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# SERMON

ON

THE DUTY OF OBEDIENCE

TO

CIVIL GOVERNORS,

PREACHED AT

**The Church of the School for the Blind,**

*ON SUNDAY, NOV. 7, 1819.*

BY

**THE REV. EDWARD HULL, M. A.**

**OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.**



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1819.



# SERMON.

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ROMANS xiii. 1, 2.

*Let every soul be subject unto the Higher Powers :  
for there is no power but of God : the powers  
that be are ordained of God : whosoever, there-  
fore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance  
of God.*

**I**N my late Discourse on the fear of God, I endeavoured earnestly to impress upon your minds the necessity of regulating your lives according to the dictates of your conscience, and of rectifying your conscience, and preserving it pure and unpol- luted, by comparing its dictates with the law of God. And those amongst you, who shall pay a due regard to these admonitions, and govern your conduct by these rules, will not fail to be use- ful and honest citizens, faithful subjects to your

king, and good servants to your God. And did men, in general, examine their actions by their conscience, and their conscience by God's laws, the world we live in would exhibit a very different scene from that which it now presents.

Unhappily, however, so corrupt is man's nature, in his present fallen state, that a very large majority of the human species, even in civilized societies, pursue the bent of their fleshly lusts, without ever consulting their conscience; and when it presumes to interpose unsolicited, and point out to them the error of their ways, and their violation of the divine testimonies, they either boldly rebuke it as an importunate and meddling intruder, or persuade it into a connivance at their follies, by representing the infirmities of the flesh and the temptations to which it is subject. Thus, this best friend of the soul, appointed by the Almighty as its pilot through the storms and tempests of the world to the mansions of eternal rest, is frequently, by the wiles of Satan, rendered of no effect; and men choose to plod their way through life, under no other direction than that of their own natural inclinations.

Now the natural inclination of all men is to act up to the full extent of natural power, to follow that only which is most agreeable to the flesh, to govern themselves solely by their own arbitrary will, and compel others to submit to it: so that, if there were no laws but those of God and conscience, the generality of men would live without law. Those who should regulate their lives by religious guidance, would be oppressed and overwhelmed by the violence of the wicked; and this world would become subject to such scenes of turbulence and confusion, that all earthly happiness would be totally annihilated.

The Almighty, therefore, whose unbounded benevolence wills the happiness of his creatures, in every period of their being, foreseeing the evils which would befall them, were they to be restrained by no laws but those of their own conscience and his revealed will, however excellent, was graciously pleased, from the earliest ages, to set governors over them from among themselves.

Thus, in the history of his chosen people, we read that, when he first called Abraham, he placed him over his fellow men, and said, "I will make



thy name great, and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curse thee !" Isaac succeeded to the like dignity with his father Abraham, who, at his death, "gave all that he had unto Isaac." Jacob, in like manner, was blessed by his father Isaac, saying, "let the people serve thee; be Lord also over thy brethren; and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee: cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee." God also himself blessed Jacob, and confirmed the appointment of his father, saying, "I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply, and kings shall come out of thy loins; and the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land."

Not long after this, the children of Israel went down into Egypt, where their posterity long remained in hard subjection to the kings of the country. When, however, the Lord thought fit to deliver them out of their bondage, he appointed Moses to rule over them, and Aaron to assist him, and this was amongst the solemn injunctions which he laid upon them, "thou shalt not revile, nor curse the rulers of the people:" and when Korah,



Dathan, and Abiram rebelled against these appointed rulers, the Almighty visited their rebellion with a just and terrible vengeance. At the death of Moses, Joshua was selected to succeed him in the government; the Lord having said unto Moses, "thou shalt put thine honour upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient." For a length of time after their arrival in the promised land, God was pleased to govern them by judges, and afterwards by kings, until they were carried away captive to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. On their return from captivity, by the decree of Cyrus, king of Persia, we find Zerubbabel possessing authority over them; nor do we ever see them without temporal governors, till they at length fell under the Roman yoke.

We see then that the Almighty, in the government of his chosen people, was pleased at all times to make use of earthly agents, to "ordain higher powers," who were to enforce the written laws and inflict temporal punishment upon offenders—thus assisting them in establishing and securing social intercourse with each other, and promoting their felicity during their sojourning upon earth. In all

the histories, moreover, of heathen nations, which have come down to us, we find universally that the people were governed by earthly rulers, and subject to earthly laws.

Now both the civil laws of the Jews, and indeed all human laws with which we have become acquainted, have in general, under the guidance of our divine Protector, been so ordained, as to act in unison with, and in support of the divine laws, by checking the progress of vice, and affording protection and encouragement to virtue; so that submission to them, as well as to the divine laws, is repeatedly and earnestly inculcated in the sacred writings. It must, indeed, be evident to all that the principles of our religion and our obedience to temporal governors, are so interwoven, that we cannot be said to understand the former without paying a due regard to the latter.

In the sacred volume of the Old Testament, which is "given to us by inspiration of God, and is profitable for instruction in righteousness," we are solemnly warned to "keep the king's commandment, and that in regard of the oath of God." We are even enjoined in one and the same sentence

to "fear the Lord and the king." And in the New Testament we read that the blessed author and finisher of our faith, wishing with all possible solemnity to sanction the authority of civil governors, when unable through poverty to pay the accustomed portion to the Jewish receiver of the tribute money, had recourse to his miraculous power to enable him to comply with the demand. And when certain of the Pharisees, "thinking to take hold of his words," asked him "whether it was lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar or no? he said unto them, shew me a penny : whose image and superscription hath it? They answered, and said, Cæsar's. And he said unto them, render therefore unto Cæsar the things which be Cæsar's, and unto God the things which be God's:" thus clearly and forcibly teaching them, that they were as strictly bound to pay unto Cæsar, their earthly governor, though a heathen and a foreigner, the lawful demands of Cæsar, as to "give unto God the honour due unto his name." And, in conformity with this decision of their Lord, we find that his disciples, wherever they journeyed to teach the knowledge of Christianity, never omitted to inculcate with

peculiar earnestness an unreserved obedience to earthly rulers.

St. Paul, writing to the Roman converts, his fellow-subjects, thus energetically addresses them: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers: for there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God: whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation: for rulers are not a terror to good works but to the evil. Wilt thou, then, not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same." And St. Peter, in his epistle to the general body of Christians, writes with much emphasis and perspicuity on this point: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man, for the Lord's sake; whether it be to the king, as supreme, or unto governors, or unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well: for so is the will of God." And St. Paul, in his Epistles to Timothy and Titus, gives them in charge as a necessary part of their office, to put their hearers in mind "to be subject to principa-

lities and powers, to obey magistrates, to make supplications, prayers and intercessions for kings and for all that are in authority;" adding, that "this is good and acceptable in the sight of God, our Saviour."

Thus, we see, that respect and submission to the constituted authorities of the state, under whose protection we reside, are zealously enjoined by the Founder of our religion, and his immediate disciples; who explicitly declare to us that this is the will of God; and that we are not to obey merely "for wrath, but also for conscience' sake;" not merely through fear of punishment from men, but as a duty to God himself.

Since, therefore, the connection between civil and religious duty is so close, that we cannot fulfil the one whilst we violate the other, it is no wonder that we generally see those, whose aim it is to cut down the tree of civil liberty, first lay the axe to the root of religion. They find that they cannot freely aim their blows against civil government, till they have removed the obstacles which religion has planted in their way.

We all know that the woeful scenes of blood,

which, a few years ago, deluged a neighbouring state, and filled surrounding nations with horror and dismay, most unquestionably drew their origin from scepticism and infidelity. When the unprincipled instigators of that sad rebellion had poisoned the minds of the people with irreligious doubts, and at length prevailed with them to cast off altogether the fear of God, and pay their homage to what they were pleased to term the goddess of human reason—they found little difficulty in instilling into their minds a contempt and defiance of all human authority. Those who had been taught that they had nothing to fear from a heavenly King, were soon induced to believe that they might with impunity murder an earthly one.

The same engines which, at the close of the last century, wrought desolation and woe amongst our ill-fated neighbours, are now labouring by the same diabolical means to work the downfall of our happy and venerable constitution. The turbulent and factious spirits, who are now vexing the repose of this flourishing and highly favoured nation, have marked well the method of proceeding pursued by their fore-runners in sedition : they have not failed



to observe that the surest road to anarchy is through the portals of infidelity. Every impure and blasphemous argument, therefore, against our holy faith, which profane wit can invent, is now dressed up in specious and deluding forms, and disseminated, "as the fool scatters firebrands," amongst the ignorant and thoughtless vulgar. The great and blessed truths of Christianity, the only support of the wretched, which administer strength to the weak, and youth to the aged, the foundation of all our true happiness here, and our hope hereafter, are represented by these deadly enemies of the human race as nothing more than "cunningly devised fables;" and their wretched auditors are instructed to believe that those pious and reverend men who delivered these truths to mankind, and voluntarily submitted, in defence of them, to all the tortures which human malice could invent, were either, like their impugners, base and designing imposters, or deluded and enthusiastic zealots. That holy book, on the genuineness and authenticity of which depends not only our condition in another world, but the preservation of our lives and properties in this, inasmuch as the solemnity of oaths rests upon it, is impiously and



audaciously set forth as an inconsistent and foolish fabrication. And lamentable is it to think that these propagators of impiety have been so eagerly listened to by unguarded men, that their poisonous doctrines have been instilled into the very veins and bowels of the state.

During the late judicial trial of an unhappy and pitiable individual, some facts transpired respecting the wide circulation of blasphemy, which must fill every pious breast with sorrow and indignation. Whither, then, tends this unholy labour, and what is the object of these foes to religion? Why are they so zealous in their hostility to the word of God, and what can they gain by the subversion of Christianity? Their hope is to free the conscience of the people from all religious restraint, well knowing, as I have before observed, that if they can succeed in this, their ultimate object, the overthrow of the state, will be a work of no difficult execution.

Whilst one part of this bold and abandoned confederacy has been engaged in disseminating infidelity, another has been equally diligent in spreading amongst the multitude the seeds of

anarchy and rebellion. And here, also, their efforts have been but too successful. It has been truly observed, that "he who slanders the great will never want an audience in the vulgar; and he who vilifies established authority will always find abettors." We are all aware that a great portion of the common people, in every nation, are governed solely by human authority: to these, therefore, human laws must be particularly irksome; and it is not to be expected that they should, at any time, entertain much good-will towards those who enforce them. But when they are made to believe that the legislature itself is corrupt and unconstitutional, and that the laws, therefore, enacted by it are illegal and nugatory, how can we hope that they will long submit to be governed by statutes, which they believe themselves not bound to obey. Their vanity is flattered with the absurd, but plausible doctrine that they are to govern themselves; that, however ignorant of the nature of legislation, of which they understand not even the terms, they are to obey no laws but those which they consent to themselves; that all submission to their appointed governors is a proof of a cowardly and

degraded spirit; that whenever poverty oppresses them, from whatever cause, they are at full liberty to seek a remedy for their misfortunes by a violent and general repartition of property.

Thus whilst one body of these agitators of the public peace has been labouring to destroy all fear of God, the other has been endeavouring to eradicate all deference to ruling men : so that the lowest order of the people in some parts of this kingdom (with grief I speak it) is now under no restraint but that arising from the fear of military power.

Our ears are daily assailed by the howl of plebeian factions : we hear of nothing but rabbles and riots, petitions and remonstrances ; we see the chain of subordination broken, the legislature scandalized and insulted ; and, unless a speedy termination be put to these dangerous and tumultuary proceedings, the daring leaders of rebellion will soon cry havock without reserve, and let loose the dogs of civil war : and this once happy nation, which by her conquering sword, under the God of battles, has been the means of staying the carnage of a bloody and relentless tyrant, and restoring the blessings of

peace to the civilized world, will at length fall the wretched victim of domestic discord.

A very great writer hath, indeed, observed, that “to apprehend that our government can be subverted by the rabble, is to fear that a city may be drowned by the overflowing of its kennels.” But, had he lived to witness the overthrow of all civil government in France effected by the lowest of the vulgar, he had altered his opinion of the power of mobs. The physical force of every nation resides in the common people; and, if they can be gained over to place an implicit confidence in evil and ambitious leaders, they are capable of overturning the strongest and the most vigilant governments.

Highly, therefore, does it behove the loyal and respectable subjects of our revered monarch, at this critical juncture, to rally round and support the stability of his throne. Sure I am, that the feelings of you who hear me are congenial with my own, ~~and~~ that from the heart you abhor the machinations of these bold and abandoned men—and that you will resist them to the uttermost of your power. The goodly edifice, in which we are now assembled in the sight of Almighty God, stands

a noble monument of your pious munificence ; and, I doubt not, should occasion require them, that ample proofs will be afforded of your loyalty ; and that you will evince to your fellow-citizens that you both “fear God and honour the King.”

I need not point out to you the means of opposing the arts of sedition : these your own good sense will suggest to you. Many of you are men of wealth and station, and must necessarily possess considerable influence over the lower orders around you.—Should you observe in them a wish to frequent tumultuous assemblies, and listen to the poisonous harangues of factious demagogues ; you will explain to them the real objects of these men : you will unveil their true characters, and warn their unreflecting proselytes of the crime and the danger of holding communion with them ; convincing them that, whilst these deluders “speak great swelling words, and promise them liberty, they are themselves the servants of corruption.” You will set before them the advice of the wise son of David : “My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. If they say, come with us, we shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with

spoil; cast in thy lot among us, and let us all have one purse; my son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path; for their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood."— Thus will you be the happy instruments of quenching the few sparks of sedition in this great and populous town, which some restless spirits are endeavouring to blow into a flame. Thus will you crush the designs of rebels, and "still the madness of the people;" preserving the high character you have attained in the empire, and continuing to shine forth to surrounding cities a bright example of unshaken loyalty. Above all, you will not cease to offer up your supplications to the King of kings, beseeching him so to influence and direct the consultations of the great council of the state, "that by their endeavours peace and happiness, truth and justice, religion and piety, may be established among us for all generations;" and imploring him to stretch forth his protecting arm over the ruler of these realms, and preserve him in safety from the gathering together of the forward, and the insurrection of wicked doers—that no secret conspiracies nor open violences may dis-



quiet his reign; but that he may always so possess the hearts of his people, that they may never be wanting in honour to his person and dutiful submission to his authority; that he may so wear his earthly crown, that, when it shall be lifted from his brow by Him who gave it, "a crown of glory, that fadeth not away," may await him in the heavens.

FINIS.



the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis* (1974), and the *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied* (1975).

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