

**Thomas Hooker and the Necessity of the Law as Preparation for the Conversion of Man**

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## Introduction

In the current day, there are many ministers who want to preach the “gospel” and “Christ.” This kind of preaching seems to be based on Scripture, as Jesus says, “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the *gospel* to every creature” (Mark 16:15) [emphasis added], and as Paul confirms, “For I determined not to know any thing among you, *save Jesus Christ*, and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2) [emphasis added]. However, comparing the preaching of those ministers to Scriptures, an important part is missing. This is related to the preaching of total depravity, God’s holiness, and His law. As P. G. Matthew says, “Many false ministers are in the church today...They do not preach repentance, total depravity, the law of God, the holiness of God, and, therefore, God’s demand for holiness.”<sup>1</sup> Also, in Acts, the apostle Peter applies in his preaching the law to his hearers, saying, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, *whom ye have crucified*, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36) [emphasis added]. Nonetheless, the question is whether the law needs to be preached and if it is necessary for the conversion of man. Both questions are surely answered by Thomas Hooker in his writings.

Thomas Hooker was born on July 7, 1586, in Markfield, Leicestershire, England, and died on July 7, 1647, in Hartford, Connecticut, United States.<sup>2</sup> For several years, he became a lecturer at Cambridge.<sup>3</sup> In this time, Clinton Rossiter says, “He underwent a religious experience of soul-shattering intensity and body-racking duration.”<sup>4</sup> Later, he fled via the Netherlands to Massachusetts Bay Colony<sup>5</sup> and settled later in Hartford, where he ministered until his death.<sup>6</sup>

In the time of Hooker’s ministry, there were many who professed faith, but it was presumptuous faith without real fruit. Murray writes, “Hooker fully shared in this evaluation: ‘*Most of the people*, who lived in the bosom of the church and profess the faith’, he believed to be ‘formal gossellers’” [emphasis added].<sup>7</sup> Therefore, Hooker preached strongly against false faith. Even though Murray would not agree with all of Hooker’s preaching, he understands why Hooker preached in this manner. He says, “It is impossible to do any justice to the burden of

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<sup>1</sup>. P.G. Matthew, “False Ministers, False Preaching, False Church,” *Grace Valley Christian Center*, March 27, 2011, <https://gracevalley.org/sermon/false-ministers-false-preaching-false-church/> (accessed January 31, 2020).

<sup>2</sup>. “Thomas Hooker,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., July 3, 2019), <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Thomas-Hooker> (accessed January 31, 2020).

<sup>3</sup>. Clinton Rossiter, “Thomas Hooker,” *The New England Quarterly*, December 1952, 461.

<sup>4</sup>. Rossiter, “Thomas Hooker,” 461.

<sup>5</sup>. “Thomas Hooker.”

<sup>6</sup>. “Thomas Hooker.”

<sup>7</sup>. Iain H. Murray, “Thomas Hooker and the Doctrine of Conversion 2: The Approach to Hooker’s Thinking,” *Banner of Truth*, n.d., 24.

Hooker's preaching in Essex between 1626-29 without taking this understanding of the state of the people into account...They meant to trouble mens' consciences; they meant to shake their empty assurance."<sup>8</sup> One of the means that Hooker used to shake empty assurances was to preach the law thoroughly, as necessary for the preparation to receive the gospel and Christ.

Therefore, the law, as shown by Thomas Hooker, is a necessary means that the Holy Spirit uses to prepare sinners for their conversion. Preparation is necessary to turn man from sin and self to God, whereby the means are related to God's law. Furthermore, preparation happens both on God's side and on man's side, worked by God, though there are differences in how God deals with different sinners. Taking all this into account, the law needs to be preached today to prepare sinners for the reception of the gospel and Jesus Christ.

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<sup>8</sup>. Murray, "Thomas Hooker and the Doctrine of Conversion 2: The Approach to Hooker's Thinking," 24.

## Preparation for Conversion

The conversion of mankind is, according to Hooker, a two-fold process. First, a sinner will be prepared by the Holy Spirit to receive a contrite and humble spirit. After this preparatory work, the sinner will be implanted in Jesus Christ. Hooker writes, “That a poore sinner might come, and bee partaker of the precious merits and death of our Savior and receive comfort thereby; There are two things considerable. First, a *fitting* and *enabling* of the Soule for Christ. Secondly an implantation of the Soule into Christ...First, *it is necessary* that the soule should bee thus humbled” [emphasis added].<sup>9</sup> Hooker uses two words in regard to the preparatory work; on the one hand, it makes the sinner “fitting,” and on the other hand, it is “necessary.” Habegger describes Hooker’s way as “two successive stages—the preparation of the sinner and his ‘implantation into Christ’.”<sup>10</sup>

Hooker uses as Biblical proof the example of John the Baptist, who came as forerunner to prepare the people for Jesus Christ. He says, “*John Baptist* was sent to prepare the way, that all those mountaines of pride might be laied low, and all the ditches filled up, and all the crooked things might bee made streight, and all rough things might bee made smooth, that there might be a way for Christ” [emphasis original].<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, Hooker believes that when the soul is truly humbled, it is sure that Christ will come into such a soul. He argues, “that Christ cannot bee hindred from comming into a Soule truly humbled, hee commeth speedily.”<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, this raises the question why Hooker believes that preparation is necessary for conversion.

### The Need for Preparation

Regarding the necessity of preparation, Hooker gives two main reasons. The first is that sin keeps man from God, and the second is that man trusts in himself or the means of salvation rather than in the Savior.

#### *First Reason: Sin Keeps Man from God*

The first cause for a sinner’s need for preparation for salvation is sin itself in its variety. By nature, the heart of man is a full of pride, stubbornness, lusts, and corruptions. Hooker says this is because of “mountaines of pride and untoward stoutnesse of heart, and many windings and turnings, and devices which the heart hath, by reason of many lusts that are in it.”<sup>13</sup> The natural

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<sup>9</sup>. Thomas Hooker, *The Soules Humiliation*, 2nd ed. (London: I.L., 1638), 3–4.

<sup>10</sup>. Alfred Habegger, “Preparing the Soul for Christ: The Contrasting Sermon Forms of John Cotton and Thomas Hooker,” *American Literature*, November 1969, 347.

<sup>11</sup>. Hooker, *The Soules Humiliation*, 4.

<sup>12</sup>. Thomas Hooker, *The Soules Exaltation [...]*. (London: John Haviland, 1638), 7 in ‘The Soules Ingrafting into Christ’.

<sup>13</sup>. Hooker, *The Soules Humiliation*, 4.

man clings to his sin and is not willing to give it up. Therefore, Hooker argues in *The Soules Preparation for Christ* that someone must see his sin before his soul can be broken.<sup>14</sup> He refers to Ezekiel, where it is written, “Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall lothe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations” (Ezek. 36:31). This means that as long as man does not see the filthiness of sin, he will not turn himself from it. Hooker confirms this, saying, “The soules hath a sight of apprehension of sinne, and thinketh that it is not so *haynous*, and so *dangerous*...this is usually the common conceit of *all men naturally*, and even of us all” [emphasis added].<sup>15</sup> Because someone does not see his sin, he thinks that it is not necessary to change, and, therefore, he does not go out for change.<sup>16</sup> However, after one is convinced of his sin and iniquity, he will loath himself and confess his sins before the Lord. Hooker sees the same pattern by Ephraim in the prophet Jeremiah: “Surely after that I was turned, I repented; And *after that I was instructed*, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded...” (Jer. 31:19) [emphasis added]. Furthermore, besides the brokenness with sin, man needs to be cut off from his sin completely. When this does not happen, one will ultimately return to his sins and become even worse than before. Hooker writes, “But if it be quite broken off, it cannot grow together, so the terroar of the Law affrighted his conscience, & a powerfull Minister unjoynted his soule, and the Iudgements of God were rending of him: but he was never *cut off altogether: therefore he returnes* as vile, and as base, if not worse, then before, and he growes more firmly to his corruptions” [emphasis added].<sup>17</sup> Therefore, one must not only have a true sight of his sin but must also be cut off completely from his sins before he will turn to the Lord.

### *Second Reason: Self-Sufficiency of Man or Making the Means the Savior*

The second reason for preparation is that man trusts in himself or in the means of salvation rather than in the Giver of the means. In this case, the sinner has a sight of his sin and has the desire to turn away from it. Here, the sinner begins to turn from his sins and to use the means of grace to receive mercy from the Lord. However, the issue here is neither that he turns away from sin nor that he uses the means, but that he thinks that the ability to turn lies in his own strength or in the means itself. Hooker writes, “When it [the soul] sees that it must change, it begins to improve all meanes to see if he can possibly do it by his owne strength, and by his meanes using, as the soule did say...though I am a sinful wretched man, yet will be no more drunke...but by prayer, and hearing, and fasting, I will labour to mend all in this kinde.”<sup>18</sup>

In this case, the means themselves—for instance, reading of Scripture, prayer, and fasting

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<sup>14</sup>. Thomas Hooker, *The Soules Preparation for Christ* [...]. (Netherlands, 1638), 11.

<sup>15</sup>. Hooker, *The Soules Preparation for Christ*, 35.

<sup>16</sup>. Hooker, *The Soules Humiliation*, 3.

<sup>17</sup>. Hooker, *The Soules Preparation for Christ*, 171–172.

<sup>18</sup>. Hooker, *The Soules Humiliation*, 6.

—become a savior in themselves. In this case, there is no need for the Savior alone. Hooker writes, “It is the nature of man naturally to make of meanes a Saviour to himself...he can heare and pray...he thinks this is enough to save him.”<sup>19</sup> Even though God uses means to bring people to the Savior, no one can be saved by the means themselves. Furthermore, the nature of faith does not seek its strength in itself but outside of itself.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, if the Lord does not bring the soul to true humiliation, the sinner will not go to Christ for mercy. The soul is willing to flee to Him only when he sees no more possibility in himself. Hooker describes that, saying, “Now the soule seeth an utter impossibilitie in himselfe, to change or alter himselfe, then he is content to goe to Christ for grace and power.”<sup>21</sup> Hooker refers to the example of the prodigal son. Only after he lost his hope in himself and other means did he turn to his father with the confession of sin (Luke 19).

### *Third Reason: God Dwells Only with Contrite and Humble Spirits*

The third reason for a necessary preparation of the sinner is that God wants to dwell only with those of a contrite and humble spirit. In *The Soules Implantation*, Hooker believes that this is true based on the passage of Isaiah, where God says, “I will dwell...With him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones” (Isa. 57:15). In other words, God dwells only with persons who have this attitude. However, in the natural man there is no broken heart or contrite spirit, which means that God cannot dwell within such a soul. Hooker says it in this way: “*The soule must bee broken and humbled, before the Lord Iesus Christ can, or will dwell therein, and before faith can be wrought therein.* There must bee contrition, before there will bee an inhabitation of Christ in the soule” [emphasis original].<sup>22</sup> This means that God will first break the spirit of a man and humble it before He will dwell in him in Jesus Christ.

In conclusion, Hooker argues that preparation of the sinner before he can receive Christ is necessary because of his sin and self-sufficiency. He must have a sight of sin to turn away from it. Also, he needs to be humbled so that his trust in his own strength or in the means themselves will be taken away. After those things have taken place, the sinner goes to Christ for grace. Moreover, the Scripture says that God dwells only with those of a broken heart and a contrite spirit, which makes it necessary to prepare the sinner in this manner before God will make his dwelling place in him. Hooker summarizes this in saying, “So the Soule being cut off from sin, then Humiliation pares it, and makes it for the ingrafting into Christ. Thus you see this worke is absolutely necessary.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>. Hooker, *The Soules Humiliation*, 9.

<sup>20</sup>. Hooker, *The Soules Humiliation*, 7.

<sup>21</sup>. Hooker, *The Soules Humiliation*, 7.

<sup>22</sup>. Thomas Hooker, *The Soules Implantation into the Natural Olive* (London: R. Young, 1640), 3.

<sup>23</sup>. Hooker, *The Soules Humiliation*, 7.

## The Means Used for Preparation

Furthermore, it is essential to know which means Hooker believes are used for the preparation of a sinner. Though he speaks about a number of means, only the three important means, which have a relationship to the Word or the law, will be considered. The first means is the sermon of a minister by which God opens the eyes of a sinner. Second, and more specifically, Hooker would speak about the law as a means to convict of sin. Third, Hooker would speak about the means as pointing to specific sins in a sinner's life rather than using the law in general.

### *The First Means: The Messenger of God*

The first means that God uses is the minister. Though Hooker would not categorize the minister himself as a means for conviction of sin, he does say that God uses a minister for opening the eyes of the ignorant. Hooker says, "There must be a messenger before hee can be grieved for the evil: So it is with the soule of a sinful creature...ungodly and ignorant, and thou considerest not this till God *by his Ministers* opens thy eyes and makes thee see painly, that the Image of sinne and Satan is upon thee, and that God is now becom thy enemy" [emphasis added].<sup>24</sup> This means lies not specifically in the minister as a person, but rather in the message that he brings. By a convicting message, the sinner receives knowledge of his sin; this knowledge takes away his ignorance regarding his own estate, and his condition is laid open before him. In other words, Hooker says that the minister gives a sinner understanding of his sin when such a message is blessed by God.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, knowledge that is given by the preachers' instruction then becomes a means for a sinner's conviction.<sup>26</sup>

### *The Second Means: The Law of God*

Second, Hooker considers the law of God as a means to convict people of their sins. In *The Soules Preparation for Christ*, he defines the "Law" as "a meanes to convince us of sinne."<sup>27</sup> In another work, he says, "The law prepares the soule, and the promise that calls the soule, and knits it unto Christ."<sup>28</sup> Hooker makes a reference to the book of Romans. In this book, there is surely a connection between the law and the conviction of sin. Hooker says, "That of the *Romans* is observable to this purpose, *There is no transgression where there is no law*, not that the Law brings sinne, but provokes a mans heart, *Rom. 7. 5*. The phrases are strange in the fifth verse, *The motionas of sinne which were by the Law: The Law moves a man to sinne by opposing of it*."<sup>29</sup> In

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<sup>24</sup>. Hooker, *The Soules Preparation for Christ*, 28.

<sup>25</sup>. Hooker, *The Soules Preparation for Christ*, 28–29.

<sup>26</sup>. Hooker, *The Soules Preparation for Christ*, A2.

<sup>27</sup>. Hooker, *The Soules Preparation for Christ*, A2.

<sup>28</sup>. Hooker, *The Soules Exaltation*, 27 in 'The Soules Union with Christ'.

<sup>29</sup>. Thomas Hooker, *A Brief Exposition on the Lords Prayer [...]*. (London: Moses Bell, 1645), 71.

expounding this text, Hooker demonstrates that when the law comes with power it shows a sinner the reality of his sins.

A practical example that Hooker uses is the conversion of Paul. Before his conversion, Paul kept the law outwardly in a perfect manner. However, in the preparation of Paul for grace, the law performed by God's grace its true duty. Paul says, "For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died" (Rom. 7:9). In this verse, Paul argues that sin revived only when the commandment or the law of God came into power. That this power is important is clearly stated by Hooker. He argues that though we can outwardly know the commandments, as Paul did, it is "no wonder though many otherwise will learned are ignorant in Gods law."<sup>30</sup> In other words, with only the outward knowledge of the law, man is still ignorant of the spirit of the law and therefore unaware of his own sin. However, when the law comes with power, it is truly a means for receiving the knowledge of sin and therefore a necessary means for the conversion of man.

### *The Third Means: Pointing to Particular Sins*

In the third place, Hooker not only speaks concerning the law in general but argues that sins as described by the law needs to be pointed out specifically. He argues that if a minister speaks only about general sins his words affect no one, but when he speaks about specific sins they hit people in their hearts. He writes, "When minister saith: *in many things we sinne all*, he hits no man, and so none are affected with it" [emphasis original].<sup>31</sup> In other words, when the minister speaks generally concerning sins among the members in the congregation, they will not be convicted personally. However, when the law of God is applied very specifically to their case, they will be convinced of their own specific sins. He writes, "A special application for *particular sins*, is a chiefe meanes to bring people to a sight of their sinnes, and a true sorrow for them."<sup>32</sup>

Hooker based this theory on the Scriptures and refers to the example of John the Baptist. He spoke to different groups of people very specifically regarding their particular sins. This meant that John's message to the Pharisees was different from that to the publicans or the Roman soldiers. For instance, John the Baptist argued with the Pharisees to bring forth fruit worthy of repentance. He said, "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance" (Luke 3:7-8). However, in relation to the publicans, he addressed their particular transgression, namely taking more from the people than what was required by the Roman government. He says, "Exact no more than that which is appointed you" (Luke 3:12-13). Furthermore, to the Roman soldiers John said, "Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages" (Luke 3:14). Therefore, the

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<sup>30</sup>. Hooker, *The Soules Preparation for Christ*, 34.

<sup>31</sup>. Hooker, *The Soules Preparation for Christ*, 58.

<sup>32</sup>. Hooker, *The Soules Preparation for Christ*, 56.



minister should make application to the particular sins of different people in his congregation. In his writing, Hooker gives an example of how this could be executed. He says, “O all drunckards and adulterers, this is your portion, and let this be as venome in your hearts to purge out your lusts then.”<sup>33</sup> Here, he shows how sins can be pointed to in a specific way.

In conclusion, there are three primary means that in Hooker’s view are used for preparing the sinner for Christ. The first means is the minister of God, who instructs his flock with the knowledge of their state. Second is the law of God when it comes with power and makes one’s sin and misery known. Third, sins should be pointed to not in a general sense but very specifically to every hearer.

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<sup>33</sup>. Hooker, *The Soules Preparation for Christ*, 58.

## The Manner of Preparation

Moreover, it is advantageous to know how Hooker sees the manner of preparation of a sinner for Christ. He believes that there are two parts in the soul's preparation. One part is on God's side and the other on man's. For the latter, Hooker is referring not to what man does in preparation but to what God works in the preparation in man's heart.

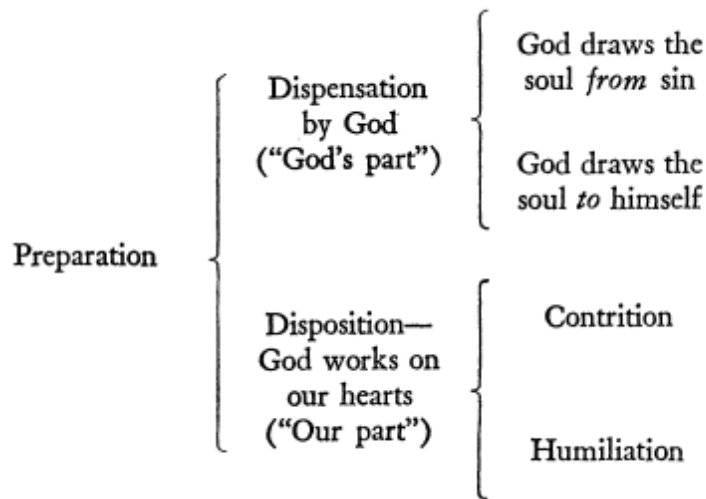


Figure 1 Scheme of Preparation by Alfred Habegger<sup>34</sup>

Regarding God's side, Hooker breaks this down into two particulars. The first is the proposal of Christ in the gospel. The second particular is that God draws the sinner from sin to Himself. Hooker makes a reference here to John 6, where Christ says, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (John 6:44).

Regarding man's side, that which is worked by God in the heart of a sinner, Hooker speaks also about two particulars. The first is contrition, which is, according to Hooker, the "airing, or sweeping of the soule, that so it may be inhabited."<sup>35</sup> In a different place, Hooker clarifies what is meant by contrition when he says, "God must first cut us off from our old sinnes by contrition."<sup>36</sup> Later, he explains what it means to be cut off. It is that the Lord shows a person his sin and the consequence of it, namely damnation, which makes the soul see that there is need for change.<sup>37</sup> In this cutting off work, a sinner does not only turn from certain or serious sins but from all his sins. The second particular on man's side is humiliation. Hooker explains, "secondly,

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<sup>34</sup>. Habegger, "Preparing the Soul for Christ," 347.

<sup>35</sup>. Hooker, *The Soules Implantation into the Natural Olive*, 4 in "The broken Heart".

<sup>36</sup>. Hooker, *The Soules Implantation into the Natural Olive*, 13 in "The broken Heart".

<sup>37</sup>. Hooker, *The Soules Implantation into the Natural Olive*, 96 in "The Soules Ingrafting into Christ".

pare us and fit us by humiliation.”<sup>38</sup> In other words, the soul is made low and suitable in the process of humiliation to receive Christ. These two particulars are similar to the ones discussed under the reasons for the need of preparation: first, to turn a sinner from his sin, and second, to take away his self-sufficiency and trust in the means as saviors in place of the only Savior, Jesus Christ.

In conclusion, in the preparation there are two parts to be considered. The first part is on God’s side and exists in His proposing Christ in the gospel and drawing the sinner to Himself. The second part is on man’s side, worked by God in his heart, existing of contrition and humiliation.

### The Different Ways in Preparation

Though Hooker argues for a thorough preparation of a sinner before he is able to receive Christ, he does not believe that all preparations are identical. On the contrary, Hooker declares that God works variously in different sinners. He says, “*All are not alike wounded for sinne...* This [sight of sin] is wrought in all: but that it must bee in all in this extraordinary fearefull manner as it is in some; the word sayth it not, weyther is God bound to any manner, *there is a difference* among persons” [emphasis added for latter].<sup>39</sup> In his work, Hooker also shows in which manner the differences in terms of knowledge of sin are evident. He argues that “The Lord deales kindly and gently with one soule, and roughly with another.”<sup>40</sup> Nonetheless, though the Lord is free in the manner of working, the reason for a different approach lies in the degree of hardness of a sinner’s heart. Some have a tender conscience and are easily convinced of their sin. For others, however, the Lord needs to break their hearts by force before they are truly convinced of their sin.

Hooker uses as an example the lock of a door. He writes, “Naturally all men are locked up under infidelity, now the Lord opens theyr hearts severally, you know some locks are new and fiefh, and therefore a key may easily open them, but some lockers are old and rusty, and therefore must be broken open by force of hand; so it is with some mens hearts.”<sup>41</sup> For Hooker, the hearts that are easily opened are of those who have lived a good moral life, while those who have lived outwardly in much sin need God to exert greater power to open their hearts. Two examples that Hooker specifies as examples of these kinds of issues are adultery and drunkenness

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<sup>38</sup>. Hooker, *The Soules Implantation into the Natural Olive*, 13 in "The broken heart".

<sup>39</sup>. Hooker, *The Soules Preparation for Christ*, 155.

<sup>40</sup>. Hooker, *The Soules Preparation for Christ*, 155.

<sup>41</sup>. Hooker, *The Soules Preparation for Christ*, 157.

In conclusion, though Hooker believed that a sinner is prepared and humbled before he receives Christ, there is a difference in the manner in which the Lord convinces each of his sin. One who has lived a moral life will usually be convinced gently; however, others who have lived openly in sin are broken by the Lord with force.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that the law is a necessary tool used by the Holy Spirit for the preparation of a sinner for his conversion. The necessity lies on one side in the fact that a sinner needs to have a true view of his sin before he will turn away from it. Hooker calls this part of preparation contrition, which is happening on man's side. On the other side, the Holy Spirit needs to humble a sinner to show that salvation cannot be received in his own strength and that the means of salvation are not in themselves a savior because he will try, after seeing his sin, to acquire salvation in his own strength. Hooker calls this part of the preparation humiliation, which also takes place on man's side. The third necessity lies in that the Bible says that God dwells only with those of a contrite heart and a humble spirit.

Moreover, for this preparation there are three means used. The first is the minister of God. God uses this man to instruct people and give them knowledge about their sinful state. Another means is the law of God. This law, when it comes with power and gives a sinner true knowledge of God's law, shows a sinner his sin and misery. The last means is related to the law, in that the minister points out very specific sins in the life of his hearers. Nonetheless, there are differences in the manner in which sinners are prepared; these can vary from gently, for those living outwardly moral lives, to forcefully for people living in outward sin. Finally, the manner of preparation on God's side exists in the proposal of Christ to draw sinners to Himself.

### Necessity for Today

The necessity of preparing sinners by the law is very applicable for today. It demonstrates that the means of the law, as a preparatory tool, needs to be preached today to the hearers in church. The necessity lies in the fact that there are many false preachers who bring a 'gospel' without the preparatory tool of the law, which leads to many false conversions. That false converts will exist was foretold by the Lord Jesus when He said, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. 7:22-23). This means that there is an urgency to preach both law and gospel in order that both hypocrites and unbelievers will be exposed, specifically through the work of the law, and ultimately shall be Biblically prepared for the reception of Jesus Christ to be truly saved.

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