

The Bondage of the Will

By Martin Luther

EXORDIUM.

Section XXXIII.

Sect. XXXIII. — BUT to return — What wonder, if God should leave all the elders of the church to go their own ways, who thus permitted all the nations to go their own ways, as Paul saith, Acts xiv. 16; xvii. 30? — But, my friend Erasmus, THE CHURCH OF GOD INDEED, IS NOT SO COMMON A THING AS THIS TERM, CHURCH OF GOD: NOR ARE THE SAINTS OF GOD INDEED, EVERY WHERE TO BE FOUND LIKE THE TERM, SAINTS OF GOD. THEY ARE PEARLS AND PRECIOUS JEWELS, WHICH THE SPIRIT DOES NOT CAST BEFORE SWINE; BUT WHICH, (AS THE SCRIPTURE EXPRESSES IT,) HE KEEPS HIDDEN, THAT THE WICKED SEE NOT THE GLORY OF GOD! Otherwise, if they were openly known of all, how could it come to pass that they should be thus vexed and afflicted in the world? As Paul saith, (1 Cor. ii. 8.) “Had they known Him, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”

I do not say these things, because I deny that those whom you mention are the saints and church of God; but because it cannot be proved, if any one should deny it, that they really are saints, but must be left quite in uncertainty; and because, therefore, the position deduced from their holiness, is not sufficiently credible for the confirmation of my doctrine. I call them saints, and look upon them as such: I call them the church, and look upon them as such — according to the law of Charity, but not according to the law of Faith. That is, charity, which always thinks the best of every one, and suspects not, but believeth and presumes all things for good concerning its neighbour, calls every one who is baptized, a saint. Nor is there any peril if she err, for charity is liable to err; seeing that she is exposed to all the uses and abuses of all; an universal handmaid, to the good and to the evil, to the believing and to the unbelieving, to the true and to the false. — But faith, calls no one a saint but him who is declared to be so by the judgment of God, for faith is not liable to be deceived. Therefore, although we ought all to be looked upon as saints by each other by the law of charity, yet no one ought to be decreed a saint by the law of faith, so as to make it an article of faith that such or such an one is a Saint. For in this way, that adversary of God, the Pope, canonized his minions whom he knows not to be saints, setting himself in the place of God. (2 Thess. ii. 4.) .

All that I say concerning those saints of yours, or rather, ours, is this: — that since they have spoken differently from each other, those should rather be selected who have spoken the best: that is, who have spoken in defense of Grace, and against “Free-will”: and those left, who, through the infirmity of the flesh, have borne witness of the flesh rather than of the Spirit. And also, that those who are inconsistent with themselves,

should be selected and caught at, in those parts of their writings where they speak from the Spirit, and left, where they savour of the flesh. This is what becomes a Christian reader, and a 'clean beast dividing the hoof and chewing the cud.' (Lev. xi. 3., Deut. xiv. 6.) Whereas now, laying aside judgment, we swallow down all things together, or, what is worse, by a perversion of judgment, we cast away the best and receive the worst, out of the same authors; and moreover, affix to those worst parts, the title and authority of their sanctity; which sanctity, they obtained, not on account of "Free-will" or the flesh, but on account of the best things, even of the Spirit only.

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