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Chapter 9: The Benefit of Keeping That Law Which Reason Teaches

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“The Benefit of Keeping That Law Which Reason Teaches”

Chapter 9 of Book 1 in

Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity

By Richard Hooker

1594

[Hooker, Richard. “Concerning Laws and Their Several Kinds in General.” Book 1 in *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*. In Richard Hooker, *The Works of that Learned and Judicious Divine Mr. Richard Hooker with an Account of His Life and Death by Isaac Walton*. Arranged by the Rev. John Keble MA. 7th edition revised by the Very Rev. R.W. Church and the Rev. F. Paget (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888). 3 vols. Vol. 1. The Online Library of Liberty. <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/921>. In the public domain. Some modernized vocabulary and constructions have been substituted in the text by the Witherspoon Institute.]

Within the text, numbers within brackets indicate the page divisions of the 1888 edition from which this text was taken; prose within text are insertions of the Witherspoon Institute to supply words required by modern English usage. In places the Witherspoon Institute has modernized archaic or obsolete vocabulary or constructions in Hooker’s text. In cases where the changes are very basic and risk no alteration to the original meaning of the text (such as changing “whereof” to “of which” and “saith” to “says”) there is no notation in the text; changes to more substantive vocabulary are noted with footnotes that show the original word that Hooker used.

Within the footnotes, text not within brackets are Hooker’s original notes; text within single brackets is supplied by the Witherspoon Institute; text within double brackets (that is, [[]]) is supplied by the editors of the 1888 edition.

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Chapter 9: The benefit of keeping that Law which Reason teaches.

[1.] Now the due observation of this Law which Reason teaches us cannot but be effectual to [the] great good [of them] that observe the same. For we see the whole world and each part of it so compacted,

that as long as each thing performs only that work which is natural to it, it thereby preserves both other things and also itself. Contrariwise, let any principal thing, as the sun, the moon, any one of the heavens or elements, but once cease or fail, or swerve, and who does not easily conceive that the consequence^[1] thereof would be ruin both to itself and whatever depends on it? And is it possible, that Man being not only the noblest creature in the world, but even a very world in himself, his transgressing the Law of his Nature should draw no manner of harm after it? Yes, “tribulation and anguish to every soul that does evil” (Rom. 2:9). Good does follow unto all things by observing the course of their nature, and on the contrary side evil by not observing it; but not unto natural agents that good which we call Reward, not that evil which we properly term Punishment. The reason of this is, because among creatures in this world, only Man’s observation of the Law of his Nature is Righteousness, only Man’s transgression [is] Sin. And the reason of this is the difference in his manner of observing or transgressing the Law of his Nature. He does not [do] otherwise than voluntarily the one or the other. What we do against our wills, or constrainedly, we are not properly said to do it, because the motive cause of doing it is not in ourselves, but carries us, as if the wind should drive a feather in the air, we no whit furthering that by which we are driven. In such cases therefore the evil which is done moves compassion; men are pitied for it, as being rather miserable in such respect than culpable. Some things are likewise done by man, though not through outward force and impulsion, though not against, yet without their wills; as in alienation of mind, or any [] like inevitable utter absence of thought^[2] and judgment. For which cause, no man did ever think the hurtful actions of insane^[3] men and innocents to be punishable. Again, some things we do neither against nor without [] and yet not simply and merely with our wills, but with our wills in such sort moved, that [238] although there be no impossibility [] that we might [not act thus], nevertheless we are not so easily able to do otherwise. In this consideration one evil deed is made more pardonable than another. Finally, [although] that which we do [is] evil, [it] is notwithstanding by so much more pardonable, by how much the exigence of so doing or the difficulty of doing otherwise is greater; unless this necessity or difficulty [should] have originally risen from ourselves. It is no excuse therefore for him, who being drunk commits incest, and alleges that his mind was^[4] not his own; inasmuch as [he] himself might have chosen whether his mind should by that mean[s] have been taken from him. Now rewards and punishments do always presuppose something willingly done well or ill; without which respect though we may sometimes receive good or harm, yet then the one is only a benefit and not a reward, the other simply a hurt not a punishment. From the sundry dispositions of man’s Will, which is the root of all his actions, there grows variety in the sequel of rewards and punishments, which are by these and the like rules measured: “Take away the will, and all acts are equal: That which we do not, and would do, is commonly accepted as done.”^[5] By these and the like rules men’s actions are determined of and judged, whether they be in their own nature rewardable or punishable.

[2.] Rewards and punishments are not received, but at the hands of such as being above us have power to examine and judge our deeds. How men come to have this authority one over another in external actions, we shall more diligently examine in that which follows. But for this present, so much all do acknowledge, that since every man’s heart and conscience does in good or evil, even secretly committed and known to none but itself, either like or disallow itself, and accordingly either rejoice—nature itself exulting (as it were) in certain hope of reward—or else grieve (as it were) in a sense of future punishment; neither of which can in this case be looked for from any other, saving only from Him who discerns and judges the very secrets of all hearts: [239] therefore He is the only rewarder and revenger of all such actions; although not of such actions only, but of all by which the Law of Nature is broken of which [He] Himself is author. For which cause, the Roman laws, called The Laws of the Twelve Tables, requiring offices of inward affection which the eye of man cannot reach to, threaten the neglecters of them with none but divine punishment.^[6]

^[1] [Hooker: sequel]

^[2] [Hooker: wit]

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[3] [Hooker: furious]

[4] [Hooker: wits were]

[5] “Voluntate sublata, omnem actum parem esse.” [[*Code of Justinian*]], [book] *foedissimam*, [chapter] de adult. “Bonam voluntatem plerumque pro facto reputari.” [[*Code of Justinian*]], book si quis in testament.

[6] “Divos caste adeunto, pietatem adhibento: qui secus faxit, Deus ipse vindex erit” [“By approaching the rich with restraint, and following duty . . . : against him who does otherwise, God himself will be the avenger”], [[Cicero, *De Legibus [On the Laws]*, 2.8[19].]]

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