

259. Excommunication is Not Intended for the Perdition, but for the Salvation of the Soul.

As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure In the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. *Ezek. 33, 11.*

God, according to His infinite love, wants all men to be saved; as Paul writes to Timothy: "God will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." He has given His Word, the Law and the Gospel, with the intention that through the Law sinners should come to a knowledge of their sins, and by means of the Gospel come to faith in Jesus Christ and be saved. All His precepts, institutions, and established orders in Holy Scripture have no other purpose than to lead sinners to the knowledge of their sins and to faith in Christ and therefore to eternal salvation.

Also excommunication, that is, the retention of sins and the exclusion of manifest and impenitent sinners from the Christian congregation, is not intended by God for the perdition, but for the salvation of the soul. When a congregation, in His name, declares an impenitent sinner a heathen man and a publican and this judgment is publicly announced by the minister of Christ, the object is no other than to show the sinner how grievously he has transgressed God's commandments in order that he may repent, believe, and be saved. That excommunication is intended for the salvation of the soul we see from the words of Christ Matt. 18, 15: "If he shall hear thee, thou hast *gained* thy brother." The object of church discipline is to *gain* the sinner.

We are therefore not to hurry from one grade of admonition to the other; but the three grades of brotherly admonition are to be repeated as long as there is hope that the erring brother may thereby be gained or until it becomes manifest that he obstinately refuses to heed the Word of God. There is only one reason for brotherly admonition and excommunication, and that is love of the sinner's immortal soul. 1 Cor. 5, 5 we read: "That the spirit may be *saved* in the Day of the Lord Jesus." When we excommunicate an impenitent sinner, it is done because we love him, because we wish to save his immortal soul. The act of excommunication seems a harsh measure, but it is done to lead men to repentance. The object is to gain, to save, the sinner.

Prayer.

Almighty and gracious God, who art our Stay and Staff in life and in the shadow of death, we pray Thee to visit us with Thy mercy and graciously to forgive us all our sins. Accept the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, as payment for our transgressions, since we were baptized in Christ's name and cleansed by His blood. Therefore deliver us, we pray Thee, from all attacks of the Evil One, that we may fight a good fight and overcome through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jesus, the name that charms our fears,
That bids our sorrows cease,
'Tis music in the sinner's ears,
'Tis life and health and peace.

He breaks the power of canceled sin,
He sets the prisoner free;
His blood can make the foulest clean,
His blood avails for me.

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