

SERMON LII

A FUNERAL SERMON

Tobias Crisp

"But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." {Gal.1:8}

Occasioned by the Death of Mr. Oliver Brunsell, Vicar of Wroughton, 1642.

You may marvel, upon hearing this text, what mean, to fall upon such a subject, on such an occasion as this, which seems altogether incongruous unto it; and no marvel, for I marveled as much at it, as any other can do; but to satisfy any curious inquisition, the occasion hereof was.

This burning light, {whom Christ, I am persuaded, to the comfort of many,} set upon this hill, or in this candlestick, and who now hath wasted himself in giving light to you; having some time before his death singled out this text, for what special reasons I cannot say, nor could learn, sent earnestly to speak with me, and desired this last kindness of me that I would discharge the world of him, and solemnize his funeral with a sermon upon it. I confess, I was at a stand so soon as I understood his mind, not as being unwilling to do this last office for him; but, because I could not know his mind herein; neither could he well impart it to me, by reason of his infirmity, which had bereft him of his wonted faculties; howbeit his deserving abilities and labors, besides mine own interest in him, challenge so much respect to his worth, as to fulfill his desire, although I know not whether I shall attain his aim or no, whereunto I should willingly have framed myself, could I have pumped it from him. I shall not need to say much to you of him, I say to you, with whom he so travailed in birth, as that he died in travail; his constancy of labour, yea, till he could scarce creep to this place; his extraordinary zeal in his ministry, with other commendable excellencies of ministerial parts and gifts, are so notorious, that all rhetorical expressions would be but as the lighting of a candle to give light to the sun.

This our zealous, indefatigable, and invincible spirited apostle of the Gentiles, who laboured in the work of the gospel more abundantly than they all, by the grace of Christ, {among the churches, successfully planted by him} had, with no small diligence and care, reared a hopeful nursery from the ground among the Galatians, rooting and establishing them in the faith; but not long after his departure, the envious one takes the advantage of his absence, and sends subverters among them, to turn them from the faith, once given to them; whereof no sooner had the apostle notice, but, as a bear bereft of her whelps, his blood grows hot, the zeal of this people even eats him up, he cannot contain himself; and therefore he breaks out very pathetically in this his epistle to them, "who suffers, and I burn not?" He is like a tender mother, when her child hath got a fall she startles, and is almost freighted; so this apostle, after a very short salutation framed, answerable to the occasion thereof administered, begins very roundly with them {a far different strain from all the rest of his epistles} in chapter 1:6, "I marvel {saith he} that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel;" wherein he intimates the sad occasion of his writing, namely, the sudden seduction of them, by white devils, as Luther calls them, whom their master had transformed into angels of light, like himself; pretending an evangelical ministry, even whilst they undermined Christ, the foundation.

In managing of which business he follows God's order, which he observed when our first parents were seduced, who began first with the ringleader; so the apostle first falls very foul on the seducers, whatever they be, thundering out the most direful execration against them. This he doth in my text, wherein we may, by a transverse order, observe, the execration; the ground of it, and the

apostle's impartiality in the denunciation of it. In the execration you may observe, the matter of it, and the manner of the denunciation. The matter is anathema; which, in the apostle's sense, is a delivering up unto Satan. The manner is by way of imprecation, let him be so; he arrogates not the act or the power of cursing to himself. The ground of this execration, is equivalent to the bitterness thereof; namely, a preaching another gospel besides and different from, what Paul and his companions had before preached to them. What that preaching was, we must consider anon. Here is also the apostle's impartiality in this execration, which shows itself in his not exempting himself and his companions; "no, not an angel from heaven," if they should be guilty of this fact; wherein he shows he hath no fling at any particular men's persons, in that he would not spare himself. From whence I might note, that the purest planted churches, are subject to errors, yea, and that in matters of faith, as this was, which hits the heart of infallibility. That the best care of ministers cannot prevent seducers from sowing tares to choke wholesome doctrine. That seducers deceive, by specious cloaking their poison, under the name of gospel, whereby they get securer entertainment. That the reverence of men's persons, or the excellency of their gifts and parts to win men, is no warrant to take anything on their own credit. But the scantiness of time will not allow us the scope these points require, I will therefore confine myself to this general proposition; that whoever they be that preach any different doctrine, though under the name of gospel preachers, from what Paul had before preached to the Galatians, are under the great curse. In the handling of which, all the difficulty lies in finding out what this gospel is, which Paul had preached to them, from which, and what that doctrine is, to which they were seduced; for they are neither of them mentioned in the text; yet this is our sea-chart by which we must steer our course, if we mean to reach our port, least whilst we speak of seduction, we ourselves be seduced from the scope of our text. That which is his gospel, we must pick out of this epistle; for he nowhere delivers a set discourse of it as we find, only by way of redargution, from chapter 3, to the end of the epistle, he gives us some hints what it was. The fullest expression of the gospel, which he had preached to them, he here vindicates, with an execration to the opposite, you may find in chapter 2:16, namely, that we are not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, which he expounds to be a believing in Jesus Christ; not intending, hereby, utterly to abolish the law, as some slandered him; only to exclude it in the matter of justification, as being altogether un-useful therein. Now the contrary doctrine he so much disclaims against, is not the utter abolishing of Christ, which the false teachers did not attempt, but the superstructure of the works of the law; as if Christ could not profit unto justification, but by the addition of the works of the law unto faith in him. This is the sum of the matter; and the whole epistle spends itself in maintaining, with much zeal, his own doctrine, and with like zeal confuting the contrary.

Whosoever then preaches a doctrine different from free justification, by faith alone in Christ Jesus, without the concurrence of any of the works of the law, is under the great curse, though he goes for an angel from heaven.

Some may say, this is an unseasonable point, not only in regard of the present occasion, but also of these present times; for that we have none among us who preach justification by works, and not by faith alone in Christ. As for the present occasion, I have spoken to that already; and for the present times, I know you are not ignorant, that this contrary doctrine to the apostle's, is one of the corner stones of the Church of Rome; anathematizing the apostle's doctrine, and maintaining the merit of good works; which subject hath filled many volumes of theirs. But, it may be said that this doctrine hath been long exploded in this our church, it being the main cause of our separation from them. I know, you are not ignorant how many among us, yea, and of the uppermost form {bishops} have warped of latter times, and have turned their faces to return back to the flesh-pots of Egypt, and have been nibbling shrewdly at this colewort; not fearing to affirm, that we are not now so angry with Rome, as in the first heat of our zeal. But, besides these gross Romanizers, we have zealots who advance works, yea, in the matter of justification, very much, and exceedingly diminish and derogate from the free grace of God in Jesus Christ; who are, therefore, near unto cursing; nay, so zealously affected are they this way, as that they stick not to revile, and with an heart-burning indignation, speak evil of that ministry, which extols and presses the acceptance of Jesus Christ by faith; though

men be in the most sinful, and loathsome condition, as the most sure portion of such, if they can but lay hold on him, and come to him in that condition; taxing such ministers, as if they were the ministers of licentiousness and libertinism, and as opening too wide a gap unto men. I speak what I know, and what I have felt. At present I shall spare to speak of that gross contradiction of the apostle's gospel, by the Romish faction, and factors, being sufficiently manifest, and shall confine myself to the latter sort of contradiction, being more subtle and prejudicial to God's people amongst us; and herein discover how some join works to the free grace of God in Christ, unto justification, and how contrary it is to the apostle's gospel.

It is a common doctrine among the rigid troublers of the Israel of God that men must have many legal preparations, and they must sensibly find them wrought in themselves, before they may dare to apply Christ by faith for justification, otherwise their faith is mere presumption. For instance; suppose a sinner hath lived in all manner of licentiousness {as Mary Magdalene} before he may believe that Christ hath justified him, he must forsake and find, by reflection on himself, that he hath forsaken all his former evil ways, and must be stricken with inward terror, and feel the pangs of the new birth, as they call it; and be, I know not how much or how long, {for their expressions intimate a strange depth,} under the bondage of a kind of hellish conscience tormenting and racking them; nay, more, they must be changed too, and find a delight in the law of the Lord, and a ready cheerfulness in obedience thereunto; and that not by a fit, but constantly, till they find all this, and much more of a like nature. Their time of believing in Christ is not come, and that, before this, their faith is but a dream, and skinning over the sore; all which, occasions so much fear, as keeps many poor souls in bondage all their lives long, suspecting still, that the humiliation is not deep enough. Is not this to put the cart before the horse, or rather to send the cart a going, and the horse must come after? To have men sanctified before they can be justified. If men must be thus qualified, before they believe to justification, how can Christ be said to justify the ungodly? By this rule he rather justifies the godly. The time of man's being in his blood, is not the time of God's love when he enters into covenant with him, {by this rule,} but rather the time of his comeliness when he is adorned, which is carnal doctrine, and a measuring God's way of love by man's. Is not this an adding of the works of the law to the righteousness of Christ for justification? If not, why may not a man be justified without all this addition? And if he may be justified without these works of the law, why may he not apply it? Some may say that they make none of this the cause of justification, but a preparative to it. I answer, they will not allow men to be justified without these works, and that justification belongs not to them, they may not apply it till it be thus; whereas the apostle's gospel is that we are justified by Christ, his righteousness, without works; which he proves out of the 32rd Psalm, "Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile;" {Ps.32:2;} so that works must not come in under any consideration, in the matter of justification; this sophistry will not have weight enough when it comes to the apostle's balance.

These men contradict the gospel of free justification by faith without works, whilst they not only require the being of such works before justification, but also make them a main, and immediate ground of believing it; for they usually affirm, that such who apply Christ without such qualifications, their application is groundless, and built upon the sand; but being thus wrought upon and changed, the groundwork is laid, they have a foundation, and therefore they need not fear; as if any foundation, or groundwork for justification can be found, saving Jesus Christ himself alone. He that hath any ground to believe besides Christ himself, doth he not make Christ imperfect, by adding some other thing to him? If they say they make not these works the ground properly, but the reason of believing; I answer, that as there is no foundation, so no reason without Christ of believing. It is that these works sincerely wrought in a person, may serve as reasons, that they do believe; but they cannot be reasons, that they may believe. If any ask, why the apostle is so bitter against such as interweave works with faith in Christ? I answer, because they bring men into bondage, and keep them in it, laying heavy burdens upon them; and this reason the apostle gives himself in chapter 2:4,5, "and that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage, to whom we gave place by subjection, no,

not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you." Here, speaking of these seducers, he calls them false brethren, who came to spy their liberty in Christ, and to bring them into bondage, to whom he would not give place an hour; therefore he earnestly urgeth these Galatians in chapter 5:1, "that they stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made them free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." Some may say, he speaks this of circumcision, which was a ceremony to be abolished; but not of works of righteousness. I answer, that he gives this but for one instance; for the seducers fell upon their keeping of the law of Moses, and circumcision both, as is plain by that expression of his in chapter 3, where the apostle disputes about the moral law in matter of justification. "This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" {vs.2} "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." {vs.10} So also in that dispute which was brought before the apostles at Jerusalem, which I suppose was occasioned by this seduction, whereupon that prime council was held; as in Acts 15:5. "But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, that it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the Law of Moses." Now this destruction of Christ's freedom they counted intolerable, and Peter saith in verse 10, 11. "Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved."

Another reason of the apostle's bitter execration against those that mingled their works of the law in matter of justification is because this mixture tends to the frustration of the free grace of Christ, and to make it of none effect. This argument the same apostle useth in Rom.11:6, "and if by grace, then is it no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace," intimating, that where any works come in, grace ceases to be grace. So, in Gal.5:4, he saith, "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace."

The apostle anathematizeth those that bring in works towards justification, because this brings Christ much out of request with men, and works into a far higher esteem than him; for you will observe, where such legal observances are required to application of justification, there is an hundred times more poring on such qualifications, than on Christ, and his free grace; the thoughts, cares, and passions, are infinitely more racked and intense about them, than him; their absence or presence, work more strongly by far on the spirit and affections, than his presence, or his absence; Christ in a manner is forgotten and neglected, in comparison of them; almost all comfort, and all peace, stand upon their presence. Whereas the apostle's doctrine is, that being justified by faith, we have peace with God; and his prayer is that they might be "filled with all joy and peace in believing;" he doth not say, that they may be filled with all joy in the presence of works. Now what greater derogation can there be to Christ, than for him to be so much passed by, and to be so rarely and coldly frequented, whilst works bear the bell away; whilst one answers from works, pro or con, works more, and stirs more the spirit of a man, than twenty from Christ himself. Let but such as are trained up under the bondage of works speak, if it be not just as I say.

Some may say, what use is there then of works, this is the way to bring them out of request? I answer, this is an old cavil, and was made in the apostle's times, and is as hot now as ever, as if works could serve for no purpose, unless they be preferred before Christ. Works were made as fire was, to serve, but not to rule; they were made to glorify God with, not to rob him of his glory; they serve for the ordering a man's conversation aright, not to get, no, nor to prepare acceptance with God. Coming to Christ is all that is needful to justification. "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." {Jn.1:12} It matters not in what pickle; and this very coming is by the Father's drawing. "No man cometh to me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him." If a person can truly see Christ, the chiefest among ten thousands, all fair, and for that cause choose and close with him; neither good nor bad works have ought to do in this business, to hinder or farther justification, or acceptance of such a person by Christ. The truth is, this gospel is the only establisher of good works as it sets bounds to

them, as to their right ends; as it shows the way to be enabled to do them, and as it shows their place and rank.

Use 1: This text should serve as a fair warning to us, the ministers of the gospel, to take heed of running on this desperate shelf of preaching a different doctrine from the apostle's, which will swallow up all such mercilessly; and let us choose rather to lie under the heavy censure of men, with the apostle himself, than to lie under his curse, by giving the freeness of grace its own due dimensions, without stinting it to the pleasure of men, for fear of a licentious abuse of it. In Paul's time men were as apt to wrest and abuse free grace to libertinism, as now; yet he feared not to impart to them to the full, the good pleasure of Christ for all that. Some while they are busy with the whip to keep off dogs, fetch blood at the hearts of children with their causeless cautions, and then rejoice to see them in their spiritual afflictions, which methinks is an inhuman cruelty. Some say, men grow very presumptuous by such liberty preached; but children must not want their bread for fear of dogs, or have gravel mixed with it, lest they should surfeit of it. I grant, that we ought not to preach continuance in sin, that grace may abound, which cannot be truly inferred from this doctrine; for there is a vast difference betwixt Christ's showing grace in the worst condition, and an allowing men to wallow in sin still; the apostle's gospel necessarily infers the first, but contradicts the last.

Use 2: This may serve as an item to all God's people. Not to censure the doctrine of free grace, lest they fall into the same condemnation, as partaking with the sin of seducers. Thankfully to embrace this doctrine, and hold it fast whatever others preach different. To beware of men that come in sheep's clothing, pretending to lay a sure foundation by laying it deep, as they call it, whilst indeed they are ravenous wolves, tearing and racking poor souls, freighting and torturing their poor consciences, about the matter of justification. I speak not against the utmost discovery of the sinfulness of sin, to make it odious to men; but, for requisites, and I know not what qualifications, {besides faith alone in Christ,} to justification; I say, beware of them, lest you receive the true gospel of Christ in vain; lest Christ himself grow into contempt and neglect with you, and works become more glorious in your eye than he, and so you be turned aside from him, who calleth you from darkness to his marvelous light, and lest he shake off the dust of his feet against you, as a self-willed and self-conceited people.