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Chapter 11: Why God Has by Scripture Made Known Supernatural Laws

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“Why God Has by Scripture Further Made Known Such Supernatural Laws, As Do Serve for Men’s Direction”

Chapter 11 of Book 1 in

Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity

By Richard Hooker

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Chapter 11: Why God has by Scripture further made known such supernatural laws, as do serve for men’s direction.

[1.] All things, (God only excepted,) besides the nature which they have in themselves, receive externally some perfection from other things, as has been shown[,] [i]nasmuch as there is in the whole world no one thing great or small, [that may not] either in respect of knowledge or of use it [] add something to our perfection. And whatever such perfection there is which our nature may acquire, the same we properly term our Good; our Sovereign Good or Blessedness, that in which the highest degree of all our perfection consists, that which being once attained to there can remain nothing further to be desired; and therefore with it our souls are fully content and satisfied, in that they have[,] they rejoice, and thirst for no more. Wherefore of good things desired some are such that for themselves we covet them not, but only because they serve as instruments to that for which we are [254] to seek: of this sort are riches. Another kind there is, which although we desire for itself, as health, and virtue, and knowledge, nevertheless they are not the last mark at which we aim, but have their further end to which they are referred, so that in them we are not satisfied as having attained the utmost we may, but our desires do still proceed. These things are linked and as it were chained one to another; we labour to eat, and we eat to live, and we live to do good, and the good which we do is as seed sown with reference to a future harvest.[1] But we must come at length to some pause. For, if everything were to be desired for some other without any stint, there could be no certain end proposed to our actions, we should go on we know not whither; yea, whatever we do would be in vain, or rather nothing at all would be possible to be done. For [just] as to take away the first efficient [cause] of our being[2] would be to annihilate utterly our persons, so we cannot remove the last final cause of our working, but we shall cause whatever we work to cease. Therefore something there must be desired for itself simply and for no other. That is simply for itself desirable, for the nature of which it is opposite and repugnant to be desired with relation to any other. The ox and the ass desire their food, neither propose they to themselves any reason[3] why; so that of them this is desired for itself; but why? By reason of their imperfection which cannot otherwise desire it; whereas that which is desired simply for itself, the excellency of it is such as permits it not in any sort to be referred to a further end.

[2.] Now that which man does desire with reference to a further end, the same he desires in such measure as is to that end convenient; but what he covets as good in itself, towards that his desire is ever infinite. So that unless the last good of all, which is desired altogether for itself, be also infinite, we do evil in making it our end; even as they who placed their felicity in wealth or honour or pleasure or anything here attained; because in desiring anything as our final perfection which is not so, we do amiss.[4] Nothing [255] may be infinitely desired except that good which indeed is infinite; for the better [it is] the more desirable [it is]; that therefore [is] most desirable in which there is [an] infinity of goodness: so that if anything desirable may be infinite, that must necessarily be the highest of all things that are desired. No good is infinite except only God; therefore he our felicity and bliss. Moreover, desire tends to union with that [which] it desires. If then in Him we be blessed, it is by force of participation and conjunction with Him. Again, it is not the possession of any good thing [that] can make them happy which have it, unless they enjoy the thing with which they are possessed. Then are we happy therefore when fully we enjoy God, as an object in which the powers of our souls are satisfied even with everlasting delight; so that although we be men, yet by being to God united we live as it were the life of God.

[3.] Happiness therefore is that estate by which we attain, so far as possibly may be attained, the full possession of that which simply for itself is to be desired, and contains in it after an eminent sort the satisfaction[5] of our desires, the highest degree of all our perfection. Of such perfection we are not capable in this life. For while we are in the world, we are subject to sundry imperfections,[6] griefs of body, defects of mind; yea the best things we do are painful, and the exercise of them grievous, being continued without intermission; so that in those very actions by which we are especially perfected in this life we are not able to persist; we are forced with very weariness, and that often, to interrupt them: which tediousness cannot fall into those operations that are in the state of bliss, when our union with God is complete. Complete union with him must be according to every power and faculty of our minds apt to receive so glorious an object. [W]e are [c]apable of God both by understanding and will: by understanding, as He is that sovereign Truth which comprehends the rich treasures of all wisdom; by will, as He is that sea of Goodness of which whoever tastes [256] shall thirst no more. As the will does now work upon that object by desire, which is as it were a motion towards the end as yet unobtained; so

likewise upon the same [when] hereafter [it is] received [the will] shall work also by love. “Appetitus inhiantis fit amor fruentis,” says St. Augustine: “The longing disposition of them that thirst is changed into the sweet affection of them that taste and are replenished.”^[7] Whereas we now love the thing that is good, but good especially in respect of benefit to us; we shall then love the thing that is good, only or principally for the goodness of beauty in itself. The soul being in this sort, as it is active, perfected by love of that infinite good, shall, as it is receptive, be also perfected with those supernatural passions of joy, peace, and delight. All this [will be] endless and everlasting. Which perpetuity, in regard of which our blessedness is termed “a crown which withers not,” (2 Tim. 4:8; 1 Pet. 5:4) does neither depend upon the nature of the thing itself, nor proceed from any natural necessity that our souls should so exercise themselves for ever in beholding and loving God, but from the will of God, which does both freely perfect our nature in so high a degree, and continue it so perfected. Under Man, no creature in the world is capable of felicity and bliss. First, because their chiefest perfection consists in that which is best for them, but not in that which is simply best, as ours does. Secondly, because whatever external perfection they tend to, it is not better than themselves, as ours is. How just occasion have we therefore even in this respect with the Prophet to admire the goodness of God! “Lord, what is man, that thou shouldst exalt him above the works of thy hands,” (Ps. 8:4) so far as to make thyself the inheritance of his rest and the substance of his felicity?

[4.] Now if men had not naturally this desire to be happy, how would it be possible that all men should have it? All men [do] have [it]. Therefore this desire in man is natural. It is not in our power not to do the same; how should it then be in our power to do it coldly or listlessly^[8]? So that our desire[,] being [257] natural[,] is also in that degree of earnestness to which nothing can be added. And is it probable that God should fashion^[9] the hearts of all men [to be] so desirous of that which no man may obtain? It is an axiom of nature that natural desire cannot utterly be vain^[10]^[11] This desire of ours being natural should be vain, if that which may satisfy the same were a thing impossible for man to aspire to. Man does seek a triple perfection: first a sensual, consisting in those things which very life itself requires either as necessary supplements, or as beauties and ornaments of itself; then an intellectual, consisting in those things which none underneath man is either capable of or acquainted with; lastly a spiritual and divine, consisting in those things to which we tend by supernatural means here, but cannot here attain to them. They that make the first of these three the scope of their whole life, are said by the Apostle to have no god but only their belly, to be earthly-minded men.^[12] To the second they bend themselves, who seek especially to excel in all such knowledge and virtue as does most commend men. To this branch belongs the law of moral and civil perfection. That there is something higher than either of these two, no other proof is necessary than the very process of man’s desire, which being natural should be vain, if there were not some farther thing in which it might rest at the length contented, which in the former it cannot do. For man does not seem to rest satisfied, either with fruition of that with which his life is preserved, or with performance of such actions as advance him most deservedly in estimation; but does further covet, yea oftentimes manifestly pursue with great sedulity and earnestness, that which cannot stand him in any stead for vital use; that which exceeds the reach of sense; yea something above capacity of reason, something divine and heavenly, which with hidden exultation it rather surmises than conceives; something it seeks, and what that is directly it knows not, yet very intent^[13] desire of this does so incite it, that all other known delights and pleasures are [258] laid aside, they give place to the search of this [] only suspected desire. If the soul of man did serve only to give him being in this life, then things appertaining to this life would content him, as we see they do other creatures; which creatures enjoying what they live by seek no further, but in this satisfaction^[14] do show a kind of acknowledgment that there is no higher good which does any way belong to them. With us it is otherwise. For although the beauties, riches, honours, sciences, virtues, and perfections of all men living, were in the present possession of one; yet something beyond and above all this [] would still be sought and earnestly thirsted for. So that Nature even in this life does plainly claim and call for a more divine perfection than either of these two that have been mentioned.

[5.] This last and highest estate of perfection of which we speak is received by men in the nature of a Reward.^[15] Rewards do always presuppose such duties performed as are rewardable. Our natural means therefore to blessedness are our works; nor is it possible that Nature should ever find any other way to salvation than only this. But examine the works which we do, and since the first foundation of

the world what one can say, My ways are pure? Seeing then all flesh is guilty of that for which God has threatened eternally to punish, what possibility is there in this way to be saved? There remains therefore either no way to salvation, or if any, then surely a way which is supernatural, a way which could never have entered into the heart of man as much as once to conceive or imagine, if God himself had not revealed it extraordinarily. For which cause we term it the Mystery or secret way of salvation. And therefore St. Ambrose in this matter appeals justly from man to God, "Cœli mysterium doceat me Deus qui condidit, non homo qui seipsum ignoravit:—Let God himself that made me, let not man that knows not himself, be my instructor concerning the mystical way to heaven."^[16] "When men of excellent intellect^[17]," says Lactantius, "had wholly betaken themselves to study, after farewell bidden to all kind as well of private as public action, they spared no labour that might be spent in the [259] search of truth; holding it a thing of much more worth^[18] to seek and to find out the reason of all affairs as well divine as human, than to stick fast in the toil of piling up riches and gathering together heaps of honours. Nevertheless, they both did fail of their purpose, and got not as much as to quit^[19] their charges; because truth which is the secret of the Most High God, whose proper handy-work all things are, cannot be compassed with that intellect^[20] and those senses which are our own. For God and man should be very near neighbours, if man's cogitations were able to take a survey of the counsels and appointments of that Majesty everlasting. Which being utterly impossible, that the eye of man by itself should look into the bosom of divine Reason; God did not suffer him being desirous of the light of wisdom to stray any longer up and down, and with bootless expense of travail to wander in darkness that had no passage to get out by. His eyes at the length God did open, and bestow upon him the knowledge of the truth by way of Gift^[21], to the end that man might both be clearly convicted of folly, and being through error off^[22] of the way, have the path that leads to immortality laid plain before him."^[23] Thus far Lactantius Firmianus, to show that God himself is the teacher of the truth, by which is made known the supernatural way of salvation and law for them that shall be saved to live in. In the natural path of everlasting life the first beginning is that [260] ability of doing good, which God on the day of man's creation endowed him with; from hence obedience to the will of his Creator, absolute righteousness and integrity in all his actions; and last of all the justice of God rewarding the worthiness of his deserts with the crown of eternal glory. Had Adam continued in his first estate, this would have been the way of life to him and all his posterity. With respect to which^[24] I confess notwithstanding with the wisest^[25] of the school-divines, "That if we speak of strict justice, God could [in] no way have been bound to requite man's labours in so generous^[26] and ample a manner as human felicity does import; inasmuch as the dignity of this exceeds so far the other's value. But even if^[27] God of his great liberality had determined in lieu of man's endeavours to bestow the same by the rule of that justice which best beseems him, namely, the justice of one that requites nothing mincingly, but all with pressed and heaped and even over-enlarged measure; yet could it never therefore^[28] necessarily be gathered, that such justice should add to the nature of that reward the property of everlasting continuance; since possession of bliss, though it should be but for a moment, would be an abundant retribution."^[29] But we are not now to enter into this consideration, how gracious and bountiful our good God might still appear in so rewarding the sons of men, although they should exactly perform whatever duty their nature binds them to. However God did propose this reward, we that were to be rewarded must have done that which is required at our hands; we failing in the one, it would be in nature an impossibility that the other should be looked for. The light of nature is never able to find out any way of obtaining the reward of bliss, but by performing exactly the duties and works of righteousness.

[6.] From salvation therefore and life all flesh being [261] excluded this way, behold how the wisdom of God has revealed a way mystical and supernatural, a way directing to the same end of life by a course which grounds itself upon the guiltiness of sin, and through sin desert of condemnation and death. For in this way the first thing is the tender compassion of God respecting us drowned and swallowed up in misery; the next is redemption out of the same by the precious death and merit of a mighty Saviour, which has witnessed of himself, saying, "I am the way," (John 14:6) the way that leads us from misery into bliss. This supernatural way had God in himself prepared before all worlds. The way of supernatural duty which to us he has prescribed, our Saviour in the Gospel of St. John does note, terming it because of its excellency^[30], The Work of God, "This is the work of God, that ye believe in him whom he has sent." (John 6:29) Not that God does require nothing for happiness at the hands of men saving only a naked belief (for hope and charity we may not exclude); but that without belief all other things are as

nothing, and it [is] the ground of those other divine virtues.

Concerning Faith, the principal object of which is that eternal Verity which has discovered the treasures of hidden wisdom in Christ; concerning Hope, the highest object of which is that everlasting Goodness which in Christ does quicken the dead; concerning Charity, the final object of which is that incomprehensible Beauty which shines in the countenance of Christ the Son of the living God: concerning these virtues, the first of which beginning here with a weak apprehension of things not seen, ends with the intuitive vision of God in the world to come; the second beginning here with a trembling expectation of things far removed and as yet but only heard of, ends with real and actual fruition of that which no tongue can express; the third beginning here with a weak inclination of heart towards him to whom we are not able to approach, ends with endless union, the [262] mystery of which is higher than the reach of the thoughts of men; concerning that Faith, Hope, and Charity, without which there can be no salvation, was there ever any mention made saving only in that law which God himself has from heaven revealed? There is not in the world a syllable muttered with certain truth concerning any of these three, more than has been supernaturally received from the mouth of the eternal God.

Laws therefore concerning these things are supernatural, both in respect of the manner of delivering them, which is divine; and also in regard of the things delivered, which are such as have not in nature any cause from which they flow, but were by the voluntary appointment of God ordained besides the course of nature, to rectify nature's obliquity with.

[1] "He that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6:8).

[2] [Hooker: the first efficient of our being.]

[3] [Hooker: end]

[4] See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 10.7 and *Metaphysics*, 12.6,4,30.

[5] [Hooker: contentation]

[6] Μόνον, ὃ Ἀσκληπείη, τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἐν ἀνθρώποις, τὸ δὲ ἔργον οὐδαμοῦ. . . . Τὸ μὴ λίαν κακὸν, ἐνθάδε τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἐστὶ. Τὸ δὲ ἐνθάδε ἀγαθὸν, μῶριον τοῦ κακοῦ τὸ ἐλάχιστον. Ἀδύνατον οὖν τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἐνθάδε καθαρεύειν τῆς κακίας. . . . Κἀγὼ δὲ χάριν ἔχω τῷ Θεῷ τῷ εἰς νοῦν μοι βαλόντι περὶ τῆς γνώσεως τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, ὅτι ἀδύνατόν ἐστιν αὐτὸ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ εἶναι ὃ γὰρ κόσμος πλήρωμά ἐστι τῆς κακίας, ὃ δὲ Θεὸς τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, ἢ τὸ ἀγαθὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ ["Oh Asclepius, only the name of the good is among men, its practice is nowhere. . . . What is not exceedingly bad is what is good here [below]; and what is [considered to be] good here is the least part of what is bad. . . . And I thank God who has implanted in my mind concerning knowledge of the good, that it is impossible that it be in the world, for world is the fullness of evil, and God is [the fullness of] good, or the good is [the fullness] of God."] (Hermes Trismegistus, [*Corpus Hermeticum*, VI.3,4] [[or 6.14]]).

[7] Augustine, *De Trinitate*, book 9, final chapter.

[8] [Hooker: remissly]

[9] [Hooker: frame]

[10] [Hooker: frustrate]

[11] Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, on the preamble, 2.

[12] Phil. 3:19.

[13] [Hooker : intente]

[14] [Hooker: contentation]

[15] "Rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven." Matt. 5: 12. "Summa merces est ut ipso perfruamur." ["The greatest reward is that we enjoy the thing itself"] Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, chapter 6.

[16] Ambrose, *Contra Symmachus*.

[17] [Hooker: wit]

[18] [Hooker: price]

[19] [Hooker: quite]

[20] [Hooker: wit]

[21] [Hooker: Donative]

[22] [Hooker: out]

[23] "Magno et excellenti ingenio viri, cum se doctrinæ penitus dedidissent, quicquid laboris poterat impendi (contemptis omnibus et privatis et publicis actionibus) ad inquirendæ veritatis studium contulerunt, existimantes multo esse præclarius humanarum divinarumque rerum investigare ac scire rationem, quam struendis opibus aut cumulandis honoribus inhærere. Sed neque adepti sunt id quod volebant, et operam simul atque industriam perdiderunt: quia veritas, id est arcanum summi Dei qui fecit omnia, ingenio ac propriis sensibus non potest comprehendi. Alioqui nihil inter Deum hominemque distaret, si consilia et dispositiones illius majestatis æternæ cogitatio assequeretur humana. Quod quia fieri non potuit ut homini per seipsum ratio divina notesceret, non est passus hominem Deus lumen sapientiæ requirentem diutius aberrare, ac sine ullo laboris effectu vagari per tenebras inextricabiles. Aperuit oculos ejus aliquando, et notionem veritatis munus suum fecit, ut et humanam sapientiam nullam esse monstraret, et erranti ac vago viam consequendæ immortalitatis ostenderet." (Lactantius,

book 1, chapter 1.)

[\[24\]](#) [Hooker: Wherein]

[\[25\]](#) [Hooker: wittiest]

[\[26\]](#) [Hooker: generous]

[\[27\]](#) [Hooker: be it that]

[\[28\]](#) [Hooker: hereupon]

[\[29\]](#) “Loquendo de stricta justitia, Deus nulli nostrum propter quæcunque merita est debitor perfectionis reddendæ tam intensæ, propter immoderatum excessum illius perfectionis ultra illa merita. Sed esto quod ex liberalitate sua determinasset meritis conferre actum tam perfectum tanquam præmium, tali quidem justitia qualis decet eum, scilicet supererogantis in præmiis: tamen non sequitur ex hoc necessario, quod per illam justitiam sit reddenda perfectio perennis tanquam præmium, imo abundans fieret retributio in beatitudine unius momenti.” John Duns Scotus, on Book IV of the *Sentences of Peter Lombard*, dist. 49, 6.

[\[30\]](#) [Hooker: by an excellency]

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