which we may not decline, neither to the right hand nor to the left. In God's word princes must learn how to obey God and to govern men. In God's word subjects must learn obedience, both to God and their princes.

Old men and young, rich and poor, all men and women, all estates, sexes and ages, are taught their several duties in the word of God. For the word of God is bright, giving light unto all men's eyes, the shining lamp directing all men's paths and steps. Let us therefore awake from the sleep and darkness of ignorance and open our eyes, that we may see the light.

Let us rise from the works of darkness, that we may escape eternal darkness, the due reward thereof. And let us walk in the light of God's word whilst we have light, as becometh the children of light, so directing the steps of our lives in that way which leadeth to light and life everlasting, that we may finally obtain and enjoy the same. Which God the Father of lights, who dwelleth in light incomprehensible and inaccessible, grant unto us, through the light of the world, our Saviour Jesus Christ, unto whom with the Holy Ghost, one most glorious God, be all honour, praise and thanksgiving for ever and ever.

Amen. A thanksgiving for the suppression of the last rebellion. O heavenly and most merciful Father, the defender of those that put their trust in Thee, the sure fortress of all them that flee to Thee for succour, who of Thy most just judgements, for our disobedience and rebellion against Thy holy word, and for our sinful and wicked living, nothing answering to our holy profession, whereby we have given an occasion that Thy holy name hath been blasphemed amongst the ignorant, hast of late both sought abashed the whole realm and people of England with the terror and danger of rebellion, thereby to awake us out of our dead sleep of careless security, and hast yet, by the miseries following the same rebellion, more sharply punished part of our countrymen

and Christian brethren, who have more nearly felt the same, and most dreadfully hath scourged some of the seditious persons with terrible executions, justly inflicted for their disobedience to Thee and to Thy servant, their sovereign, to the example of us all, and to the warning, correction and amendment of Thy servants, of Thine accustomed goodness turning always the wickedness of evil men to the profit of them that fear Thee, who, in Thy judgments remembering Thy mercy, hast by Thy assistance given the victory to Thy servant our Queen, her true nobility and faithful subjects, with so little, or rather no, effusion of Christian blood, as also might justly have ensued, to the exceeding comfort of all sorrowful Christian hearts, and that of Thy fatherly pity and merciful goodness only, and even for Thine own namesake, without any our desert at all.

Wherefore we render unto Thee most humble and hearty thanks for these Thy great mercies showed unto us, who had deserved sharper punishment, most humbly beseeching Thee to grant unto all us that confess Thy holy name, and profess the true and perfect religion of Thy holy gospel, Thy heavenly grace, to show ourselves in our living, according to our profession, that we, truly knowing Thee in Thy blessed word, may obediently walk in Thy holy commandments, and that we, being warned by this Thy fatherly correction, do provoke Thy just wrath against us no more, but may enjoy the continuance of Thy great mercies toward us, Thy right hand, as in this, so in all other invasions, rebellions, and dangers, continually saving and defending our church, our realm, our Queen, and people of England, that all our posterities ensuing, confessing Thy holy name, professing Thy holy gospel, and leading an holy life, may perpetually praise and magnify Thee, with Thy only Son, Jesus Christ our Saviour, and the Holy Ghost, to whom be all Lord, praise, glory, and empire, for ever and ever. Amen.