


"GOD'S VIEW OF REBELLION."

A SERMON


PREACHED IN THE

Fourth Avenue Presbyterian Church,

ON THE OCCASION OF



THE NATIONAL THANKSGIVING,



Sunday, Sept. 11, 1864,

By HOWARD CROSBY, D. D.

NEW YORK:

E. FRENCH, 126 NASSAU STREET.

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GOD'S VIEW OF REBELLION.

ROM. xii., 2.

" Whosoever resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God : and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation."

You will bear me witness, my friends, that it is not my habit, in this sacred place, to abandon the solemn subjects which belong to our eternal peace, and to plunge into the exciting national and social topics of the day. Not that I feel any lukewarmness in my regard for my country and its interests, or any aversion to consider the vast social and political problems which are offered the thoughtful mind in our remarkable history ; but that I believe that our relation to God is of infinitely greater importance than our relation to the nation or to society ; that there should be one place where even the highest earthly interests should not enter to mar the soul's approach to God ; and that the heart is so deceitful and deceived that we must watch constantly lest political or social truth become with us a fatal substitute for religious truth. I have marked with intense interest all the developments of this war, and every faculty of my mind has worked ardently in the solution of the important

questions which have been thrown before the public—the questions of centralization and State Rights, of extra-Constitutional action, of finance and revenue, of military law, of human slavery, of the subjugation policy, and of peace platforms. But, as a minister of Christ, under the convictions just mentioned, I have carefully abstained from introducing these subjects into the hallowed time when we are especially called to regard our personal relations to Heaven and not to earth. Nor do I intend to make any exception to this rule to-day. I do not purpose to discuss our earthly relations as such—to draw arguments from history or consistency or expediency for certain courses of national conduct—to enlarge upon a mere philanthropy, and build an ethical philosophy upon this foundation—or to convert this Church into a lyceum, and give a lecture on education and civilization. But there are certain positions which Christians should hold toward the nation and its government, consequent upon their *heavenly* citizenship, the holding of which will minister to their spiritual welfare. There are clear revelations of God's will to us as subjects of government, which it becomes us to hear in the house of God, not as political or social philosophers, but as obedient children. The honor and glory of Christ our Redeemer is concerned in our apprehension *of* and conformity to these revelations, and it is at His cross we can most appropriately stand when we engage in their considera-

tion. Let us, dear brethren, there stand this morning, feeling the value of His blood which makes us kings and priests unto God, and, in this high experience, trampling upon partisan animosities and political prejudices, we can see what God's will is concerning us in our national duties.

The President of the United States has invited us to gather together in our usual places of worship this day, in devout acknowledgment of God's favor to the country, and in earnest prayer for His continued grace. It becomes us, as godly citizens, to give heed to the summons. God spoke before the President. When the flag of our country went up on Fort Morgan, amid the cheers of our army and navy, just nineteen days ago, and when General SLOCUM led his corps of national troops into the streets of Atlanta, one week later, God, who had heard our prayer, sent forth his summons for our praise. If it was *right* for us to pray, it is *duty* for us to praise. And yet with many faith is so weak that, not making much of prayer, it does not make much of praise. It can see no connection between the Christian's prayer and the fall of Mobile, and can only trace cause and effect in SHERMAN'S tactics and Atlanta's capture. It may go so far as to doubt the efficacy of *all* prayer, and so stand on the infidel's platform, or it may object to this special case because Christians were also praying for the rebellion. What a conclusion! To doubt the power of prayer be-

cause Christians are praying against one another! Is there not a right and a wrong, and am I to doubt the efficacy of prayer for the right, because prayer is also offered for the wrong? Will God hear prayer for the wrong, and will he not hear prayer for the right? "Yes," says Little Faith, "but how do you know you are praying for the right? Perhaps the rebellion is right and we are wrong." Well, perhaps the burglar is right, and I am wrong to defend my house against him—perhaps murder is right, and our laws against murder are wrong—perhaps the devil is all right, and we are very wrong to resist him. "Ah! *these* are clearly revealed to us as wrong (you say), and we cannot be mistaken in dealing with *them*." Just as clearly (I reply) is rebellion declared to be sin, as are robbery and murder, and just as obligatory is it upon the Christian citizen to resist rebellion as to resist the devil. God has not left us in the dark—nor is His government all at sixes and sevens; and yet how many, by the want of faith, look upon all God's movements as erratic and arbitrary! Of course, such a view makes prayer a vain thing, and saps the very foundation of praise. It is to rebuke such weakness—to show that Christian duty is clearly defined in this civil war—to invite hearty, faithful prayer for the cause of truth and justice, and so to supply the fountains of praise, that I have selected the text of Scripture, and urge its consideration upon every doubtful soul. Let me

read it again : "Whosoever resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God ; and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation."

These are the words of inspiration, and bear all the weight of those other words—"Thou shalt not kill—Thou shalt not steal." A Christian who cannot see the right and the wrong of this present national contest, certainly does not go to the Bible for his direction in the matter. He is following prejudices, or indulging in philosophic speculations, or listening to plausible sophistries. The honest applicant to the sacred oracle sees a flood of heavenly light thrown on the whole question of this war. He sees that if it is a nation's duty to seize the thief and shut him up behind stone and iron, and that the duty does not abate one jot, if the thief gains a thousand helpers and shows fight against the police it is also a nation's duty to seize and throttle rebellion, whatever be the numerical assistance that it gains. Right and wrong do not go by numbers. Government is established for this very purpose by God—to sustain the right—and not to sustain numbers, even should they form a majority. An administration may be rightfully elected and placed in power by a majority ; but when once elected and placed in power, it is to govern by constitution, by law, by right, and not by the majority's will. The duty of the Government's opposing rebellion is just as clear if nine-tenths of the people rebel as if

only nine or ten men rebel. The increased numbers may make a different line of tactics advisable to common sense in the Government's opposition, but they can never absolve the Government from the duty of opposition. A government has no more right to connive at rebellion than it has to connive at murder. It would make itself *particeps criminis* in the sight of God by so doing. Resistance is the Government's one clear duty to all who resist Government. That is God's word, whether man likes it or not. Now comes another objector. "All very well," he says; "your argument is just: rebellion must be crushed; *but is this war a rebellion?* The States seceding assert that they only resumed their original sovereignty; if so, that surely is not rebellion." Let us answer this shallow fallacy. In the first place, their assertion that they only exercise a sovereignty does not give them sovereignty. We must look to facts to see if there is such a State sovereignty. We have the Constitution and the laws; they are our guides. We search the Constitution, and not a word is there found about any other sovereignty but the National. We then look at seventy years of legal history, and find not one hint of State sovereignty in the country's legislation for all that period. What do we then see? Certain States calling themselves sovereign deliberately breaking their allegiance and opposing the Government *de facto*, with much talk about its not being a Government *de jure*, for

which assertion they cannot quote one line of the Constitution or the laws. Now all sinners (rebels included) have excuses. That is the necessary toll paid to conscience. There never was a murderer that didn't patch up a reason for his deed. Now so mighty a step, fraught with such dire calamity as the tearing away of a large part of the country from its government, should be undertaken by Christian agencies only with the most overwhelming proofs of its necessity as a Christian duty, not with trifling excuses that tremble as you look at them. But if we even grant that the political doctrine of State sovereignty is correct, even then this war is a godless rebellion, a sin before Heaven. Because actual facts modify all abstract doctrines, however true in themselves. For example, two others with myself own thirty thousand bricks; each of us owns absolutely and personally ten thousand, marked with the owner's name. We agree to build a house with them. When it is built we live in it together, jointly furnishing it and hanging pictures on its walls, and combining so generally in its adornment that it is utterly impossible to tell who did what part. All you can say is, that we three did all. After a dozen years, I buy a new pickaxe and begin to pry into the side wall of the house. My two friends, astonished at my position, inquire my design. "Oh," I reply, "I am going to build myself a separate house, and now I want my bricks." Do you think because those bricks are

mine and have my name on them, that my two friends will let me go on with my work, and pull the house down about their ears? Do you think they would do *right* to let me? nay, do you not see perfectly that it is their *duty* to stop me, and, if necessary, put me in a strait-jacket? Is it hard to see that the abstract fact of my complete sovereignty over those bricks is vastly modified by my association with my two friends? So, then, I say, that all the proof of original State sovereignty (even if it were possible) goes for nothing, in view of the facts presented in our country's condition. We are one people, under one Government, and armed resistance to that Government is rebellion, and rebellion is accursed of God. Having thus settled the question of the character of this war, that it is a *rebellion*, let me briefly note one or two other questions which naturally suggest themselves. The first is: "Are there not such things as righteous rebellions?" I reply: "No;* the Bible speaks all one way; it denounces rebellion even against a Nero. Paul wrote this very text to Christians living under the very shadow of that monster-tyrant's palace. Paul was no admirer of that Nero, who ere long was to order Paul's head to be struck off, and yet he revered government and law as the reflection of the divine order, and, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, he

* This does not, of course, touch the question of a peaceable change of either administration or government.

said of this fierce despotic government to its subjects :
“ *They that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.*”
Another question now springs up in every American breast : “ What do you say, then, of the American Revolution ? Was that unjustifiable and wrong ?” By no means. That war is rightly called a revolution and not a rebellion. The British Government did not attempt to exercise its own authority over the American Colonies, but the British monarch endeavored to annul the British Constitution and Government as far as the Colonies were concerned. The Colonies rose to arms, not to inaugurate a new order of things (which is the object of rebellion), but to resist such a new order of things which the King of England wished to inaugurate. The Colonies stood by their time-honored legitimate Government, and never would have sought independence had not the British King actually withdrawn the British Constitution from them. There is no analogy between such a manly adherence to law by a whole people, and the secession of a portion of a nation from a righteous Government, in order to erect a new empire, antagonistic in its principles and position to the nation from which it secedes. Now, in the light of our text, let us seek the answer to two questions.

1. *What is the duty of every Christian citizen in regard to this rebellion ?* I reply, to stand by the side of Almighty God and denounce it utterly, and to uphold the Govern-

ment of the country in its efforts to destroy it. Any sympathy for the rebellion, whether secret or open, is sin against God. It is taking issue with God in His strong and positive denunciation of rebellion. Now, in all times of public commotion, and especially in civil war, mistakes will be made, illegalities committed, and injuries inflicted through the hurry and confusion of the hour. There never was a national disturbance without these. It is consequent upon the frailty, weakness, and ignorance of human nature. It is one of the many sad results of war. These irregularities should, doubtless, be noted and righted; but let us take care lest, in trying to right these subordinate evils, we assist the giant evil of all, *the rebellion itself*. If, because there are arbitrary arrests made by the Government in its prosecution of this war, I turn traitor and give aid and comfort to the rebellion by praising its principles, singing pæans in honor of its victories, and apologizing for its sins, thus weakening, to the extent of my influence, the public conscience on this great moral and religious question of rebellion, I am myself violating a law of God, because my Government has infringed upon human rights! Where is the logic or the Christianity of this? Let me expostulate and argue against any and every error the Government may commit; but by my regard for God's holy law, let me so do this as in no wise to connive at rebellion or assist its success. Let my voice and action be consistently and

continually directed against this monster iniquity, and let no lesser question of personal rights, much less of policy and party, weaken my zeal or pervert my energy. If I, for any reason, philosophical, social, or political, am ready to yield to any of the demands of rebellion, while I have power to resist it, I am compounding with felony, and am myself a rebel, exposing myself to the threatened judgment of the text. And this leads to our second question.

2. *What is to be the issue with the rebels?* "They that resist shall receive to themselves damnation." God is against them, and His wrath shall consume them. Temporary gains shall only make more woful their final destruction. It is not a question of North and South, of democracy and aristocracy, of Slavery and Antislavery, however much these questions may prove concomitants; but it is a question of obedience to law and rebellion—a question raised above all human expediences and party platforms—a question not between man and man, but between God and man, and woe to him who is found fighting against God. God has given our nation the power to put down this rebellion, and He has ordered us to put it down. We must do one of two things—put it down and be God's ministers of vengeance for this odious crime against Him, *or else* draw back from the appointed task, shake hands with rebellion, and thus, becoming rebels ourselves, suffer with them the fierce

punishment which God will inflict by some other agent whom He will raise up for the purpose. For rebellion must and will be punished. God declares it, and in all history He has kept His word. He cannot lie—and when he says, “they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation” (or punishment), there is no loophole of escape for the most cunning or most plausible rebel. God’s rules are perfect—they have no exceptions. If we compromise with this rebellion we shall bring down woes most fearful on our country’s future. We cannot tell what those woes shall be; but we do know that, as God is sovereign and His word is true, they shall surely come and shall bear the sharp sting of His most holy justice. *We* may compound with sin, but *God* can’t. It is a source of gratitude to believe that this nation is alive to its duty—that however we may honestly differ about men and special measures (in which may we agree to differ in all Christian charity), yet we are determined, by God’s guidance and help, to tread out the last spark of rebellion, not abating one jot of the demand (which is God’s, not ours) of implicit obedience to the Government of our country. Let us, then, on this day of thanksgiving, render our hearty thanks to Heaven, that through three and a half years of this sad war, the great heart of the nation has not faltered—that while made to suffer for its own many sins, yet it has clearly discerned that in the great sin of the war, rebellion, it

was firmly fixed upon the vantage-ground of truth and right, and that it must not stay its arm, for duty hallowed every blow.

Let us give thanks that, during this long and unexampled struggle, our God has signally interposed to defend us while we were acting as the minister of God, who beareth not the sword in vain, as the revenger to execute wrath upon the evil-doer. He has marvellously sustained our finances—he has preserved the loyal part of the nation (with a small exception) from the ravages of war—He has forbidden all foreign interference, which threatened us so long and so formidably, and He has given the work of reducing the rebellion a constant and sure advance. Three years and a half ago, the rebellion began with flying colors, claiming fifteen States of the Union. It was thoroughly prepared with arms and armies, plans and provisions, while the Government was surprised amid its utter weakness and emptiness. What do we see now? The Government strong in means and men—with mighty fleets and armies, and the rebellion contracted within the area of *six* States and two half States, with its last man and boy in the field, all its strongholds either taken or beleaguered, its whole life exhausted and gasping. Let us heartily thank God for this vast progress He has given to the cause of country and truth, remembering that to Him all praise belongs.

And let us especially, to-day, thank our Heavenly Father for the threefold success of our arms within the past month—the seizure of the Weldon Railroad, the capture of the Mobile forts, and the fall of Atlanta. Much as we owe to our noble Generals and Admirals, with their brave followers, I would forget to-day all human agencies, and look *only* to the Supreme Power, who has heard the prayer of faith, and stretched out His hand in behalf of the nation's integrity and His own holy law. Let our hearts be buoyant with His praise, and let our faith be strong in His promises and threatenings, knowing that according to the resoluteness of our faith will be our safety and success. It is He who redeems our souls from death and hell by His blood, who also controls the movements of our earthly life; and as faith gives us the victory in the one case, so will faith give us the victory in the other. Let us, then, know no wavering; but as lovers of our country and lovers of our God, resting upon the truth which has formed the subject of our morning's consideration, let us with a firm determination set our faces as a flint against this iniquitous rebellion till its last nerve has quivered and its last breath has fled.

