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SUBJECTION TO CIVIL RULERS:

The Christian's Duty.

A FAST-DAY SERMON:

Preached Thursday, April 30th, 1863,

In the Second Presbyterian Church, St Louis,

-BY-

JAMES H. BROOKES.

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PREFACE.

In accounting for the late appearance in print of the following discourse, it is proper to state that immediately after its delivery a number of friends requested its publication. I declined a compliance with their request, partly because of an extreme reluctance to claim the attention of the public, occupied as it is, with more important concerns than any thing I can say, and partly because the sermon was prepared in great haste, and I was unwilling to send forth so crude a production. Since the morning it was preached, however, I have had the manuscript in my possession but three or four days, and finding that there are many who desire to peruse it, and above all, finding that there are many (and among them, even earnest Christians,) who express surprise at the views which are presented in the discourse, as if I were the setter-forth of some strange doctrine, I have determined to publish it notwithstanding its manifest imperfections. I do not hope to overtake and correct the curious misapprehensions and misstatements that have gone abroad concerning what I said, but I do hope to start God's children among my congregation upon a course of investigation which I believe will lead them to the same conclusion reached in the sermon. To accomplish this important end I have quoted largely from standard writers, preferring to let wiser and better men expound the Holy Scriptures, and I ask special attention to their clear and explicit statements. I am very sure that if we had been born and reared under any of the despotisms of the old world, there would have hardly been a question concerning the correctness of the views here set forth; and I am very sure that if Christ and His apostles were now in the United States, their conduct and counsel would not be different from that so strenuously urged by the distinguished authors to whom I have referred.

At all events, I send it forth with the sincere conviction, that it is the truth—that it must ultimately prevail—and that it will do the believing and penitent soul good, as God's word ever doth the upright in heart.

JAMES H. BROOKES.

St. Louis, May 25th, 1863.

A FAST-DAY SERMON.

We have met here to-day, my brethren, in response to the following

PROCLAMATION:

"Whereas, the Senate of the United States, devoutly recognizing the supreme authority and just government of Almighty God in all the affairs of men and of nations, has, by resolution, requested the President to designate and set apart a day for national prayer and humiliation; and

"Whereas, it is the duty of nations as well as of men, to own their dependence upon the over-ruling power of God, to confess their sins and transgressions in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope, that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon, and to recognize the sublime truth announced in the Holy Scriptures, and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord:

"And inasmuch as we know that by His divine law, nations like individuals, are subjected to punishments and chastisements in this world; may we not fear that the awful calamity of civil war, which now desolates the land, may be but a punishment inflicted upon us for our presumptuous sins, to the needful end of our national reformation as a whole people? We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven. We have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth and power as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied, and enriched, and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace—too proud to pray to the God that made us.

"It behooves us then to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness.

"Now, therefore, in compliance with the request, and fully concurring in the views of the Senate, I do by this my Proclamation, designate and set apart Thursday, the thirtieth day of April, 1863, as a day of national humiliation, fasting and prayer. And I do hereby request all the people to abstain on that day from their ordinary secular pursuits, and to unite at their several places of public worship and their respective homes, in keeping the day holy to the Lord, and devoted to the humble discharge of the religious duties proper to that solemn occasion.

"All this being done in sincerity and truth, let us then rest humbly in the hope authorized by the divine teachings, that the united cry of the nation will be heard on high and answered with blessings, no less than the pardon of our national sins and restoration of our now divided and suffering country to its former happy condition of unity and peace.

"In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand, and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed. Done at the city of Washington, this thirtieth day of March, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, and of the Independence of the United States the eighty-seventh.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

"By the President:

"WILLIAM H. SEWARD, Secretary of State."

The spirit of this Proclamation, I can not doubt, will meet with the warm commendation of every generous and devout mind. There is a tone pervading it, of penitence and confession and humble dependence upon God which must touch a responsive chord in the breast of every true Christian. There is a total absence of that sweeping denunciation and vindictive hatred which we so often observe in the productions of men who have far less cause of personal grievance, and who make far louder professions of religion. It does not even ask that prayer should be offered for the success of the Federal arms, but with an acknowledgement of sin that deserves the wrath of offended Heaven, it only expresses the hope that national humiliation may be followed by pardon, and "the restoration of our now divided and suffering country to its former happy condition of unity and peace." In short, think as we may of the character and conduct of him who wrote it, I pity the man whose prejudices will not permit him to see that it is a noble Christian Proclamation; and who does not feel within him the dawning of a brighter confidence for the future, when in this day of ungodliness and unbelief, such a call is made upon the people by the rulers of our still mighty though distracted nation.

And now, in order to meet the demands of this solemn call, and to further its important objects, several methods present themselves. We might attempt to establish by sound arguments drawn from reason, from human history, and from the inspired word of God, the substantial value of our observance; and thus meet and shame the flippant ridicule and cheap witticisms in which, I am grieved to say, some of our public journals indulge whenever a day is designated for prayer or thanksgiving. Or we might undertake to enumerate our national sins, —the sins in high and in low places—the sins of governors and the governed—the sins which receive the sanction of law, but which first of all, received at least the tacit sanction of those who, in this country, are the source of law—the sins committed under public authority and under popular authority—the sins by which we were gaining as a people, an infamous distinction, as our proud reliance upon our own resources, and the presumption which led us to defy the evils that imperil the existence or the welfare of other nations, and corruption in office, and

profanity, and Sabbath-breaking, and if possible, still more startling exhibitions of forgetfulness or disregard of divine authority. Or we might maintain the position too much overlooked even by thoughtful and good men, that God deals with a nation in its organized form as an individual—that He treats it as possessing a personal character, and fastens upon it all the moral responsibilities and obligations belonging to a person, with the important difference, that since national existence can not be carried, as in the case of the individual, beyond the grave, He assigns its appropriate rewards and punishments within the limits of time.

But I wish to call your attention to-day, my hearers, to a particular and prominent sin, which more than any other perhaps, underlies the troubles that have come upon us like a flood, and which furnishes abundant cause of humiliation, confession and prayer. I refer to the sin of *lawlessness* that has prevailed to an alarmiug extent in our country, and that has shown its dangerous front not unfrequently in mob violence, in hot impatience at all restraint, and in a haughty refusal to submit to properly constituted authority in the state, in the church, and in the family. Even the children of America have become proverbial for their self-will, and the imprudent haste with which they throw off parental control, and assume not only to think, but to do for themselves, years before they are fitted to act independently of experienced counsel. With a habit of insubordination thus confirmed upon them, they often pass from this unpromising beginning into the household of Christ, where, as many a Pastor can testify, they frequently avow their determination not to submit to those laws and regulations of the Church which may conflict with their immature views, or interfere with their unregulated desires and pleasures. It is not surprising, therefore, that when called to meet the responsibilities of citizenship, they are prepared to set at open defiance the constitution and laws of their country, and to make their personal opinions the only standard by which they will consent to be governed, in estimating the duties that belong to them as members of the body-politic.

To this evil germ, I verily believe, we are mainly indebted for the bitter fruit of our civil war, which we have been forced to taste, until "the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint." Long before the appeal to arms was made, sagacious minds could discover dark signs portending the present calamities, and even predicted the evils that have come upon the land. Multitudes speaking from the hustings, from the press, and I am sorry to say, from the pulpit, openly proclaimed their purpose not to abide by the decisions of our supreme judicatory. State enactments were passed with the evident intent to render null and void, laws of Congress, and men on every hand under the miserable pretence of a "higher law," constituted their own prejudices and passions the final judge to determine questions of the gravest national importance. And that the same unhallowed spirit, unchecked by the judgments of God, is still bearing lordly sway in nearly every part of the country, is painfully manifest from the fact that thousands daily speak of deposing our lawful rulers, and of trampling fundamental law as embodied in sacred constitutions under their feet, as pertly, and with no deeper sense of moral obligations, than when they speak of the most trifling occurrences.

And now that this rank insubordination is sinful, grievously sinful, can not admit of question, because sin is the transgression of the law of God; and the law of God as revealed in the Holy Scriptures thus addresses us in unmistakable language:

"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: for he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake."

What, my brethren, is the meaning of this language? Applying to it the ordinary rules of interpretation by which we arrive at the meaning of the Scriptures touching any duty or doctrine, what, I ask, is the obligation which it devolves upon us in our relation to the ruling powers or authorities placed over us in the providence of God? As soon as this question is answered, there must be in the nature of the case an end of all controversy with the sincere Christian. There is nothing left for him to do but to conform to the requirements of his Lord at any cost of personal feeling—at any sacrifice of earthly interests. Natural affections and human sympathies may clamor for the control, but the will of the Divine Redeemer must gain the entire ascendency over him, "casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." "To the law and to the testimony" with all our emotions and actions—"if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them;" and by the joys of an approving conscience, by the comfortable communications of the Holy Ghost, nay, by the hope of eternal salvation, let us bring our hearts and lives into entire subjection to the pleasure and precepts of Jesus Christ. I feel that I have the better right to address you boldly in this behalf, because, as is well known to all with whom I have conversed freely during the progress of this terrible strife, no one has been more powerfully swayed by considerations of birth-place, and early associations, and kindred, which have often kept me in a state of painful embarrassment and conscious imbecility of purpose and character. Further, I will here say publicly, what I do not remember ever to have said privately, that yielding to these considerations alone, I could have been easily swept forward by a current of strong sympathy with a people dearer to me than any other on earth into an attitude of open and even of armed rebellion. Although, taking the position at the outset with numbers of others, who no doubt are in the southern army to-day, that secession was both unconstitutional and unjustifiable, yet that position might have been readily carried by the force of sectional preference or prejudice, had not the duty been almost literally forced upon me, to examine as

thoroughly as I could, the teachings of the word of God concerning our obligations as Christians to civil obedience. Pursuing a track of honest inquiry, I am glad of this favorable opportunity for saying that an impression has been steadily gaining a stronger hold upon my mind that the word of God is *not* silent in relation to our precise duties as the disciples of the Lord Jesus at a time like this; and along with the impression has come an increasing conviction that we can not resist the powers that are over us, because resistance is sinful.

If I understand the Scriptures, allegiance to the Constitution and laws, and government under which we live, is involved in our allegiance to Him who hath called us out of darkness into His marvellous light, unless indeed there are two exceptions—the first of which is, that we should be required to do something morally wrong, when it is manifestly our duty to disobey, as did the apostles themselves—and the second of which is, that the Government should altogether cease from being a minister of God for good, and become a minister of Satan for evil. But even when a government fails in the discharge of its appropriate functions as a blessing to society, and is turned into an instrument of oppression and injustice, it is to my mind at least doubtful whether a fair interpretation of the Bible would sustain the Christian in resorting to armed resistance; and although this position trenches largely upon the opinions of some of our ablest moral philosophers, and tends directly towards what has been considered in this country the absurd and exploded theory of the divine right of kings, I can not see that the precepts and example of Christ and His apostles give the slightest countenance to revolutionary violence as a mode of redressing public and private wrongs.

Now I beg you to observe whether there is the least straining or exaggeration in interpreting the passage already quoted from the epistle to the Romans, when I assert that the Apostle leaves no room for doubt upon the four following points: 1st. Every soul without exception, no matter what may be his personal calling, dignity or importance, and no matter where he may choose to reside, is to be subject to the existing power or government. 2d. Government, all government, whatever may be its form, and however called into being and exercise, is ordained, as truly as the Church, of God, and not of men, according to a popular but altogether erroneous conception of its origin. 3d. To resist therefore, this divinely appointed Institution, is to resist the ordinance of God Himself, who will see to it that the guilty shall not escape punishment. And 4th. After showing that civil government affords a representation poor and imperfect indeed, but still a symbol of God's dominion over the world, he alleges that our subjection to it is not merely to be wrung from us by terror, and that it is more than a matter of self-interest or of patriotic pride—it is a matter of conscientious and religious obligation. And what adds tremendous force to our argument is the fact that when the Apostle addressed these positive and authoritative precepts to the Christians at Rome, they were living under the government of one of the most atrocious wretches that ever disgraced a throne. Obscene, cruel, cowardly, the deliberate murderer of his wife and mother, exhibiting most unseemly mirth

while his Capital was wrapped in the flames of a fearful conflagration, and the terror-stricken inhabitants were fleeing from their burning dwellings—the crimes of this monster might have well put to blush the fiends of darkness themselves.

Now it is simply absurd to suppose that the apostle Paul approved of all that Nero did and said; and it is equally absurd to suppose that Christian loyalty demands a blind and unreasoning approval on the part of believers of all that their rulers may choose to say and do. This were indeed to deprive the people of all intelligence, of all conscience, of all will, and to number them among "dumb, driven cattle," more fit to be controlled by an ox-goad, than by a calm appeal to reason. On the other hand I hold it to be not only the right but the duty of citizens especially in a Republican form of government like ours, to traverse in a respectful and Christian manner the policy of our rulers, and if in their best judgment that policy is unwise, to attempt to correct it by argument and at the ballot-box. But what I equally insist upon is, that according to the teachings of the Apostle, the personal character or conduct of those in authority, however unworthy, does not release us from obligations to civil obedience; and that disobedience or resistance on this ground is more than a crime against society—it is sin against God. This view I present to you, brethren, as the only conclusion that can be reached, as it seems to me, from an impartial examination of the word of God which we all profess to receive as the rule of our faith and practice. And that it is not peculiarly my own view, but that it has been held in all ages of the Church by the wisest and best men I now proceed to show. To the authorities which I am about to cite, your candid and careful attention is asked, to detect if possible, the fallacy of their exposition and statements.

First of all, let us consult the standards of our own Church—the Westminster Confession of Faith which Presbyterians adopt as containing the system of divine truth and the substance of doctrine found in holy writ. In chapter xxiii, section 1, we read—"God the supreme Lord and King of all the world, hath ordained civil magistrates to be under Him over the people, for His own glory and the public good, and to this end, hath armed them with the power of the sword, for the defense and encouragement of them that are good, and for the puuishment of evil-doers." Again, in section 4th of the same chapter—"It is the duty of the people to pray for magistrates, to honor their persons, to pay them tribute and other dues, to obey their lawful commands, and to be subject to their authority for conscience sake. Infidelity or difference in religion doth not make void the magistrate's just and legal authority, nor free the people from their due obedience to him." Again in section 4, chapter xx—"And because the powers which God hath ordained, and the liberty which Christ hath purchased, are not intended by God to destroy, but mutually to uphold and preserve one another; they who upon pretence of Christian liberty, shall oppose any lawful power or the lawful exercise of it, whether it be civil or ecclesiastical, resist the ordinance of God." Once more, in answer to question 124 in larger catechism—"Who are meant by father and mother in the fifth commandment," we read—"By father and mother in the fifth commandment, are meant not only natural parents, but all superiors

in age and gifts; and especially such as by God's ordinance are over us in place of authority, whether in family, Church, or commonwealth." Question 127—"What is the honor that inferiors owe to superiors?" Answer—"The honor which inferiors owe to their superiors is, all due reverence in heart, word and behavior; prayer and thanksgiving for them; imitation of their virtues and graces; willing obedience to their lawful commands and counsels; due submission to their corrections; fidelity to, defense and maintenance of their persons and authority, according to their several ranks and the nature of their places; bearing with their infirmities and covering them in love, so that they may be an honor to them and to their government." With this testimony substantially agree the confessions and standards of the Protestant Churches, both of this couutry and Europe, quite a number of which I have recently had an opportunity of examining upon this point, and in none of which do I find provision made for armed resistance to "the powers that be," under any pretence or on any ground whatever.

But let us proceed to notice the opinions of some of our ablest commentators: men whose praise for piety and learning and sound judgment is in all the churches, and who wrote, not under the pressure of party feeling or of passion, but as faithful expounders of God's word, and in view of their accountability to the Judge of quick and dead. Says Dr. Chalmers upon the passage quoted from the Epistle to the Romans—"There are certain speculatists in social and political philosophy who would measure the duty of subjection by what they are pleased to imagine the right of sovereignty, and would make the one depend upon the other, so that there shall be no incumbent loyalty on the one side, unless there is a legally constituted government on the other. And thus to make out the obligation of subjects, they would go back on the theory of an original compact, and carry us upward to the first construction of society, and tell us of rights elective and rights hereditary; and on the basis of certain juridical dogmata, would assign how much or how little it is that the individual members of a community owe in the way of allegiance to the actual rulers, who, whether rightfully or not, yet really and by actual possession and exercise bear authority over them. It has long appeared to us that the Bible cuts short all this reasoning in that while it defines the duty of the subject, it does not define the nature or composition of the government to which that duty is owing. It does not say that we should be subject to the powers which were rightly originated or have been rightly constituted, but subject to the powers that be. It is not the kind of character of any government, but the existence of it which invests it with its claim on our obedience, or at least which determines for us the duty of yielding subjection thereunto. Its mandates should be submitted to, not because either law or justice or respect for the good of humanity presided over the formation of it, but simply because it exists. It is true that the Apostle affirms of those powers to which he requires our subjection, that they are ordained of God; but this is merely because they are the powers that be, and in the sense that whatever is, is ordained of God. It is He who overrules all history; and to His sovereign will do we refer the rise and continuance of all the actual dynasties in our world—although in their establishment,

fraud and force and barbaric cruelty, and that wrath of man which He so often makes to praise Him, may have been the instruments of His pleasure. It is thus that the duty of our text is of universal application, whatever be the country, and amid all the political diversities which obtain on the face of our globe—insomuch that the Christian who lives in Turkey or China, or under any of the iron despotisms of the East, is as much bound to obedience by this unexcepted law of the New Testament, as if his lot were cast in those more favored regions of civilization and equitable rule, where all the caprices and the cruelties of arbitrary power are unknown." * * * * * "But a government may depart from its proper and ordinary character; and instead of a protector, may become a tyrant and a persecutor. It may abuse its powers. The sword of justice in its hands, it may wield as an instrument of iniquitous violence—turning it from its own righteous purpose, as an instrument of vengeance on rebels and murderers. Instead of this it may become a murderer itself, and bathe its feet in the blood of the innocent. And the question is, what is duty towards a government in this new attitude and style of acting; and when, no longer a minister to them for good, it becomes an executioner of wrath on the peaceable and the praiseworthy—the terror and scourge of the righteous?

"This question has already been answered in the chapter immediately before our present one—where we are told to bless them which persecute, to give place unto wrath, to avenge not ourselves. And it has not only been answered didactically in the Bible, but has been answered historically and by example during three long centuries of persecution—beginning with the author of our faith, and continued onward to the reign of Constantine. If, when the hand of a private individual inflicted outrage and injustice upon them, they were commanded to forbear all retaliation—this forbearance was still more imperative when it was an injustice which came from the hands of a magistrate. And accordingly, in those ages of martyrdom we have a bright verification of the meek and passive moralities—of the virtues which belong to a state of sufferance—so strenuously recommended by the apostle. And it was not only in the feebleness of their infancy, when the Christians formed but a very little flock, amid the overwhelming majorities that abode in the ancient faith, whether of Jews or Gentiles—it was not only then, that they gave themselves quietly up to torture and death, as if in imitation of their great Master, who was led like a lamb unto the slaughter, but even in the strength and maturity of their manhood, *when they far outnumbered their adversaries* and could have taken the power of government into their own hands—even then do we read of their weathering in meek endurance the last and bloodiest of those great persecutions which they had to undergo. They might have risen against their enemies and achieved over them the victory of force—but, still more glorious, theirs was altogether the victory of principle, and it serves for our admonition, on whom the latter ends of the world have come. Should the fires of persecution be again lighted up in our land—in the holy discipline of God, should this be again brought to bear upon us, as at once the test and the exercise of our Christianity—after such an example, and still more with

such a lesson as the Apostle has recorded for our guidance in the foregoing passage we should know how to acquit ourselves. We should, for conscience toward God, endure the grief and suffer wrongfully. We should take it patiently. We should commit ourselves to Him that judgeth righteously. We should leave to Him the cause of our redress, and that work which is exclusively His own, the work of vengeance. If we want to obtain a like conquest with our predecessors in the church, then not overcome of evil ourselves, we should overcome the evil with good." The position of Dr. Chalmers in these lengthy extracts evidently is, that under no circumstances is it right for a Christian to resist by violence the powers in authority over him.

Says Robert Haldane in his excellent commentary on the Romans, and in relation to the same passage—"Christians having become the subjects of a kingdom which is not of this world, might be led to suppose that they were released from the ties of obedience to human authorities, especially such as were not Christians. Far different is the doctrine here taught by the Apostle. He commands "every soul," both Jew and Gentile, to be subject to the existing powers. He makes no exception as to the nature or constitution of any government. He speaks neither of monarchies, nor of republics, nor of mixed constitutions. But he applies all his precepts to every form that government may assume. As there is nothing from which political partisans in the present day more widely differ than from the apostolic doctrine laid down in this chapter, Christians ought to give to it the more earnest heed, lest they be led away on this subject by the opinions of the world, or of those who "despise government." They ought to examine carefully what is here taught by the Apostle, without attempting to accommodate it to their preconceived views of civil liberty. This is the more necessary, as many have lately embarked in politics with a keenness that will be of no service to their spiritual life, and will rather tend to make them cleave more closely to the dust.

"In considering the duties enjoined in the apostolic epistles, it is constantly to be kept in view, that while written on particular occasions, and addressed to particular churches, they are equally adapted, in the wisdom of God, to all times and circumstances. They are intended for the instruction and guidance of Christians in every country and every age, just as the decalogue, though delivered only to one nation, and that only once, is binding on every nation under Heaven, in every period, till the end of time. Christians learn at present from this passage the will of God respecting their duty to civil government, just as those to whom this epistle was addressed. It is true that there is an innumerable variety of differences in circumstances; but this is nothing to the purpose. The things taught in these epistles are in all circumstances duty. The Roman Christians were under a despotism, and those who read this epistle may live under a free government. But the duty of obedience is in both cases the same. The powers are under both equally to be obeyed. It is of the utmost moment that Christians under all forms of government should have a rule concerning their duty to civil government clear and precise. Such a rule we have here laid down. No practical subject is more fully or more explicitly treated in the word of God. The weakest

Christian cannot be at a loss to discover the will of his Lord with respect to obedience to civil government. * * * * * In the most solemn manner, subjection to the existing powers is here enjoined. This is contrary to the wisdom of the world, which takes offense at such subjection, and contrary to the proud heart of man, that would make religion a pretense to cover its secret reluctance to submit to disagreeable restraints. How natural the opposite doctrine is to the carnal heart may be seen from the general sentiments entertained on the subject by rulers and ruled—by infidels and professed Christians—by statesmen and people of all ranks. With one consent the generality of men, even in this country, which is comparatively so much enlightened by the Scriptures, proclaim that subjection to rulers is, even in things civil, limited and conditional—that in case of the breach of the supposed compact between the rulers and the ruled, rebellion is lawful and resistance a duty. Even in the houses of Parliament is this doctrine boldly maintained. It is much to be desired that among those who thus trample on the commandments of God, and set aside the Scripture doctrine on this subject, there were no real Christians. It is lamentable to reflect that to justify resistance to civil powers, many of the people of God have resorted to the same false rules of interpretation which Neologians, and other perverters of the divine word, have invented to banish the doctrines of grace from the Bible. No expedients to explain away the meaning of any part of Scripture were ever more forced, than those adopted to make this chapter accord with the right of resisting the powers that be.

"*Let Every Soul.*—This most comprehensive expression shows that to every Christian, in every country, in all variety of situations, and on all occasions, the doctrine which the Apostle is about to teach is applicable. *Be subject unto the higher powers.* By this expression is meant the persons who possess the supreme authority, who are in the third verse denominated *rulers.* Government in our language is a term of similar import. No phrase could more clearly and definitely express the duty of subjection to civil rulers whom God has placed over us, than that which the Apostle here employs. This passage *expressly* enjoins obedience to all governments equally. The word rendered "powers" wants the article, and has not an exclusive reference to the Roman government. It comprehends governments universally. Had any of the Roman Christians gone beyond the bounds of the empire, their duty of obedience to the government of the country is here as expressly enjoined as it is to the powers of the empire itself. And the foreigners who may have belonged to countries beyond the limits of the empire, are here taught obedience to the powers of Rome while in the country, and obedience to the powers of their own country when they should have returned home. The Apostle speaks of "powers" without peculiar reference. Every one without exception is, by the command of God, to be subject to the *existing* powers, whatever were the means by which they became possessed of the situation in which they stand. Cæsar subverted the laws of his country, Jeroboam established idolatry, and Nebuchadnezzar carried Judah captive. Yet the successors of Cæsar were recognized by Jesus, and were the rulers of the

Roman Empire when the Apostle wrote; Jeroboam was expressly appointed by God as king over the ten tribes; and the oppressed Jews were commanded to pray for the peace of Babylon.

"*There is no power but of God;* because it is God in His providence who confers power on every man who holds it. No tyrant ever seized power till God gave it him. It is not merely the form of civil government that is from God, but the governors. *The powers that be are ordained by God.* Here every evasion is taken away from the ingenuity of sophistry. It will not be of any avail to attempt to limit allegiance according to the conduct of rulers or the means by which they have acquired their authority. The *existing* powers in every country, and in every age are *ordained* of God. Nero was as truly a ruler ordained of God as Titus or Antoninus. The divine appoinment of the government that is over us, is the ground on which the duty of submission rests; and the powers that be—that exist in any country—are appointed by God.

"*Whosoever therefore resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God.* Literally: 'So that he that setteth himself in opposition to the power resisteth the ordinance of God.' Resistance to the government, then, is resistance to God; because government is God's ordinance or appoinment. If God has appointed every government that exists in the world, His people are bound to submit to every government under which their lot has been cast. There is but one exception, and that is when anything is required contrary to the law of God. Then duty is plain. We are to obey God rather than men. The people of God, then, ought to consider resistance to the government under which they live as a very awful crime—even as resistance to God Himself."

"To carnal wisdom," says Dr. Carson, "the doctrine of unlimited submission to civil government in temporal things, appears a hard saying. Who can hear it? If this sentiment prevails, it may be said, rulers may tyrannize as they please. They who speak thus do greatly err, not knowing the Scripture, neither the power of God in the ruling of the world. It would be a hard thing indeed, if God did not rule the rulers. But the Christian has nothing to fear when he considers that every plan and proceeding of government is overruled and directed by his God. If He puts His children into the hands of men, He retains these men in His own hands, and they can injure them in nothing without His permission. 'The king's heart is in the hands of the Lord, as the rivers of water; He turneth it withersoever He will.' So far, then, from being a doctrine that fills the mind with discomfort, it is the only view that gives peace. Have not Christians more security for their safety in the care of their Almighty Father than in a permission given by Him to defend themselves against the oppression of rulers? They have peace whatever party gets into power, because they know that in everything God fulfills His purposes by them."

"In the preceding five verses," adds Mr. Haldane, "the Apostle makes no provision in matters of civil submission for any case of resistance or rebellion under any circumstances. He makes no exceptions, no modifications; he discusses no hazardous cases of conscience upon emergencies not existing; but in

language which none can mistake, and with an authority, the commanding solemnity of which defies opposition, He proclaims to the Greek and to the Roman, to the barbarian and the civilized, *Let every soul be subject to the higher powers. The powers that be are ordained by God.*"

"In the statement of Suetonius," says Olshausen, "that the Jews of Rome made a commotion under the leadership of one Chrestus, there is perhaps an indication that a portion of the Roman Christians in their lively feeling of Christian liberty may not have quite rightly apprehended their relation towards the authorities. If, now, we consider that the epistle to the Romans was written under Nero, after Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius, with their abominations and madness, had already passed over the scene, there appears in the following exhortation a greatness and purity of thought strikingly contrasting with the malice and baseness which were manifested in the ruling power of the Roman Empire. This purity and truth could not but at the same time carry in it the power of renewing the youth of the whole old and corrupted world, and of restoring it for a series of ages. At present we look forth into a world which has in like manner passed into corruption, in which 'the people are become wild and desolate, because prophecy is nothing heeded;' it becomes essential then that the law be again administered as from above, and that the doctrine of Holy Scripture respecting the magistracy as God's representative on earth, should be anew established. * * * * But are there not absolutely ungodly powers, which come into being by sedition, or other evil means? Are these also of God? Certainly they are so, in as far as they come into actual and manifest existence. The Christian, who as such knows himself to be the citizen of a higher world, has not to go into investigations as to the rightfulness of the subsisting power, which besides are generally of great difficulty, and hence cannot possibly be devolved on each individual; he belongs to that power to which God has given the sway over him. Evil governments have their judge in God alone, not in men."

"Hence follows another duty," writes Calvin, "that with minds disposed to honor and reverence magistrates, subjects approve their obedience to them in submitting to their edicts, in paying taxes, in discharging public duties, and bearing burdens which relate to the common defense, and in fulfilling all their other commands. Paul says to the Romans, 'Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. Whosoever resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God.' * * Here let no man deceive himself. For as it is impossible to resist the magistrate without at the same time resisting God Himself, though an unarmed magistrate may seem to be despised with impunity, yet God is armed to inflict exemplary vengeance on the contempt offered to Himself. * * * But if we direct our attention to the Word of God, it will carry us much further; even to submit to the government, not only of those princes who discharge their duty to us with becoming integrity and fidelity, but of all who possess the sovereignty, even though they perform none of the duties of their function. * * Finally, we owe these sentiments of affection and reverence to all our rulers, whatever their characters may be; which I the more frequently repeat, that we

may learn, not to scrutinize the persons themselves, but may be satisfied with knowing that they are invested by the will of the Lord with that function, upon which he has impressed an inviolable majesty. But it will be said that rulers owe mutual duties to their subjects. That I have already confessed. But he who infers from this, that obedience ought to be rendered to none but just rulers is a very bad reasoner. They are still subject even to those who are wicked and unkind. As it is incumbent on all not to inquire into the duties of one another, but to confine their attention respectively to their own, this consideration ought particularly to be regarded by those who are subject to the authority of others. Wherefore, if we are inhumanly harassed by a cruel Prince; if we are rapaciously plundered by an avaricious or luxurious one; if we are neglected by an indolent one; or if we are persecuted on account of piety, by an impious or sacrilegious one, let us first call to mind our transgressions against God, which He undoubtedly chastises by these scourges. Thus our impatience will be restrained by humility. Let us, in the next place, consider that it is not our province to remedy these evils; and that nothing remains for us but to implore the aid of the Lord, in whose hand are the hearts of kings and the revolutions of kingdoms."

But it may be urged that while the views of these distinguished writers can not be gainsayed as to the duty of the individual Christian, yet they do not disprove the right of a community or nation *as such*, to resist oppression and to raise the standard of rebellion or revolution. It is unnecessary to notice this theory, as our object to-day is not to discuss the political rights of nations, but the religious duties of individuals; and yet it may be suggested that if every one of all the people should become thoroughly consecrated to Christ, and should make His word the rule of personal action, it is very certain that when organized into the form and with the functions of a nation, they would have no other rule of public conduct, and would refuse to be governed by any maxims or principles at variance with their individual obligations. Hence, in addition to what has been said already, let us remember in the first place, the numerous predictions in the Sacred Scriptures that look forward with eager anticipation to the coming of a period when under the reign of King Jesus and the universal prevalence of His gospel, men "shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." When, therefore, the Christian religion shall gain a complete ascendency, and sway the sceptre of its love over a regenerated world, war is to be done entirely away as a thing altogether contrary to its benevolent spirit; and much more will armed resistance to the powers which God Himself hath ordained be done away; aud much more ought such resistance now to be looked upon as contrary to the spirit of that holy religion, whose influence every child of God is bound to extend, and whose precepts every child of God is bound to exemplify.

Let us remember in the second place the example of our Lord and of the Apostles under circumstances that must have proved a mighty temptation to cast the whole weight of their high authority against the oppressors of their wronged and persecuted countrymen. That the Roman power had established a merciless

despotism over the Israelites without even the semblance of a plausible pretext can not be questioned; that the Savior and His disciples loved their native land with all the peculiar fervor of Jewish patriotism will hardly be doubted; and yet we search the records of their lives in vain for the first word or act that would go to encourage revolutionary violence as a mode of obtaining redress. On the other hand the master Himself distinctly recognized the existing government when He commanded the people in the payment of tribute money, to "render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's," and His followers in meek endurance conformed to His requirements.

Let us remember in the third place the frequency and the urgency with which subjection to civil rulers is enjoined in the apostolic epistles as a Christian duty. Thus, besides the passage which has already been considered at length, we find Paul telling Titus to "put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates,"—and in writing to Timothy he says, "I exhort, therefore, that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks be made for all men: for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake," writes Peter, "whether it be to the king as supreme, or unto governors;" and elsewhere he foretells the doom of the unjust whom God reserves unto the day of judgment to be punished—"but chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise government. Presumptuous are they, self-willed; they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities."

Let us remember in the fourth place, the graces with which the believer must adorn his character, and then ask ourselves how it is possible for him to rush with ardor into the strifes and animosities of a turbulent world that lieth in wickedness. He is to "let all bitterness, and wrath, and clamor, and evil-speaking be put away from him, with all malice" and to have his soul filled with "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." He is "to speak evil of no man, to be no brawler, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men"—"pitiful, courteous, not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise, blessing." He is "to love his enemies, to bless them that curse him, to do good to them that hate him, to pray for them which despitefully use him and persecute him," and not to "avenge himself, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay saith the Lord." If we yield a hearty obedience to these and similar precepts in their evident import, can it be doubted whether we will at the same time yield a hearty obedience in things temporal to the powers that be, even should those powers become unjust and oppressive?

Once more let us remember the unspeakable value and importance of civil government as the instrument which God so often employs in protecting the Church against the assaults of its enemies; in giving us peaceful homes; in removing obstructions out of the way of human enterprise and progress; and in restraining the unhallowed passions of wicked men which would otherwise stalk forth in savage ferocity to accomplish their fell work of destruction and involve

us all in a common misery and a common ruin. Perhaps the worst government on the face of the earth that retains any element of order whatever, is better than a state of anarchy; and it seems to me that all of these considerations together ought to render the arguments in favor of subjection to "the powers that be," conclusive, and carry them home to the understanding and heart and conscience of every Christian with overwhelming demonstration.

In conclusion then let me ask what is our duty, our plainly revealed duty as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, amid the stormy scenes through which in the providence of God we are called to pass? I do not ask what powers the Federal constitution has conferred upon the general government, nor whether those powers have been transcended, nor what are the exact limits of State sovereignty. These are purely political questions which I do not feel myself competent to discuss, and which I can not and will not enter upon in the pulpit. Nor do I ask what is the duty of our Christian brethren in the seceded States, as it is wholly profitless to preach to those at a distance, and to their own master they stand or fall. But what is our personal duty here in Missouri? What does God's word require at our hands? Why, if I have not entirely misunderstood the teachings of that word, it is to make a sincere acknowledgement of our conscientious subjection to the powers, which the "Most High who ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will," hath seen fit to put in authority over us—it is to lay the mighty check of Christian principle on every word and act that would tend to overthrow that authority, and it is to place our allegiance to the existing government on far higher and nobler ground than that of sectional sympathy or political opinions, or even of patriotism, as we are commanded to put it on the sacred and commanding ground of allegiance to Him who rules in and reigns over the hearts of His people, and to whom we have sworn perpetual and unswerving loyalty. And an allegiance springing from this deep sense of religious obligation is altogether trust-worthy because it is an allegiance that arises from the fear and love of God, and is won as a victory of principle achieved over self, after many a struggle perhaps with pride and passion and preference, and in the face it may be of all our natural tendencies and desires.

Here then in this State, whatever may have been true in the past, the Christian is not *now* perplexed by any dispute concerning the powers that are actually in possession of the Government. After a fierce and sanguinary conflict, and the wasting of our borders by the desolating march of armies, the question as to existing authority is definitely if not finally settled. I will grant you if you desire it, that the people of Missouri were prevented from leaving the Union only by the bristling array of bayonets that surrounded them, or that the government established over us is an usurpation, but so it *is* established, what is our duty in the light of God's word which we have considered to-day? Undoubtedly to be subject to it, not only for wrath but for conscience sake; and to be subject to it all the more willingly because divine providence hath been pleased to intrust that government into the hands of an Executive who recognizes his dependence upon the Lord of heaven and earth, and who seeks the guidance of His unerring spirit in the discharge of his duties.

Let us therefore "study the things that make for peace," and strive to soften all asperities of feeling and cultivate kindly regard and brotherly love especially for them who are of the household of faith. Let us also determine that whatever may be before us in the future, and whatever may be the character of the government which will assert its supremacy over us, we will hold fast by the principles of the gospel as the only safe guide amid the perils and perplexities of these disordered times. "Thus saith the Lord, stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls." So too shall we find Christian unity and fellowship, and discover that there is a sacred trysting place at the feet of Jesus, where we may hold communion with Him, and with one another, undisturbed by the tumult of the world around us. So too shall we find mercy and forgiveness with Him who hath promised to accept the humiliation and confession of His repentent children. And so too let us hope we shall soon hear the voice of the Master saying, in conscious omipotence and in infinite love, to the tempest that hath burst upon our country, "Peace, be still;" and that once more we can raise the song and prayer—

"Not guns, but lever; books,—
Not swords, but pruning-hooks
Our times demand:
With teachers, truth, Thy word,
Not raging warriors, Lord,
O bless this land."