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THE
DOCTRINE
OF
THE NEW TESTAMENT,
RESPECTING
MILITARY DUTY



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ST. PAUL has told us, in the thirteenth chapter of the Romans, that the civil government of countries is *an ordinance of God*; and that it is graciously instituted, for the preservation of public tranquillity, and the defence of the quiet, against the violence of the wicked.

He therefore describes the Magistrate, whether he be supreme or subordinate, as a *minister of God*;—"an avenger," appointed

by divine authority, "to *execute* *vengeance* against him that doth evil." As such he is *to bear the sword*, and, it is added, "*not to be afraid*;" which implies, that it is not only *right*, but his *DUTY*, to take away the *lives* of the unruly, when public peace and personal safety cannot otherwise be secured.

To the Magistrate, or Ruling Power *thus described*, the apostle requires obedience to be paid, under a penalty the most awful and alarming. "They that resist," he, "shall receive to themselves condemnation." And again, "Ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for *conscience sake*." And why? Because, he, "He that resisteth the" [ruling] "power resisteth the ordinance of God."

Here then is plainly; 1. the power of the ruler; 2. the duty of the subject; and 3. both are clearly and expressly sanctioned and enjoined, as parts of the supreme, immutable law of Christ. The simple qu

tion then is—Does this power of the ruler authorize him to use the sword which he bears, as well against an invading enemy, as against a domestic robber? And does the Christian Duty of the subject bind him to obey the ruler, when called upon, in such an exigence, to arm, and resist the foe?

Let common sense decide this question.—The *divine* duty of the magistrate is, *to protect person and property*; and, in order to this, he is armed *with the sword*: that is, as before observed, he is to *take away life itself*, if public or personal safety makes it requisite.—I ask then, if person and property are to be protected, *by the sword*, against a single robber, or a band of robbers, at home; is it not equally, and *consequently*, the right and the *duty* of the ruler, to use the same sword against ten or twenty thousand robbers coming from another country?—Will the robbery be less destructive, or less dreadful, because it is perpetrated by thousands? Or have foreign robbers and murderers any privilege to plunder and destroy, more than

the domestic house-breaker or common highwayman.

The only plausible scruple could be whether person and property are to be secure, at the expence of the *lives* of the assailants? But this scruple St. Paul renounces in the first instance, by that one expression, "He beareth not *THE SWORD in vain*;" the ruler bears the sword expressly, that he may, where necessary, actually cut off the murderer or the robber. Is then the ruler to shed blood without scruple, where private injuries are to be prevented; and to stop in sheath his sword, where the evil is multiplied ten thousand fold, and where *nothing but the sword* can avert it? Or can that method of defence, which is allowed and commanded by the Almighty, in the case of private single wrongs, cease to be lawful when providential necessity has become infinitely greater?—Surely, if it be lawful for the ruler to put any number of ruffians to death, he should start up one by one in succession; the justice of the case cannot be altered by the

sands coming forward together. To preserve the peace and safety of the country is the end of rulers being appointed. It is for this the sword has been committed to them ; and were they to hesitate in using it, in the very case where the necessity is most extreme, it would be hard to say which would be greater—their disobedience to God, or their senseless infatuation.

But if the duty of the ruler, in repelling invasion, by the sword, be thus clear, what is the duty of the Christian citizen ? “ Ye must needs be subject,” says St. Paul, and that “ not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.” “ Put them in mind,” says he to Titus, “ to be *subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates ;*” and again, St. Peter no less strongly enjoins, “ Be subject to *every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake ;* whether to the king, as supreme, or to governors, as those that are sent by him, &c. for such is the will of God, that by well doing ye put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.”

Now

Now, I ask this plain question, if God has given to the ruler a trust which he is to discharge, and a power which he is to exercise, are not they whom God has made *subject*, and enjoined to be *obedient*, to the ruler bound by this very ordinance to do everything, at the command of the ruler, which is necessary in order to his fulfilling his presidential duty. What is *subjection*, and what is *obedience*, if they do not imply such assistance and co-operation?

A ruler is “an avenger to execute wrath on him that doth evil”—but in no case can he do this, without ready and obedient assistance from those who are under him—“He beareth not the sword in vain.”—But he would use it *in vain*, even against individual malefactors, if he had not a right to use the help of others, and of as many as the occasion may require. How should the magistrate seize on a robber or a murderer—how should he bring him to prison or to punishment, if there were not subordinate officers of justice, and if others, where there was need of great force

force, were not ready to assist. Where God expressly appoints any thing, he thereby commands every thing, which that appointment makes necessary. Consequently, when St. Paul declares magistracy to be the appointment of God, he thereby obliges Christians, on their allegiance to their Almighty Sovereign, to do every thing which the due maintenance of magistracy requires. It is, of course, a part of their *religious* duty to assist the magistrate, whenever he calls upon them, to exert their utmost bodily strength, and even under his direction to use the sword itself, for the preservation of public order and personal safety. This, I say, is unquestionably implied in St. Paul's directions; inasmuch as without this the providential ends of government cannot be accomplished.

Will it be supposed then, that the magistrate has not the same right to demand assistance, in order to repel an army of plunderers, as he has for apprehending an individual felon? What actual difference is there between the two cases, except this, that the
necessity

necessity of protection against invaders, the consequent duty of the ruler to provide such protection, rises above all comparison. It will follow of consequence, that St. Paul and St. Peter's command to subjection and obedience, do even more strongly enjoin the co-operation of Christians with their ruler in resisting and repelling invasion, than any of the other causes to which the same injunctions can possibly be applied.

Let pious men of sense and candour weigh this reasoning, and see how the conclusion can be avoided; nay, let any one consider how he will justify himself, in omitting to assist his ruler, when in such an emergency his aid is solemnly demanded. Will he contradict our Saviour's command of non-resistance in the Sermon on the Mount? On such a supposition, this command would prove by far too much; for it would tie up the hands of the bailiff, constable, jailor, and executioner as much as of a soldier; and then what would become of magistracy and law? Our Saviour's words, therefore, cannot have

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meaning which would counteract and annul the whole divine ordinance of government. They cannot be pointed against the sword of the magistrate, because it is God who has placed it in his hands. They therefore must be confined, (as to every intelligent and unbiassed reader the very sense and purport of the passage will confine them,) to cases of private passion and violence; the indulgence of which is, in every instance and degree, forbidden by our divine religion. And by doing so, our Lord has not more adhered to the spirit of his own heavenly doctrine, than he has consulted the good order of civil society.

It is not, then, *every* kind of *resistance of evil*, which our Lord prohibits; since it is by effectually *resisting evil* that rulers become the Ministers of God for good. He evidently has in view, that *private* and *personal* resistance only, in which *passion*, and not *reason*, operates.—Magistracy takes resistance out of private hands; and, by doing so, restrains *passion*, and preserves the rule
of

of *reason*.—The *resistance of evil*,
 fore, which the magistrate exercises
 right and necessary, as that which
 passion would suggest, is wicked and
 malicious. But *defensive war*, under the
 tion of the magistrate, has no more
 with *private passion*, than the publick
administration of justice has. It is, in fact,
 great branch of that very *administration*
justice, resting on the same principles,
 sary for the same purposes, and equal
 that description of *regular and rational*
tance, “ against which there is no
 because without it there could be no So

It was evidently no part of our
 Saviour's design, to unsettle in any re
 or instance the providential order of
 and nations. To interpret, therefore,
 of his commands in a manner which
 tend to such a consequence, would be
 misrepresent the divine wisdom of the
 pel. It so happened, that our Lord
 had occasion to refer directly to the mil
 duties of subjects to their rulers; but

easy to prove, that, in the view of Infinite Wisdom, those duties were not in any respect inconsistent with our Saviour's rule of life: had they been so, John the Baptist never could have sanctioned them; his express mission was "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord;" and we have our Redeemer's own divine authority, for the perfectness with which he fulfilled that trust. When, therefore, we hear this divinely commissioned forerunner of our Saviour, answering the soldier's question, "what shall we do?" not with any intimation against their calling, but with an exquisite compendium of their professional duty,* we have the clearest demonstration, that the being military servants of an earthly ruler implied no unfitness for that spiritual kingdom of the Messiah, to which the Baptist's preaching was so immediately preparatory.

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* The Baptist's advice to soldiers was the aptest that could be given to military men, either under an absolute monarchy, or in a time (like the present) of temporary martial law. The common translation in our Bibles does not convey the whole force of the expressions. Their sense is, "Treat no one roughly. Be not busy informers; and do the duties of your station, cheerfully, and without murmuring."

And suitably to this we see, that, as all who believed in Our Saviour, none higher in strength and efficacy of faith than a soldier. It is remarkable that this honoured centurion, even in the humblest and most pious language which he uses to Our Lord, intimates the exactness with which he was accustomed to military discipline. "I am a man," says he, "in authority, having soldiers under me; and I say to this man, go, and he goeth; and to another, come, and he cometh." But does Our Lord's reply intimate any disapprobation, either of the man himself, or of its being thus mingled with the mysteries of His Kingdom? On the contrary, is not the entire approbation and complacency manifested in Our Lord's answer? "I say unto thee, I have not found so great faith in Israel."

The case of this military officer naturally leads us to think of that other, who was honoured by being chosen as the first of the Gentile Christians. The circumstances of Cornelius's life had been no obstacle

eminence in piety and goodness, and therefore neither did it prevent the highest distinction being conferred on him, that could, at that time, have been given to mortal. Would it not even seem, that this and the last mentioned instance had been ordered by the Great Lord of all, for this amongst other reasons, that the prejudices, possible to arise amongst sincere Christians, against military duties, might be most effectually anticipated and guarded against? To have approved of war *expressly* in the Gospel, might have led to many abuses, and, perhaps, would have been inconsistent with that loving, tranquillizing spirit, which reigns throughout the Christian scheme, and, through its growing influence, is one day to reign throughout the earth. To intimate permission, therefore, of necessary war, without affording encouragement to ambitious war, and to sanction the duties of the case, so as not to countenance the crimes, seemed to be the point of wisdom. And how could this be more happily accomplished than by a divine arrangement, that the very highest

honours in the Christian church, next apostleship itself, should fall to the two military men; one the most approved believer in Christ, while he was on earth, the other the first adopted of God's children?

Having, I trust, sufficiently met an objection that could be brought from the blessed Saviour's divine doctrine or ministry.

* An expression of our Lord's, might, p. be quoted, as implying his censure of *using the sword*. "Put up thy sword into its sheath; for all that take the sword, shall perish with the sword." But if our Lord had meant to condemn *all* the sword, he would evidently have pronounced his opinion sooner; he would have desired the swords to have been deposited where they had been found, instead of saying, "It is enough." The promptitude with which those swords were buried on our Lord's alluding figuratively to the sword, can hardly be accounted for but by supposing that the apostles carried swords with them in their late walks about Jerusalem, to defend themselves and their master against night ruffians. Be that as it may, our Lord neither reprov'd them for carrying swords, nor objected to their taking the two swords along with them, though that was evidently what he meant by speaking of a sword. His subsequent observation, therefore, cannot be extended to every taking of the sword, but merely to the fruitless and unlawful use of it, which Peter was that time betrayed into by his rashness; and

I shall proceed to shew that the sanction of military duties, contained in St. Paul's view of magistracy, and subjection to it (as quoted above), is expressly exemplified and illustrated in that apostle's own history, as recorded in the Acts.

When St. Paul addressed his Epistle to the Romans, he was on his way to Jerusalem. The Holy Ghost had already testified to him that bonds and afflictions awaited him; and therefore he solicits the earnest prayers of his Roman brethren, that he may be delivered from the unbelieving Jews. The prayers thus desired, and doubtless continually offered up by himself also, were not in vain. God, for wise reasons, permitted his servant to fall into great perils, but not without adequate provision for his deliverance. *The minister of God to him*

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for

view our Lord's words sufficiently explain themselves, since nothing could be more sure, than that *so* to "take the sword, was the most direct way to perish by the sword." They whom Peter was resisting were officers of justice, however unjust the business on which they were sent; and to resist such was as dangerous to the offender, as it was contrary to moral duty.

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for good, in this great instance, was Claudius Lysias, a Roman military magistrate. "As this man," says Lysias, in his address to the governor, "was seized by the Jews, and about to be killed by them, I came with *an army* and rescued him."

What would have been the consequence if this magistrate had not had soldiers under his command? The rage of the Jews against St. Paul was only to be resisted by force; but whence could Claudius have obtained such force, if he had not had a military body to employ for that purpose? Can we suppose that St. Paul had approved of the measures used on this occasion—or could doubt the provident appointment of that instrument of magistracy which was thus made the means of his miraculous escape?

But this is not all; the next day Paul was again in jeopardy; and again the soldiers, at the command of their tribune, go to pluck Paul from among those who were ready to tear him in pieces, and bring him safely into the castle.

On the succeeding night, the Lord himself appeared to Paul, and thereby shewed him who was the great worker in his deliverance. "Fear not, Paul," said he, "for as thou hast testified the things concerning me at Jerusalem, so thou must testify at Rome also." This consolation was graciously fitted to the apostle's necessity; for before many hours, he was apprized of the Jews having formed against his life the most determined and desperate conspiracy.

After the assurance of divine protection, which has been just mentioned, he could not hesitate to regard the tribune and his soldiers as *the ministers of his God*. To Claudius Lysias, therefore, he has recourse against the new danger. On receiving the intelligence from his sister's son, "Calling one of the Centurions, he says to him, Take this young man to the chief captain, for he hath something to tell him." Who will deny, that, by this act, St. Paul directly and completely sanctioned the use of a military force? Was it not that the Jews might be resisted, that St. Paul gave
this

this intimation; and to what means for assisting them did he look, but to that which he had experienced already, the same as the chief captain?

The application was not in vain. Could it, when God had determined that Paul should be delivered? He is taken by night from Jerusalem, under an escort of seventy horse and four hundred foot. These were not the guards of a prisoner, but were for the protection of an innocent man against those who sought his life. They were the safeguard of an apostle, and, of course, in a most peculiar manner, *ministers for good*. Here, however, a conflict took place; the promptitude and secrecy of their departure happily escaped the vigilant malice of the Jews; but that preparation was made for the same assertions which had twice before been made for, and which, in case of an attack, had been more necessary than ever. Was it not also, that that necessity was felt by St. Paul, and that he did not hesitate to avail himself of that method of security, which G

provided for him. No man was more grateful than St. Paul to his earthly benefactors; but *here* it is God, whom he supremely views and acknowledges. — “ For these “ things,” says he to Agrippa, “ the Jews “ having seized me in the temple, attempted “ to kill me with their own hands; but “ having obtained help *from* GOD, I continue till this day.”

Let us now lay all these particulars together—the sanction of military duty by our Lord’s forerunner—the high praise of a military commander by our Lord himself—the singular honour conferred upon Cornelius—the divine committal of the *sword* to rulers—the necessity of their committing that sword to subordinate instruments—their right of multiplying instruments as emergencies increase—the necessity of *military* force, even for the domestic purposes of magistracy—the benefits accruing to St. Paul from such a *military force*, and his *direct resort* to it for renewed protection, in a case of renewed danger—the strict identity of principle between judicial punishment and

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and defensive war—the substantial difference between the robber and the invader—equal right of repelling both, but a infinitely greater necessity of repelling the invader—the consequent duty of rulers to wield the sword against the invader, as well as against the robber—and the inevitable obligation on the subject to co-operate in this instance, no less than in the suppression of private wrongs. I say, let us consider these particulars, and then pronounce whether the New Testament gives the countenance to those, who would require this co-operation on the ground of conscientious scruples; and whether the obedience required in scripture is not as indisputable *here*, as in any other conceivable

What then, finally, is the duty of Christian subjects, on such an occasion as which *now* presses? Was there a greater necessity for powerful protection on the part of rulers; and, of course, for general and zealous co-operation on the part of all loyal subjects? Have either our domestic or foreign enemies any more right

tack us, than the wicked Jews had to attack St. Paul; and is not our government as much bound to defend the innocent thousands, who are liable to become the victims of invasion or rebellion, as Claudius Lysias was bound to defend the apostle? If they did otherwise, would they not *bear the sword in vain*, and be no longer *the ministers of God to us for good*? But if it be their duty to defend us, can it be less our duty to assist them? Is not refusal, in such a case, equivalent to *resistance*? And whether we consider St. Paul's doctrine, or his own venerable example, is not the conclusion inevitable, that those, who in such a case resist, shall receive to themselves *condemnation*?

Let Christians, then, feel what their duty is, and let them do honour to their holy profession; let infidels also, who have accused our divine religion of a passiveness inconsistent with civil society, see the folly of the accusation, and blush (if they can blush!) at the injustice of the calumny.

Lastly,

Lastly, let such religious persons who take arms, be careful, above all things, amid their new occupations, they neglect nothing, either of their inward piety, or outward strictness. That these are not incompatible, but congenial with the character of a soldier, the examples adduced formerly fully demonstrate; and additional instances might be multiplied from the history of Christian piety adding new splendour to martial magnanimity. Let, then, those who are called to command, take for their pattern the two centurions of the New Testament—the military exactness of the one—the benevolence of the other—the deep piety of both; and let those who serve in the ranks, recollect that mention is also made in the New Testament of a DEVOUT SOLDIER, an expression which, alone, is, to military men, a clear *sanction*, and a most important *instruction*. It justifies what they are permitted to do, and it tells them what they *may*, and *ought* to be, even in the midst of their busi-
 ness, and most spirited exertions.

* Acts x. 7.