

actions; make me always humble, thankful, and contented both towards thee and towards man.

Bless this whole family to which I belong, and sow in all our hearts the seeds of unfeigned charity; that we may enjoy the comfort of mutual affection, and of mutual help in our several places.

And grant, that being protected by thy providence, directed by thy word, and assisted by thy Holy Spirit, we may be admitted into thy kingdom in heaven, through Jesus Christ our Lord; in whose holy name and words I continue to pray,

Our Father, &c.

## SERMON XXXIII.

### DUTY OF SUBJECTS.

ROM. xiii. 1.

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.

It is one of the excellencies of our holy religion, that it extends to every part of our temper and conduct. Not only does it inculcate piety towards God, and the acknowledged virtues of humility, temperance, justice, and charity, but it enters into the various relations of social life, and points out the peculiar duties which belong to each of them.

Among the several duties which it thus enforces upon us as members of society, is that of obedience to civil government—the duty of quiet submission to the established laws and constitution of the country, in which the providence of God has placed us. This duty is inculcated in many parts of the holy Scriptures, but most strongly and remarkably in the thirteenth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans.

At the time when St. Paul wrote this Epistle, there was peculiar necessity for insisting on this subject. Many of the Jews, of whom there were considerable numbers residing at Rome, appear to have entertained the idea, that having received



their laws immediately from God himself, and having for a course of years been governed under his immediate protection, they were not only exempted from paying obedience or tribute to any heathen government, but could not pay it without being guilty of a sort of rebellion against God. It was this notion that occasioned the question to our Saviour, as to the lawfulness of paying tribute to the heathen emperor of Rome. It is probable too, that some of the early Christians so far misunderstood the nature of their religion and of that liberty wherewith Christ had made them free, as to imagine that it allowed them to refuse submission to authority merely human, especially when that authority was placed in the hands of heathens and idolaters. They might be the rather tempted to encourage those mistaken opinions, because the Roman emperors, to whom the greatest part of the world then known was in subjection, had originally acquired their power by violence, exercised it in a despotic manner, and were generally in their personal characters depraved and dissolute. At all events, we know, that their enemies represented them as being turbulent men, who turned the world upside down, as movers of sedition, and enemies to established governments.

Against these mistaken notions, dangerous in themselves, and calculated to bring discredit upon the Christian religion,—to cause the word of God to be evil-spoken of,<sup>a</sup>—St. Paul anxiously cautions his converts. Neither their spiritual privileges, whether as Jews or Christians, on the one hand, nor any defects in the personal characters or original title of their rulers on the other, could set them at liberty to refuse obedience as subjects. Religion requires quiet submission to the established govern-

<sup>a</sup> Titus ii. 5.

ment and laws. “Let every soul”—whether Jew or Christian, whether learned or unlearned, whether rich or poor—“let every soul” without exception, “be subject unto the higher powers.”

St. Paul was so anxious to enforce this duty of obedience to government, that in the direction which he gives to Titus, and, through him, to all succeeding ministers of the Gospel with respect to their public instructions, he particularly mentions the inculcation of this duty. “Put them in mind,” says he, “to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates.”<sup>b</sup> We may here remark, by the way, that so far is the subject of obedience to government from being a subject which the ministers of religion do well to avoid, that it is particularly pointed out to them by St. Paul as a subject on which they ought to insist.

St. Paul enforces this duty by the most powerful argument, by asserting that it is required of us by the obedience which we owe to God himself. “There is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God.”

Civil government of some sort, is not only absolutely essential to the peace and well-being of society, but is to be regarded as the institution of God himself; who, when he first created man, intended him to live in orderly society, not in savage wildness with his hand against every man, and every man’s hand against him. I say, civil government of *some sort*, for the Scriptures no where appear to prescribe any particular form of government, or to say whether the supreme power shall be placed in the hands of *one*, or of a *few*, or of *many*.

If, however, civil government is to be looked upon as the ordinance of God, it then necessarily

<sup>b</sup> Titus iii. 1.



follows, as it is said in the next verse, "Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God, and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation;" shall be deservedly condemned to punishment in this world, and shall be in danger of eternal condemnation in the world to come, for their disobedience to the divine law.

The next verse suggests the great reason for which civil government was instituted: "For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil."

Although civil government in its origin be of divine appointment, yet its particular form, and laws, and regulations, are of human institution, and like all human institutions, must be expected to be full of imperfections. And even, were they not so in themselves, yet being administered by such a weak and sinful being as man, there will in the administration of them be always many faults to be found. Still, the general object and tendency of government are, the protection of the persons and property of its subjects, the encouragement of what is good, and the prevention or punishment of what is bad. Those, consequently, who wish to live quietly, and to cultivate in themselves and others habits of piety and virtue, generally regard government as a friend, and rejoice in the protection afforded by it; while it is an enemy to those whose wishes and practices are evil, who would be glad to own no law but their own will. As religion is rejected and opposed by men, whose sins and vices make it their interest that religion should be false; so the persons who, in any country, are most ready to rise in active and forcible resistance to the established government, are generally those whose actual crimes, or whose inclination to iniquity, make them unable to bear the restraint which government imposes on them. They are against the laws, because the laws are against them. I say, generally,

for there may possibly be some exceptions; and I speak of *violent* and *forcible resistance*, as distinguished from that temperate opposition to those by whom the government is administered, which the established constitution itself may allow, and which is often useful.

It is on account of the protection, which the orderly and well-disposed—the quiet in the land—receive from government, that we are in another place directed to pray for its preservation. "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;"<sup>c</sup> and why? "That we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty."

"Wilt thou then," continues St. Paul, "not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same." If you do that which is good, if you keep your passions, and lusts, and appetites, under the control of reason and religion, and live in obedience to the laws of God and man, the government which you live under, so far from being an irksome restraint upon you, or an object of fear and dread, is to be regarded, generally speaking, in the light of a protector and friend, disposed to encourage and applaud your good conduct: "Thou shalt have praise of the same."

"But," says the Apostle, "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."<sup>d</sup>

It has been argued, and with much force and appearance of reason, that it is only inasmuch as civil government is the institution of God, and derives its authority from him, that it has a right to

<sup>c</sup> 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2.

<sup>d</sup> Rom. xiii. 4.



use the *sword*, to inflict capital punishment. Certainly, the civil power should be very backward to use the sword, and should never cut off any of its subjects, and send them to that place where is no repentance, but with the greatest caution and reluctance. The power over man's life belongs to *Him* by whom man was created. He can delegate that power to his ministers on earth; and it appears from this passage of St. Paul, and from other places of Scripture, that he has so delegated it. But then, as I said before, this power is not to be exercised except in cases of apparent necessity, and recourse should be had to almost any mode of punishment rather than to this.

The fear of punishment by human laws is a necessary and wholesome restraint upon those who are not properly influenced by a sense of duty to God. The sense of religious obligation, however, is the best and strongest safeguard to obedience. The Apostle accordingly continues—"Wherefore ye must needs be subject not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake." You must be subject—must obey the laws of your country—not only for wrath—not only from fear of the temporal punishment to which disobedience would expose you—but also for conscience sake, from a sense of the duty which you owe to God. It is in the same spirit that in the book of Ecclesiastes the wise man says—"I counsel thee to keep the king's commandment, and that in regard of the oath of God."<sup>e</sup>

The well known passage in St. Peter's first Epistle is very similar to this of St. Paul—"Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake:"—for the Lord's sake, answers to the conscience sake in the Epistle to the Romans—

<sup>e</sup> Eccles. viii. 2.

"Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well."<sup>f</sup>

The same considerations also extend to the payment of taxes. "For, for this cause," continues St. Paul, "pay ye tribute also; for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing."<sup>g</sup> The right of civil government to receive tribute, or taxes, arises from the circumstance of its being of divine appointment, from the protection which it affords to persons and property, from its being a terror to evil-workers, and an encouragement to those that do well, from its attending continually upon this very thing. Money raised by public tribute and customs ought, doubtless, to be administered with the utmost economy. Profuseness in the public expenditure is, in many points of view, a great evil, and throws blame upon those to whom it is to be attributed. But the evil will appear the less, when the money thus raised returns into the country again, and is spent in articles of manufacture and commerce, and in finding employment for the artisan and labourer. The duty respecting public taxes prescribed by St. Paul, is to pay them honestly and fairly. "For this cause pay ye tribute also;" and again, "Render therefore to all their dues, tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom." In the same manner our blessed Lord himself, when asked whether it was lawful to pay tribute to a heathen and foreign sovereign, answered, "Render unto Cesar the things which are Cesar's, and unto God the things that are God's."<sup>h</sup>

But St. Paul, in the passage before us, requires

<sup>f</sup> 1 Peter ii. 13, 14.    <sup>g</sup> Rom. xiii. 6.    <sup>h</sup> Matt. xxii. 21.  
K k



us not only to pay tribute and custom where they are due, but also to render "fear to whom fear" is due, "honour to whom honour." The office and dignity of the supreme ruler in any state ought always to be treated with respect and honour. Whatever defects may be supposed to exist in the personal character of any sovereign—and from defects of some sort no human being is free—still, these do not set his subjects at liberty to withhold that honour and respect which is due to his office.

Such, then, appears to be the Scripture doctrine with respect to the duty of subjects. It requires dutiful obedience to the laws of the country in which we live, and a reasonable respect and deference for those by whom the government is administered. Religion does not require implicit and servile subjection to the will of any man, however high in authority; or undistinguishing approbation of the measures of any government; but it enjoins a quiet submission to the laws of the land. I may add, that both the spirit and the precepts of religion would incline us to view the conduct of our rulers in as favourable a light as it is fairly capable of, and to make all proper allowances for the various and manifold difficulties of their situation. At the same time they would check a disposition to exaggerate their faults and failings, to condemn them without proof, or to impute their conduct to unworthy motives. "Curse not the king, no, not in thy thought," says the book of Ecclesiastes;<sup>i</sup> and it is written in the law of Moses, "Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people."<sup>k</sup> Those "presumptuous, self-willed" men, who "despise government," and "are not afraid to speak evil of dignities"—who "speak evil of the things they understand not"—who, "while they promise li-

<sup>i</sup> Eccles. x. 20.

<sup>k</sup> Acts xxiii. 5, and Exod. xxii. 28.

erty, are themselves the servants of corruption," are compared by St. Peter to "natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed."<sup>l</sup> In proportion as *self-will, presumption, vanity*, or a desire "to walk after the flesh" in the ways of unrighteousness, prevail either in the governors or the governed, civil dissensions will more and more increase and multiply. They will lead the rulers to be guilty of oppression, and the people to fall into disaffection, turbulence, and sedition.

Let us implore God by his grace to subdue these evil principles both in ourselves and in others, and to increase in all parties public spirit, humility, meekness, and charity.<sup>m</sup> Let us ever remember, that civil government is not only most useful and necessary in itself, but is to be looked upon as the ordinance of God, and that submission to it is a religious duty, which we are to pay *for the Lord's sake*. Let us keep in mind the injunction in the Old Testament—"Fear thou the Lord and the king, and meddle not with them that are given to change."<sup>n</sup> Let us remember the admonition of St. Peter in the New Testament—"Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king."<sup>o</sup>

<sup>l</sup> 2 Peter ii. 10, 12, 19.

<sup>m</sup> See the Christian Duty of Obedience to Rulers, by the Rev. R. Whately.

<sup>n</sup> Prov. xxiv. 21.

<sup>o</sup> 1 Peter ii. 17.

THE END.



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