



OF TEMPTATION AND TRIBULATION

DCXXIX.

Whoso, without the word of grace and prayer, disputes with the devil touching sin and the law, will lose; therefore let him leave off betimes. For the devil is armed against us with Goliah's sword,

with his spear and weapons; that is he has on his side to assist him, the testimony of our own consciences, which witness against us in that we have transgressed all God's commandments; therefore the devil has a very great advantage against us.

The devil often assaults me, by objecting, that out of my doctrine great offences and much evil have proceeded, and with this he many a time vehemently perplexes me. And although I make him this answer: That much good is also raised thereby, which by God's grace is true, yet he is so nimble a spirit, and so crafty a rhetorician, that, master-like, he can pervert this into sin. He was never so fierce and full of rage as he is now. I feel him well.

But when I remember myself, and take hold on the Gospel, and meet him therewith, then I overcome him and confute all his arguments; yet for a time I often fail. He says: The law is also God's Word; why, then, is the Gospel always objected against me? I say: True: the law is also God's Word; but it is as far different from the Gospel, as heaven from earth; for in the Gospel, God offers unto us his grace; he will be our God merely out of love, and he presents unto us his only begotten Son, who delivers us from sin and death, and has purchased for us everlasting righteousness and life; thereon do I hold, and will not make God a liar. God indeed has also given the law, but in every respect for another use and purpose.

What I teach and preach, I teach openly, by clear daylight, not in a corner. I direct the same by the Gospel, by baptism, and by the Lord's prayer. Here Christ stands, him I cannot deny; upon the Gospel do I ground my cause, etc. Yet the devil, with his crafty disputing, brings it so near unto me, that the sweat of anguish drops from me.

Thus was St Paul constrained to defend himself at Philippi, when both Jews and Gentiles hit him in the teeth, saying: That he troubled their city." And, at Thesalonica, saying: "These are they who turn the world upside down; they do contrary to the decrees of Caesar. And at Caesarea, saying: "This is a pestilent fellow, that hath moved sedition among all the Jews throughout the world." So the devil stirred up the Jews against Christ, accusing him of rebellion, that he forbad to pay tribute unto Caesar, and that he blasphemed, in calling himself the Son of God. So I say to Satan: Like as thou camest to confusion by Christ and St Paul, even so, Mr. Devil, shall it go with thee if thou meddlest with me.

DCXXX.

All heaviness of mind and melancholy come of the devil; especially these thoughts, that God is not gracious unto him: that God will have no mercy upon him, etc. Whosoever thou art, possessed with such heavy thoughts, know for certain, that they are a work of the devil. God sent his Son into the world, not to affright, but to comfort.

Therefore be of good courage, and think, that henceforward thou art not the child of a human creature, but of God, through faith in Christ, in whose name thou art baptized; therefore the spear of death cannot enter into thee; he has no right unto thee, much less can he hurt or prejudice thee, for he is everlastingly swallowed up through Christ.

DCXXXI.

It is better for a Christian to be sorrowful than secure, as the people of this world are. Well is it for him that stands always in fear, yet knows he has in heaven a gracious God, for Christ's sake; as the Psalm says: "The Lord's delight is in them that fear him, and put their trust in his mercy."

There are two sorts of tribulations; one, of the spirit; another, of the flesh. Satan torments the conscience with lies, perverting that which is done uprightly, and according to God's Word; but the body or flesh, he plagues in another kind.

No man ought to lay across upon himself, or to adopt tribulation, as is done in Popedom; but if a cross or tribulation come upon him, then let him suffer it patiently, and know that it is good and profitable to him.

DCXXXII.

Luther being informed of one that was fiercely tempted and plagued in his conscience, because he found not in himself a complete righteousness, that he was not so righteous as God in the law required, and that, in praying, he always felt blaspheming against Christ, said: It is a good sign; for blaspheming of God is two-fold; one active, or operative, when one willfully seeks occasion to blaspheme God; the other a constrained blaspheming of God, passive, when the devil, against our wills, possesses us with evil cogitations, which we desire to resist. With such, God will have us to be exercised, to the end we may not lie snoring in laziness, but strive and pray against them. By this means, such things, in time, will vanish away and cease, especially at our last end; for then the Holy Ghost is present with his Christians, stands by them, drives away the devil, and makes a sweet, quiet, and peaceable conscience. Wherefore, for his spiritual disease, let him take this my physic; that he trouble not himself about anything, but be of good comfort, trust in God, and hold on to the Word—the devil, of his own accord, will soon cease from stirring up such temptation.

Concerning this tribulation, that he finds not a full and complete righteousness in himself, let him know, that no human creature finds it in this life; it is altogether angelical, which shall fall unto us in the life to come. Here we must content ourselves with Christ's righteousness, which he fully merited for us, with his innocent and spotless life.

DCXXXIII.

Christ said to the adulteress: "Neither do I condemn thee, go, and sin no more." To the murderer, he said: "This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." But to the Scribes and Pharisees, who set themselves against the righteousness of the gospel, Christ said: "Woe be unto you."

When one out of weakness denies God's Word, as many at this time do, under Prince George, it is no sin against the Holy Ghost. Peter sinned in denying Christ, but not against the Holy Ghost. On the contrary, Judas persisted in sinning; he repented not aright, but remained hardened.

DCXXXIV.

It is impossible for a human heart, without crosses and tribulations, to think upon God.

DCXXXV.

Not all can bear tribulations alike; some are better able to bear a blow of the devil; as we three, Philip Melancthon, John Calvin, and myself.

DCXXXVI.

David, doubtless, had worse devils than we, for without great tribulations, he could not have had so great and glorious revelations. David made psalms: we also will make psalms, and sing as well as we can, to the honor of our Lord God, and to spite and mock the devil and his spouse.

DCXXXVII.

When David sang his song: “O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom, would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son,” etc. Ah! how sorrowful and perplexed a man was he. The very words denote that his grief of heart was excessive.

The good and holy king had vehement tribulations and crosses, which altogether eclipsed and darkened the promises made by God unto him. They were fearful and horrible examples. To hold fast and sure to the Word, in time of such trials and vexations, as David did, Oh! this is of inestimable value.

DCXXXVIII.

The upright and true Christian church has to strive not only with flesh and blood, but with spiritual wickedness in high places. The spiritual combat is most heavy and dangerous; flesh and blood take away but only body, wife and children, house, land, and what is temporal; but the spiritual evil takes away the soul, everlasting life and salvation.

DCXXXIX.

The Lord our God is a God of humble and perplexed hearts, who are in need, tribulation, and danger. If we were strong, we should be proud and haughty. God shows his anger in our weakness; he will not quench the glimmering flax, neither will he break in pieces the bruised reed.

DCXL.

Faith’s tribulation is the greatest and sharpest torment, for faith must overcome all other tribulations; so that if faith be foiled, all other tribulations must needs fall upon human creatures; but if faith hold up her head, and be sound and in health, all other tribulations and vexations must grow sick, weak, and decrease. This tribulation of faith was that thorn which St Paul felt, and which pierced through flesh and spirit, through soul and body. Such tribulations was David possessed with, when he made this psalm: “Lord, rebuke me not in thy anger.” No doubt he would rather have been slain with a sword, than have suffered such wrath and indignation from God.

DCXLI.

Heavy thoughts bring on physical maladies; when the soul is oppressed, so is the body. Augustine said well: *Anima plus est ubi amat, quam ubi animat*. When cares, heavy cogitations, sorrow, and passions superabound, they weaken the body, which, without the soul, is dead, or like a horse without a driver. But when the heart is at rest, and quiet, then it takes care of the body, and gives it what pertains thereunto. Therefore we ought to abandon and resist anxious thoughts, by all possible means.

DCXLII.

The life of no human creature is without discontent; every one has his tribulations, and many a one, rather than be without them, will procure disquietness to himself. No man is content with that which God gives him.

DCXLIII.

Ah! how willingly would I now die, for I am faint and overwrought, and at this time I have a joyful and peaceable heart and conscience. I know full well, so soon as I shall be again in health, I neither shall have peace nor rest, but sorrow, weariness, and tribulations. But even that great man, St Paul, could not be exempt from tribulations.

DCXLIV.

When spiritual tribulations approach, we say: cursed be the day wherein I was born; and we begin to sweat. In such tribulations was our blessed Saviour Christ, in the garden, when he said: "Father, let this cup pass from me." Here the will was against the will, yet he turned himself presently according to his Father's will, and was comforted by an angel. Christ, who in our flesh was plagued and tempted, is the best mediator and advocate with God, in our tribulation. He is president, when we are only respondents, if we will but suffer him to meditate. Seems it God is angry with us when we are in tribulation and temptation; yet when we repent and believe, we shall find, that under such anger God's grace and goodness towards us lie hid. Therefore, let us patiently attend God's leisure, and constantly remain in hope.

DCXLV.

On the 8th of August, 1529, Luther, with his wife, lay sick of a fever. Overwhelmed with dysentery, sciatica, and a dozen other maladies, he said: God has touched me sorely, and I have been impatient: but God knows better than we whereto it serves. Our Lord God is like a printer, who sets the letters backwards, so that here we must so read them; when we are printed off, yonder, in the life to come, we shall read all clear and straightforward. Meantime we must have patience.

Tribulation is a right school and exercise of flesh and blood. The Psalms, almost in every verse, speak of nothing but tribulations, perplexities, sorrows, and troubles; they are a book of tribulations.

DCXLVI.

Christ received the thief on the cross, and Paul, after so many blasphemings and prosecutions. We, then, have no cause at all to doubt. And, indeed, we must all in that way attain to salvation. Yet, though we have no cause to fear God's wrath, for old Adam's sake we must stand in fear; for we cannot take such hold on the grace and mercy of God as we ought. He had but only the first six words in the creed: "I believe in God the Father," yet these were far above his natural wisdom, reason, and understanding.

DCXLVII.

The devil plagues and torments us in the place where we are most tender and weak. In Paradise, he fell not upon Adam, but upon Eve. It commonly rains where it was wet enough before.

When one is possessed with doubt, that though he call upon the Lord he cannot be heard, and that God has turned his heart from him, and is angry, cogitations which we suffer, which are forced upon us, he must against them arm himself with God's Word, promising to hear him. As to the when and how God will hear him, this is stark naught; place, time, and person are accidental things; the substance and essence is the promise.

DCXLVIII.

I have often need, in my tribulations, to talk even with a child, in order to expel such thoughts as the devil possesses me with; and this teaches me not to boast, as if of myself I were able to help myself, and to subsist without the strength of Christ. I need one, at times, to help me, who, in his whole body, has not so much divinity as I have in one finger.

DCXLIX.

In this life are many different degrees of tribulations, as there are different persons. Had another had the tribulations which I have suffered, he would long since have died; while I could not have endured the buffetings which St Paul did, nor St Paul the tribulations which Christ suffered. The greatest and heaviest grief is, when one dies in the twinkling of an eye. But hereof we ought not to dispute, but to refer the same to God's judgment.

DCL.

When I am assailed with heavy tribulations, I rush out among my pigs, rather than remain alone by myself. The human heart is like a millstone in a mill; when you put wheat under it, it turns and grinds and bruises the wheat to flour; if you put no wheat, it still grinds on, but then 'tis itself it grinds and wears away. So the human heart, unless it be occupied with some employment, leaves space for the devil, who wriggles himself in, and brings with him a whole host of evil thoughts, temptations, and tribulations, which grind out the heart.

DCLI.

No papist among them will throw himself into the flames for his doctrine, whereas our people readily encounter fire and death, following therein the example of the holy martyrs, St Agnes, St Agatha, St Vincent, St Lawrence, etc. We are sheep for the slaughter. Only the other day, they burned, at Paris, two nobles and two magistrates, victims in the cause of the Gospel, the king himself (Francis I.) setting fire to the faggots.

DCLII.

My tribulations are more necessary for me than meat and drink; and all they feel them ought to accustom themselves thereunto, and learn to bear them.

If Satan had not so plagued and exercised me, I should not have been so great an enemy unto him, or have been able to do him such hurt. Tribulations keep us from pride, and therewith increase the acknowledgment of Christ and of God's gifts and benefits. For, from the time I began to be in tribulation, God have me the victory of overcoming that confounded, cursed, and blasphemous life wherein I lived in popedom. God did the business in such a way, that neither the emperor nor the pope was able to suppress me, but the devil must come and set upon me, to the end God's strength may be known in my weakness.

DCLIII.

Our tribulations and doubts, wherewith the devil plagues us, can be driven away by no better means than by condemning him; as when one condemns a fierce cur, in passing quietly by him, the dog then not only desists from biting, but also from barking; but when one enrages him by timorously throwing something at him, then he falls upon and bites him. Even so, when the devil sees that we fear him, he ceases not to torment and plague us.

DCLIV.

A woman at Eisenach lay very sick, having endured horrible paroxysms, which no physician was able to cure, for it was directly a work of the devil. She had had swoonings, and four paroxysms, each lasting three or four hours. Her hands and feet bent in the form of a horn; she was chill and cold; her tongue rough and dry; her body much swollen. She seeing Luther, who came to visit her, was much rejoiced thereat, raised herself up, and said: Ah! my loving father in Christ, I have a

heavy burden upon me, pray to God for me; and so fell down in her bed again. Whereupon Luther sighed, and said: "God rebuke thee, Satan, and command thee that thou suffer this, his divine creature to be at peace." Then turning himself towards the standers by, he said: "She is plagued of the devil in the body, but the soul is safe, and shall be preserved; therefore let us give thanks to God, and pray for her;" and so they all prayed aloud the Lord's prayer. After which, Luther concluded with these words: "Lord God heavenly Father! who hast commanded us to pray for the sick, we beseech thee, through Jesus Christ, the only beloved Son, that thou wouldst deliver this thy servant from her sickness, and from the hands of the devil. Spare, O Lord, her soul, which, together with her body, thou hast purchased and redeemed from the power of sin, of death, and of the devil." Whereupon the sick woman said: "Amen." The night following she took rest, and the next day was graciously delivered from her disease and sickness.

DCLV.

A letter, written by Luther to Doctor Benedict Paul, whose son had lately been killed by a fall from the top of a house: - "Although it be nowhere forbidden in Holy Scripture to mourn and grieve for the death of a godly child or friend—nay, we have many examples of the godly, who have bewailed the death of their children and friends—yet there ought to be a measure in sorrowing and mourning. Therefore, loving doctor, while you do well to mourn and lament the death of your son, let not your grief exceed the measure of a Christian, in refusing to be comforted. I would have you, first, consider that 'twas God gave that son unto you, and took him from you again; secondly, I would wish you to follow the example of that just and godly man, Job, who, when he had lost all his children, all his wealth and substance, said: "Have we received good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil? The hand of the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord," etc. He rightly considered that both good and evil come of the Lord; even so do you likewise; then you shall see that you have much greater gifts and benefits left of God to you than the evil you now feel. But you look now only upon the evil that your son is dead; and, meantime, you forget the glorious treasure God has given you, in the true knowledge of his Word, a good and peaceable conscience, which alone should outweigh all evil which may happen unto you; why, then, do you plague and torment yourself with the death of your son? But, admit the loss a great and heavy one, 'tis no new thing; you are not alone therein, but have companions who have had like misfortunes.—Abraham had much more sorrow of heart, concerning his son, while he was yet living, than if he had been dead. How think ye was it within his heart, when, with his naked word, he was to strike off the head of his son? How was it also, think you, with Jacob, when he was informed that his loved son Joseph was torn in pieces by wild beasts? Or what father was ever perplexed and troubled in heart like David, when by his son Absalom he was persecuted and driven out of his kingdom, and when that son, in a state of rebellion, was slain and damned? Doubtless, David's heart at that time, with great grief, might have melted. Therefore, when you rightly behold and consider these and like examples of such high, enlightened people, you ought to feel that this your sorrow of heart is nothing comparable with theirs. Therefore know, loving brother, that God's mercy is greater than our tribulations. You have, indeed, cause to mourn, as you think, but it is nothing else than sugar mingled with vinegar; your son is very well provided for; he lives now with Christ; oh! would to God that I, too, had finished my course; I would not wish myself here again. Your suffering is only a corporal cross. You are a good logician, and teach others that art; make

use thereof yourself now; put it in practice; define, divide, conclude, distinguish that which is spiritual, and separate it from that which is corporal.”

DCLVI.

When Satan will not leave off tempting thee, then bear with patience, hold on, hand and foot, nor faint, as if there would be no end thereof, but stand courageously, and attend God’s leisure, knowing that what the devil cannot accomplish by his sudden and powerful assaults, he thinks to gain by craft, by perservering to vex and tempt thee, thereby to make thee faint and weary, as in the Psalm is noted: “Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth up; yet they have not prevailed against me,” etc. But be fully assured, that in this sport with the devil, God, with all his holy angels, takes delight and joy; and assure thyself, also, that the end thereof will be blessed and happy, which thou shalt certainly find to thy everlasting comfort.

DCLVII.

Concerning predestination, it is best to begin below, at Christ, as then we both hear and find the Father; for all those that have begun at the top have broken their necks. I have been thoroughly plagued and tormented with such cogitations of predestination; I would needs know how God intended to deal with me, etc. But at last, God be praised! I clean left them; I took hold again on God’s revealed Word; higher I was not able to bring it, for a human creature can never search out the celestial will of God; this God hides, for the sake of the devil, to the end the crafty spirit may be deceived and put to confusion. The revealed will of God the devil has learned from us, but God reserves his secret will to himself. It is sufficient for us to learn and know Christ in his humanity, in which the Father has revealed himself.

DCLVIII.

Christ, on the tenth day, came again into Jerusalem, and on the fourteenth day he was killed. His cogitations and tribulations then were concerning the sins of the whole world, concerning God’s wrath and death, of which all ought to stand in fear. But before he was thus personally made sin for us, he was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; his tribulations were concerning his labor and pains, which he knew would be spent in vain upon his own nation, the Jews, and over which he wept bitterly, because they knew not the time of their visitation.

DCLIX.

More and greater sins are committed when people are alone than when they are in society. When Eve, in paradise, walked by herself, the devil deceived her. In solitary places are committed murders, robberies, adulteries, etc.; for in solitude the devil has place and occasion to mislead people. But whosoever is in honest company is ashamed to sin, or at least has no opportunity for it; and, moreover, our Saviour Christ promised: “Where two or three be gathered together in my name, there will I be in the midst of them.”

When king David was idle and alone, and went not out to the wars, then he fell into adultery and murder. I myself have found that I never fell into more sin than when I was alone. God has created mankind for fellowship, and not for solitariness, which is clearly proved by this strong argument: God, in the creation of the world, created man and woman, to the end that the man in the woman should have a fellow.

DCLX.

We find in no history any human creature oppressed with such sorrow as to sweat blood, therefore this history of Christ is wonderful; no man can understand or conceive what his bloody sweat is. And it is more wonderful, that the Lord of grace and of wrath, of life and of death, should be so weak, and made so sorrowful, as to be constrained to seek for solace and comfort of poor and miserable sinners, and to say: Ah, loving disciples! sleep not, wake yet a little, and talk one with another, that at least I may hear some people are about me. Here the Psalm was rightly applied, which says: “Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels,” etc. Ah, Saviour Christ Jesus, through the immeasurable heavy burden which lay on his innocent back; namely, the sins of the universal world, against which, doubtless, he prayed: “O Lord, rebuke me not in thine anger neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure.”



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