

The Bondage of the Will

Martin Luther

ERASMUS' SCEPTICISM.

Section V.

Sect. V. — BUT this is still more intolerable, — Your enumerating this subject of “Free-will” among those things that are “useless, and not necessary;” and drawing up for us, instead of it, a “Form” of those things which you consider “necessary unto Christian piety.” Such a form as, certainly, any Jew or any Gentile utterly ignorant of Christ, might draw up. For of Christ you make no mention in one iota. As though you thought, that there may be Christian piety without Christ, if God be but worshipped with all the powers as being by nature most merciful.

What shall I say here, Erasmus? To me, you breathe out nothing but Lucian, and draw in the gorging surfeit of Epicurus. If you consider this subject “not necessary” to Christians, away, I pray you, out of the field; I have nothing to do with you. I consider it necessary.

If, as you say, it be “irreligious,” if it be “curious,” if it be “superfluous,” to know, whether or not God foreknows any thing by contingency; whether our own will does any thing in those things which pertain unto eternal salvation, or is only passive under the work of grace; whether or not we do, what we do of good or evil, from necessity, or rather from being passive; what then, I ask, is religious; what is grave; what is useful to be known? All this, Erasmus, is to no purpose whatever. And it is difficult to attribute this to your ignorance, because you are now old, have been conversant with Christians, and have long studied the Sacred Writings: therefore you leave no room for my excusing you, or having a good thought concerning you.

And yet the Papists pardon and put up with these enormities in you: and on this account, because you are writing against Luther: otherwise, if Luther were not in the case, they would tear you in pieces tooth and nail. Plato is a friend; Socrates is a friend; but Truth is to be honoured above all. For, granting that you have but little understanding in the Scriptures and in Christian piety, surely even an enemy to Christians ought to know what Christians consider useful and necessary, and what they do not. Whereas you, a theologian, a teacher of Christians, and about to draw up for them a “Form” of Christianity, not only in your sceptical manner doubt of what is necessary and useful to them, but go away into the directly opposite, and, contrary to your own principles, by an unheard of assertion, declare it to be your judgment, that those things are “not necessary:” whereas, if they be not necessary, and certainly

known, there can remain neither God, nor Christ, nor Gospel, nor Faith, nor any thing else, even of Judaism, much less of Christianity! In the name of the Immortal God, Erasmus, what an occasion, yea, what a field do you open for acting and speaking against you! What could you write well or correctly concerning "Free-will," who confess, by these your declarations, so great an ignorance of the Scripture and of Godliness? But I draw in my sails: nor will I here deal with you in my words (for that perhaps I shall do hereafter) but in your own.

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