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THE DUTY OF CHRISTIANS TO CIVIL GOVERNMENT:

A

S E R M O N,

PREACHED IN

LADY GLENORCHY'S CHAPEL, EDINBURGH,

On the 29th November, 1798,

BEING THE DAY APPOINTED BY HIS MAJESTY
FOR A GENERAL THANKSGIVING.

BY GREVILLE EWING, *K*

MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL.

EDINBURGH:

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*If any Profit shall arise from the Sale of this Sermon,
it will be given to the Society for Propagating the
Gospel at Home.*



TO THE

*CONGREGATION OF LADY GLENORCHY'S
CHAPEL, EDIN.*

THIS SERMON, which was the last he had the honour to preach to them, is respectfully inscribed, as a small Token of Love, Esteem, and Gratitude, by their late Pastor, and ever affectionate Well-wisher and Servant for Christ's sake,

THE AUTHOR.

THE DUTIES OF CHRISTIANS TO CIVIL GOVERNMENT:

A

S E R M O N.

TIT. iii. 1.

*Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers,
to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work.*

WE are this day called together, by royal proclamation, to give thanks to Almighty God, for his manifold mercies to the land in which we live; particularly for a recent victory in distant seas, and for various other signal interpositions of Providence, whereby the invasion of these kingdoms has been prevented, and intestine commotions repressed. The operations of war, the Christian must, in every
A case,

case, deplore. A field, or a sea of blood, which is shocking to the man of mere humanity, is peculiarly horrible to a mind that is impressed with the general wickedness of man, and with the belief of future judgment and eternity. Whatever be the ostensible cause, or the immediate occasion, the Christian is assured that wars and fightings come of our lusts, that war in our members. He regards them therefore as grounds of deep humiliation. He daily prays for their speedy termination. And he rejoices in the prospect of a blessed period, when, through the prevalence of the gospel, “men shall beat their swords into plough-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: when nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither learn war any more.”

But however much the operations of war are to be lamented, the events of it, like all other events, should be regarded as the work of God. These, the Christian will observe, with admiration of the wisdom, power, justice, and all the other divine attributes, which they serve to illustrate. If they have the effect of chastising him, he endeavours to submit with resignation: if they afford him protection or deliverance, he
feels

feels himself called upon to be thankful. The events which are the occasion of our present meeting, have been the means of crushing civil war, of averting invasion, and of diminishing the power of the invaders to renew their attempt. For these inestimable blessings it is indeed a duty to be thankful, and we have accordingly been offering up thanksgiving with prayer to God. What a mercy, brethren, that we live in a country, where the powers that be, invite us to engage in such delightful exercise ! Had our lot been cast in a neighbouring land, or had the designs of Frenchmen respecting us been accomplished ; instead of giving thanks this day to God, we might have been observing one of their unhallowed *Decades*, or perhaps suffering persecution, for a conscientious adherence to the observation of the Lord's day.

I hope it will not be thought, that I undervalue the immediate causes of thanksgiving, because I do not make them the sole, or the chief subject of this discourse. They are all universally known and well understood. Their importance to our present safety, and to the probable acceleration of peace, has of late been largely discussed in the public papers, and almost

most in every private conversation. Besides, the subject proposed, although general in itself; is intimately connected with the particular calls for our gratitude. In vain shall the hostile designs of invasion be frustrated, unless we live quiet and peaceable lives, and attend to relative and public duties at home. I trust, therefore, that I shall now, by the blessing of God, speak a word in season, if, in obedience to Paul's instruction to ministers in the text, I *put you in mind* of your duty to government, although I believe that most, if not all of you, already *know it, and are established in the present truth.*

On the words of our text, it may be proper, in the outset, to make two remarks. The first is, that the terms, "principalities, powers, and magistrates," are of a general nature. Terms of this kind are commonly used in every part of the New Testament, where our duty to the higher powers is treated of, and the reason seems to be, that the Christian's duty towards them does not depend on any particular form of government. It is not necessary for him to examine the comparative merits of monarchy, aristocracy, or democracy; or to appreciate the excellence of a mixture of these forms, such as
 obtains

obtains in the British constitution; it is enough for him to know, that the principalities, powers, and magistrates, call them what you will, are the existing and acknowledged government of the country in which he lives. That point he cannot be at a loss to ascertain, and when it is ascertained, he knows to whom the precepts of the text refer.

The second remark upon the words is, that there seems to be a gradation of duties here enjoined. "Put them in mind," says the apostle, "to be *subject* to principalities and powers, to *obey* magistrates, to be *ready to every good work.*" *Subjection* is merely passive, and may be the effect of constraint. *Obedience* implies activity, from regard to authority. *Readiness to every good work*, seems to denote an activity, which is caused, not so much by regard to authority, as to the excellence of the thing authorized. "Every good work," here, though an indefinite phrase, seems, from the connection, to mean chiefly, works which are good for society; which immediately promote the public welfare; and as such may be acceptable to the higher powers. The lesson couched in this last clause, seems to be, that where a thing is truly good in
itself,

itself, although it may not be absolutely enjoined by authority, although it may be simply recommended, or even only encouraged indirectly; yet the Christian should cheerfully afford it his countenance; should be active in endeavouring to give a favourable direction to public opinion; to raise the general standard of morals; and to carry on every benevolent and useful undertaking. Here, therefore, he is enjoined to be, not merely submissive and obedient, but zealous, and indefatigable for the public good.

In discoursing further from these words, we shall first read some passages of the New Testament, where the subject before us is more fully treated. We shall next draw a few inferences which these passages seem to warrant. And then reply to some objections.

In the *First* place, We shall read some passages of the New Testament, where the subject before us, is more fully treated. And here we shall begin by examining, how Paul did that himself, which in the text he requires Timothy to do. For this purpose you may read, Rom. xiii. 1,---8. " Let every soul be subject unto the
" higher

“ higher powers, for there is no power but of
 “ God ; the powers that be, are ordained of
 “ God. Whofoever, 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. For, for this
 “ cause pay you tribute also ; for they are God’s
 “ ministers, attending continually upon this ve-
 “ ry thing. Render therefore to all their dues,
 “ tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to
 “ whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to
 “ whom honour. Owe no man any thing, but
 “ to love one another ; for he that loveth ano-
 “ ther, hath fulfilled the law.” Read also,
 1 Tim. ii. 1,---4. “ I exhort therefore, that first
 “ of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and
 “ giving

“ 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. For this is good and
 “ acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour ;
 “ who will have all men to be saved, and to
 “ come unto the knowledge of the truth.” We
 may likewise observe the harmony of the doc-
 trine of Paul and Peter upon this subject, 1 Pet.
 ii. 11,---17. “ Dearly beloved, I beseech you as
 “ strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly
 “ lusts, which war against the soul ; having your
 “ conversation honest among the Gentiles, that
 “ whereas they speak against you as evil doers,
 “ they may, by your good works which they
 “ shall behold, glorify God in the day of visita-
 “ tion. 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 pu-
 “ nishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of
 “ them that do well. For so is the will of God,
 “ that with well-doing, ye may put to silence
 “ the ignorance of foolish men. As free, and
 “ not using your liberty for a cloke of malici-
 “ ousness, but as the servants of God. Honour
 “ all

“ all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God.
 “ Honour the king.”

The best illustration of precept, is example of acknowledged conformity to its letter and spirit. Examples, suited to the case before us, may be found in the lives both of Christ and his apostles. Read Matt. xvii. 24,---27. “ And
 “ when they were come to Capernaum, they
 “ that received tribute money, came to Peter,
 “ and said, Doth not your master pay tribute?
 “ He saith, Yes. And when he was come into
 “ the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What
 “ thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings
 “ of the earth take custom or tribute? of their
 “ own children or of strangers? Peter saith
 “ unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him,
 “ Then are the children free. Notwithstanding,
 “ lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea,
 “ and cast an hook, and take up the fish that
 “ first cometh up; and when thou hast opened
 “ his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money;
 “ that take, and give unto them for me and
 “ thee.” Turn next to Matt. xxii. 15,---22.
 “ Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel
 “ how they might entangle him in his talk.
 “ And they sent out unto him their disciples,
 B “ with

“ with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know
 “ that thou art true, and teachest the way of
 “ God in truth, neither carest thou for any man,
 “ for thou regardest not the person of men.
 “ Tell us therefore, what thinkest thou? is it
 “ lawful to give tribute unto Cesar or not? But
 “ Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said,
 “ Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? shew me the
 “ tribute-money. And they brought unto him
 “ a penny. And he saith unto them, Whose is
 “ this image and superscription? They say un-
 “ to him, Cesar’s. Then saith he unto them,
 “ Render therefore unto Cesar the things which
 “ are Cesar’s, and unto God the things that
 “ are God’s. When they had heard these words,
 “ they marvelled, and left him, and went their
 “ way.” Such was the conduct, and such the
 sentiments of Jesus Christ. Many instances of
 the behaviour of his apostles to the higher powers,
 are recorded. At present we shall read only the
 following: Acts iv. 18, 19, 20. “ And they cal-
 “ led them, and commanded them not to speak
 “ at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus. But
 “ Peter and John answered, and said unto them,
 “ Whether it be right in the sight of God to
 “ hearken unto you more than unto God, judge
 “ ye.

“ ye. For we cannot but speak the things
 “ which we have seen and heard.” Acts
 v. 24,---29. “ Now, when the high priest, and
 “ the captain of the temple, and the chief priests,
 “ heard these things, they doubted of them
 “ whereunto this would grow. Then came one
 “ and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom
 “ ye put in prison are standing in the temple,
 “ and teaching the people. Then went the
 “ captain with the officers, and brought them
 “ without violence : (for they feared the peo-
 “ ple, lest they should have been stoned :) And
 “ when they had brought them they set them
 “ before the council : and the high priest asked
 “ them, saying, Did not we straitly command
 “ you that ye should not teach in this name ?
 “ and behold ye have filled Jerusalem with your
 “ doctrine, and intend to bring this man’s blood
 “ upon us. Then Peter and the other apostles
 “ answered, and said, We ought to obey God
 “ rather than men.”

The value of a precept may often be strong-
 ly displayed, by contrasting with the character
 of those who obey it, that of those by whom it
 is despised. In the 2d chap. of the 2d epistle
 of Peter, after describing false teachers, as the
worst

worst of men, the apostle says at the 9th verse,
 “ The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly
 “ out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust
 “ unto the day of judgment to be punished ;
 “ ver. 10. 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.” To the same purpose are the
 words of Jude, ver. 8. “ Likewise also those fil-
 “ thy dreamers defile the flesh, despise domi-
 “ nion, and speak evil of dignities.”

We shall read the scriptures to little purpose, unless we do it with a child-like, with an humble and teachable disposition. Such a disposition seems all that is necessary for understanding the plain passages which have been now read. Hoping therefore that the Lord will give it us, at this time, we shall proceed to the

Second thing proposed, which was to draw a few inferences, which seem to be warranted by our text, and by the other portions of scripture with which it has been compared.

First, then, The subjection of a Christian to the higher powers, ought to be Conscien-
 tious.

tious. Many submit to government merely because they must do it. They obey, because they dare not rebel. A period of anarchy they would welcome as a season of emancipation and festivity ; or if they disliked it, their motive would be, rather that of fear for the consequences towards themselves, than that of duty towards God and their neighbour. But the Christian is taught, that the powers that be are ordained of God ; that they all exist by divine permission and appointment ; nay, that the existing power is the minister of God to the Christian for good. However imperfect human laws and human administration may be, he is sensible, that even a government comparatively bad, is better for society than none. At any rate, he knows that the measures of the higher powers, like all things else, shall work together for good to him, and to all his fellow Christians. He therefore cheerfully submits to the ordinance of God, and is subject, not only for wrath, but for conscience sake.

Secondly, The Christian's subjection must be Unresisting. Many confess their obligation of duty to the higher powers, but perplex themselves with questions respecting the extent of
that

that obligation. I have no hesitation in saying, that I conceive the precept enjoining subjection, to be absolute. “Whosoever resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist, shall receive to themselves damnation.” These awful words are limited by no exception; and however strong they may seem, they are in perfect unison, both with the general morality of the gospel, and with all the examples in point that are to be found in the New Testament. Put the strongest case you please; that, suppose of persecution, or of any violent dealing under form of law; the morality of the gospel will still countenance the principle for which we contend. “Ye have heard,” saith Christ, “that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil,” Matth. v. 38, 39. “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial, which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you. But rejoice, in as much as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye;

“ye;

“ ye ; for the spirit of glory, and of God rest-
 “ eth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken
 “ of, but on your part he is glorified. But let
 “ none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a
 “ thief, or as an evil-doer, or as a busy-body in
 “ other mens matters. Yet if any man suffer
 “ as a Christian, let him not be ashamed ; but
 “ let him glorify God on this behalf,” 1 Pet. iv.
 12,---16. If resistance had ever been allowa-
 ble in Christians, it must surely have been so,
 when the liberty and the life of their Lord was
 attacked. But even then, it was checked, and
 that not merely, because he was delivered by
 the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of
 God, but because it is not suited to the na-
 ture of his kingdom. “ My kingdom,” said
 Christ, “ is not of this world: if my king-
 “ dom were of this world, then would my ser-
 “ vants fight, that I should not be delivered to
 “ the Jews ; but now is my kingdom not from
 “ hence.” John xviii. 36.

If men in power should issue an order, prohi-
 biting us to obey an express command of God ;
 we could be at no loss, which of the interfering
 authorities to prefer. But there may be even
 a refusal to obey, where there is no resistance.

This

This case receives a very happy illustration from the behaviour of Peter and John, of which the account was a little ago read. When the Jewish rulers forbade what Christ commanded, those apostles very properly answered, "We ought to obey God rather than men;" and they acted upon the principle of their answer. But they did not resist the violent interruption that was given them in the discharge of their duty. They did not resist the summons, nor the order of commitment. When threatened, they threatened not again. When summoned a second time, they obeyed as before, and that, although there was no compulsion. For we are told, that "the captain, with the officers, brought them without violence, because they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned." The force of this precedent seems altogether irresistible. On the one hand, here was a set of murderers, endeavouring to conceal one sin by committing another. That the blood of Jesus might not be laid to their charge, they were commanding the apostles not to speak at all, nor teach in his name, although nothing less than the salvation of the world depended on their doing it. On the other hand, here

were

were men of the most unblemished character, who had wrought a notable miracle, and were preaching heavenly doctrine, and their persecutors could say nothing against either the one or the other. What is above all to be remarked, the persecutors had rendered themselves odious, and the apostles, for the moment, were become so popular, that they might be supposed to have had the power, as well as the right, to resist. If the people were ready to stone the captain and his officers of their own accord, how much more would they have been so, if the apostles had given them any encouragement. A rescue at least might have been made, if not a decisive rebellion. No such thing, however, was attempted; and we may be well assured, that no such thing would have been permitted. The apostles knew, that in cases of persecution, the only lawful means of relief for a Christian, is flight from one place to another; and when opportunity of doing so, is denied, the will of Christ evidently is, that his servants should be brought before governors and kings for his sake, for a testimony against them, and the Gentiles. Matth. x. 18.---23.

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It is hardly necessary to add, that unresisting subjection, though utterly opposed to all conspiracy and violence, does not interfere with the use of constitutional and acknowledged privileges. When imprisoned, when bound, when in danger of a partial trial, Paul availed himself of the rights of a Roman. His conduct on these occasions may be explained by one of his own exhortations, 1 Cor. vii. 21. "Art thou called being a servant? (or slave), care not for it; but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather." The principle evidently was this obvious dictate of Christian morality, which will also apply to the subject before us, that whatever Christ calls us to endure, we are to submit to with cheerfulness, and whatever he permits us to possess, we are to enjoy with gratitude.

Thirdly, The Christian's subjection must be Disinterested. Some men may think themselves sufficiently conscientious in their duty to government, if they perform with common honesty any service in which government employs them, and for which they receive an adequate reward. They may profess loyalty, because it is their interest to do so; and, in the true spirit of hypocrisy,
be

be perhaps officious to make their profession, and censorious of those who are not so loud in making it as themselves. Far be it from me to throw out this as a general reflection on those who are engaged in any public department. We are no doubt bound in charity to believe, that they are as conscientious, generally speaking, as men in other situations of life. But it is surely not too much, for the sake of illustration, to state, as at least a possible case; that some men may seem to be loyal, because they have their price, either in possession, or in expectation; that, if this venal disposition should prevail, it would prove extremely embarrassing to any government; and that none would be more dangerous to the hand that feeds them, than venal friends, if interest, which is a variable consideration, should ever tempt them to change their party. The Christian must not be swayed by filthy lucre. He must submit himself to every ordinance of man, for the Lord's sake. His principle is at once exalted and steady. It requires the most uniform fidelity of conduct, whether he occupy a public or a private station; whether his services be properly rewarded, or not; nay, although they should

should be despised or even misunderstood, and turned into matter of accusation against him.

Fourthly, The subjection of the Christian must be Respectful. Among the dues that belong to the higher powers, it is said, Render "fear to whom fear is due; honour to whom honour." On the other hand, it is mentioned as sin in the false teachers, that "they despised government, and spake evil of dignities." We are in great danger of thinking little of sin, in these particulars; and yet no sins are more pregnant with mischief to society. The difference between great and little among men, when viewed abstractly, is no doubt very trifling. We have the authority of Scripture for saying, "Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie: to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity." Psal. lxxii. 9. The possession of power, however, is very apt to intoxicate the mind, and to render men overbearing, haughty, and vain. Hence, the insolence of office has become proverbial. The titles of dignity are frequently extravagant, and are often retained, after the authority that belonged to them is so completely obsolete, that their very meaning is hardly remembered.

membered. On these accounts the pride of inferi-
 ors is ready to take offence ; and the same prin-
 ciple which makes the one class of society ty-
 rannical and ostentatious, makes the other re-
 fractory and turbulent. When its workings are
 confined to the indignant feelings of the mind,
 or at least to merely verbal expressions of con-
 tempt, men are sometimes disposed to overlook
 it as harmless. There are some who would e-
 ven encourage a licentiousness of speech in the
 inferior classes, as a salutary check upon the
 manners of their superiors. And there are o-
 thers who conscientiously refuse to give titles of
 rank to a fellow creature, or so much as to use
 the ordinary phrases of civility, under the no-
 tion that these things are inconsistent with a pro-
 per regard to the word of God. But, except per-
 haps in the last case, the withholding of expres-
 sions of respect, is the symptom of an improper
 spirit. God requires us to exercise humility,
 not only towards him, but also towards one a-
 nother. Where contempt is cherished, obedi-
 ence will not long continue to be faithfully
 paid. The bands of society will be probably
 broken, and authority, robbed of its due respect,
 will have recourse to coercion, as the only re-
 maining

maintaining means to preserve its existence. Hence, the squabbles of party, and the dreadful commotions of civil war, which, however they may terminate, are pernicious in the extreme. I would remind even those who may have conscientious scruples on the subject, that the Scriptures recognize titles of office and dignity, as the means of preserving decency and order in society. Not to mention the numerous instances in the Old Testament, where servants of the Lord addressed even heathen kings, with the ordinary compliments of salutation to royalty; we find Paul, when under persecution, when rudely interrupted by a Roman governor, and charged with insanity, (which was certainly very ignoble conduct), not only replying with meekness, but using the language of respect, "I am not mad, *most noble* Festus; " but speak forth the words of truth and soberness." Acts xxvi. 25.

Fifthly, The subjection of the Christian must be Practical. Like every other part of his profession, it must be evinced by works. Among many of the professors of loyalty, there is reason to fear, that this is not the case. It is amazing, for example, how little conscience is made

made of defrauding the public revenue. Men who are not suspected of dishonesty in private transactions, will sometimes hardly deny that they heighten their charge, if it is a demand upon government. Smuggling is often acknowledged, as if it were neither dishonest nor dishonourable. Even perjury itself is awfully common. A custom-house oath is often held to be no farther binding, than men are prevented by vigilance from breaking it. All these crimes, however common, the Christian must abhor: The multiplication of oaths in collecting the revenue, is much to be lamented. But whatever improprieties may be committed in imposing them, they are nevertheless a solemn appeal to the omniscience of God and to future judgment. And if a man cannot live by his business without perjury, it were surely better that he gave up his business. If this conduct were followed, (supposing a case that might require it), things would be more likely soon to find their own level; the unproductiveness of the tax would point out the expediency of such alterations in the law, as would suit the interest, both of the fair trader and of the state. To smuggle, indeed, is a crime not merely against government, but against the
public

public at large. For if, through its frequency, the revenue prove deficient, it is evident that another tax must be levied on the honest, that the deficiency occasioned by the fraudulent may be made up. The payment, therefore, of taxes, is at once an obvious and an important duty. "For this cause pay you tribute also," saith the apostle, "for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues : tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom," Rom. xiii. 6, 7. We have seen that when a demand was made upon Christ for the half-shekel levied on every Jew for the service of the temple ; although, as Son of God and Lord of the temple, he might have claimed exemption, yet, that he might not give offence, he wrought a miracle, and paid the money. Again, when his enemies, wishing to entangle him in his talk, asked him whether it was lawful to give tribute to Cesar or not ? although that emperor had no other claim, than from what is called the right of conquest, yet, since his power was permitted in providence to exist, and his coin in consequence circulated through the country, the answer was, "Render there-
fore

“fore unto Cesar, the things which are Cesar’s,
 “and unto God the things that are God’s.”
 This was not an evasive answer, as if he had said,
 Give every one his own. Our Saviour did not
 give answers of that kind. It was an express
 declaration, that they ought to give to Cesar
 his tribute-money, and to God his worship, and
 that the one duty was not only consistent, but
 connected, with the other.

As it is absolutely a sin to refuse paying taxes,
 so it is very unbecoming in a Christian to mur-
 mur at the amount of them. His treasure is in
 heaven. Silver and gold are not his Gods. If
 taxes increase, God wills that he should be so
 much poorer, and good is the will of the Lord.
 Indeed, the precept to pay taxes should be con-
 sidered as a blessing. Had it not been given
 expressly, conscientious men might have thought
 it necessary to know first, how the money was
 to be applied, and to refuse wherever they dis-
 approved of the expenditure. This would have
 given occasion to endless trouble and contention.
 But now, in consequence of the express precept,
 all occasion of scruple or uneasiness is removed;
 and, as of old, Christians were permitted to buy
 whatever was sold in the shambles, asking no
 D questions

questions for conscience sake, so now, whatever is imposed as a tax, it is our duty simply to pay, and to owe no man any thing, but to love one another.

Sixthly, The Christian's subjection must be Pious. Common honesty may lead other men to imitate him in the preceding particulars, but here he will leave them wholly behind. Instead of the selfish spirit, which is contracted within itself, and which cherishes rather a sullen malignity, than a generous benevolence towards the higher powers; the Christian, animated by the love of God and his neighbour, is taught to offer up "supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, for all men; and particularly for kings, and for all that are in authority." How delightfully does grace enlarge and elevate the mind! Not content with doing good to all, as he has opportunity, and with rendering to all their dues, he still feels the debt of universal love; and in order to answer its unlimited demands, he draws by fervent effectual prayer on the inexhaustible treasury of heaven. Kings and men in authority, because they are commonly rich and mighty in the things of this world, are often thought to
have

have no need of prayers. They are too much neglected even by Christians, in secret and family devotion ; and when public prayer is made for them, there is sometimes visible a strange indifference, a cold formality, both in the minister and in the people. Brethren, these things ought not so to be. It is like Cain to say of any man, " Am I my brother's keeper ?" We should feel interested in other men, in proportion to the importance and difficulty of their several stations. Kings, therefore, and all in authority, claim a principal place in our requests to God. On their behaviour, in a great measure, depends our own happiness, and the happiness of many. They may either be left to breathe out threatenings and slaughter, or, by respecting the liberty of conscience, have the honour of being nursing fathers to the church of Christ. Besides, are we not to be earnestly concerned for their everlasting salvation ? Their situation is attended with peculiar temptations, which render their danger extreme. What a sad thing to see men so much engrossed by affairs of state, as to have little time to think of the affairs of their own souls ! And then they are almost beyond the reach of friendly admonition. A serious Christian

Christian

stian is perhaps seldom in their presence. What remains then, but that with peculiar earnestness we commend them to God, in whose hand is the heart of Kings, and who turneth them as the rivers of water. This duty should be enforced by a sense of the many benefits which we enjoy from civil government. At the same time, the obligation of it does not depend on these. Not even the greatest injuries could afford us a pretence for neglecting it. Was ever injury, like that of Jesus, when, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, he was taken, and by wicked hands crucified and slain? That injury was in some sense, chargeable upon Jewish and Roman governors; yet were they certainly included, if not chiefly intended, in that admirable prayer, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Luke xxiii. 34. See also 1 Cor. ii. 8. I have to add here, that the piety of the Christian's subjection is not in vain. Ten righteous men would have saved Sodom and Gomorrha from the fire of heaven. Wicked men are not aware how much they owe to the unknown prayers of the Lord's people. And, whatever becomes of the wicked, precious in

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the fight of the Lord, is the “ death of his
 “ faints.” If Sodom is to perish, a solitary Lot
 must first be warned to haste him, and escape,
 for the destroying angel: cannot do any thing
 till he be come unto Zoar. If judgment is to
 begin at the house of God itself, the Lord will
 say unto his servant, “ Go through the midst of
 “ the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and
 “ set a mark upon the forehead of the men that
 “ sigh, and that cry for all the abominations that
 “ be done in the midst thereof.” Ezek. ix, 4.

Let us now, as was proposed, in the

III. place, Reply to some Objections.

The doctrine of conscientious; or, as some
 may call it; passive obedience and non-resist-
 ance, is by no means popular. No doubt it
 has often been sadly abused; by court clergy-
 men, who certainly did not preach it in a scrip-
 tural manner, or with a proper spirit. But
 truth, though wrested, is still truth. If a doc-
 trine has been preached wrong, let us endea-
 vour to preach it right; but if it be asserted in
 Scripture, let us never be offended at it.

It may be said, this doctrine is an encourage-
 ment to tyrants, whom it is not only lawful,
 but

but our duty to resist. I cannot see, that Christians are any where in Scripture either bound, or warranted to resist even tyrants. Supposing, resistance were in certain cases lawful, the questions, when it is so, and how far it may be carried, must be always as difficult as they are critical. When are governors tyrants, and when not? What shall we do, when they are tyrannical in some things, and not in others? Shall we, in matters like these, tell the Christian to regulate his subjection, either by his own opinion, or by that of the public? Alas, he may be too simple to judge, or too much sequestered to obtain the needful information. The public mind may be much divided or much prejudiced, and its conduct such as would call rather for an opposing testimony, than an obsequious compliance. What incessant disturbances, what multiplied disputes, what distressing perplexities, would prevail in the church! How preferable then, both for its simplicity and safety, is the rule of Scripture! “Dearly
 “beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather
 “give place unto wrath: for it is written,
 “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the
 “Lord.” Rom. xii. 19. “Promotion cometh
 “neither

“ neither from the east, nor from the west, nor
 “ from the south. But God is judge : he put-
 “ teth down one, and setteth up another.” Pſal.
 lxxv. 6, 7. To him therefore who for wiſe
 ends ſetteth up, the Chriſtian ought to leave
 the putting down of tyrants. If it be argued,
 that we muſt uſe means, and that reſiſting ty-
 rants, implies not a ſpirit of vengeance, but ra-
 ther of benevolence to ſociety, I anſwer, Uſe
 only the means that are lawful, and you will
 find theſe at once the ſafeſt and the moſt effi-
 cacious for every ſalutary purpoſe. If what
 was ſaid before be according to Scripture, re-
 ſiſtance of higher powers can in no caſe be law-
 ful for a Chriſtian. And how much better will
 it be for him to oppoſe the proud and violent
 ſpirit of tyranny, by exemplifying the humble
 and meek ſpirit of the goſpel, than to give to
 tyrannical violence its moſt plauſible apology,
 by entering into the plots of conſpiracy, the
 combinations of faction, or the dreadful deeds
 of civil war ! When the little flock of Chriſt
 diſperſe, for the purpoſe of joining with world-
 ly men in political aſſociations, the incongruous
 connection is hurtful at once to the ſpiritual in-
 terests of their own minds, and to the credit of
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the gospel; and their awkward, scrupulous, half length co-operation in many of the measures pursued, exposes them to the contempt, the jealousy, and the hatred of the rest of their party. Even their small number renders them insignificant. But when they keep to their own shepherd, and their own fold, they dwell in quiet habitations, and in sure resting-places. Their consciences are not misled or overruled; their minds individually, and their communion with each other, are equally comfortable; and the influence of their avowed opinions, of their united example, of their heavenly and fast-held profession, though gradual and silent in its operation, is irresistible in its progress, and mighty in its effects. I appeal to history, whether it is not a fact, that in every country where the gospel has been preached with considerable success, and professed by its disciples with a tolerable degree of purity, the standard of morals has been raised, the administration and the very principles of the government have been improved, and the condition of all ranks meliorated. These blessings have been derived from the doctrines and precepts of Christianity, not from political schemes and measures, even when ap-
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proven or helped forward by Christians. The cabals, indeed, of churchmen and their adherents, are not only altogether distinct from the influence of the gospel, but form an humbling contrast to it; and have ever afforded to the infidel and the scoffer their favourite subject of declamation.

It may be objected, again, that the doctrine which we espouse, condemns the noble exertions of those excellent men, who were honoured of God to bring about the blessed reformation from popery, and afterwards what has been termed the glorious Revolution of 1688. I trust, that I feel strongly the importance of these remarkable events. I read the history respecting them with the liveliest interest. I admire the integrity and the fortitude of many who struggled for the cause of God and truth. I believe they were raised up of God for a blessing to their own, and to future times. I desire to enjoy the benefit of their efforts with thankfulness to the kind Providence, which crowned those efforts with success. But we must always distinguish between the holiness of God, and the imperfection of his instruments.

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After all, the reformers were only men. It remains to be proved, that the same, or perhaps superior, advantages could not have been obtained, by means simply of preaching, and steadfast adherence to the spiritual faith and practice of the gospel. It is certain, that great as the attainments of the reformers were, they lived in times of general darkness, as to liberty of conscience, mutual forbearance, and the way in which error should be opposed by the friends of truth. Besides, in a question of Christian duty, may we not follow the obvious precepts of the word of God? Must we stop to accommodate what is legibly written in the law and the testimony to the opinions or practices of certain celebrated men? Grant that they were Christians and eminent Christians, did they give law to the Scriptures, or the Scriptures to them? What if the gospel should refuse to sanction the creed either of *Whig* or *Tory*? What if it should be found to be the religion of strangers only, and pilgrims on the earth? of men chosen out of the world individually; gathered into associations purely of a spiritual nature, and called to make themselves
known

known to men, only by the propagation of their faith, and the light of their good works ?

Thus have we endeavoured to illustrate the duties of the Christian to civil government ; and, notwithstanding some objections which seemed worthy of reply, we have thought ourselves warranted by Scripture to say, That his subjection to “ principalities, powers, and “ magistrates,” ought to be Conscientious, Unresisting, Disinterested, Respectful, Practical, and Pious.

How thankful, brethren, ought we to be, that these duties, which are universally binding on Christians, are to us so easy ! Had our lot been cast in Turkey, in a country where the government was absolute, and the administration ever so oppressive, our duties would have been the same, but the temptations to transgress would have been certainly great. In this land, however, the case is far otherwise. I firmly believe, (and I do not think any of you will ascribe it to mere partiality to my native country when I say) that no other part of the whole world is at present so highly favoured, in respect either

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of temporal or spiritual blessings. In our situation, therefore, the smallest approach to sedition, the cherishing of discontent, or the mere want of gratitude to God, would be most heinously criminal.

The land, which we live in, is indeed upon earth, and, like every thing earthly, has inscribed upon all its temporal advantages, “vanity
“of vanities, and vexation of spirit.” What then? Let us desire a better country, that is, an heavenly. One thing is needful. God is in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. This, and this alone, is the ministry of reconciliation; the grand theme for thanksgiving both in time and eternity. Our victories in distant seas, our repelling of invasions, our internal tranquillity, our civil privileges, were they ten thousand times more important than they are, can neither save nor satisfy our immortal souls. “Nevertheless
“we, according to his promise, look for new
“heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth
“righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing
“that ye look for such things, be diligent that
“ye may be found of him in peace, without
“spot,

“ spot, and blameless : and account that the
“ long-suffering of our Lord is salvation. Be-
“ ware lest ye, being led away with the error of
“ the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.
“ But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of
“ our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ : To him
“ be glory both now and forever, Amen.” 2 Pet.
iii. 13, 14, 15. 17, 18.

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