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Government and Administration :

## A SERMON

PREACHED ON THE SABBATH SUCCEEDING THE SECESSION RIOTS  
IN NEW YORK CITY, JULY 19, 1863,

BY

WILLIAM AIKMAN,

PASTOR OF

Hanover Street Presbyterian Church,

WILMINGTON,

DEL.

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"He is the minister of God to thee for good."—ROMANS XIII : 4.

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## CORRESPONDENCE.

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WILMINGTON, July 23, 1863.

DEAR SIR :

Having heard with great interest, your Sermon on Sunday morning last, and believing that the views set forth will materially aid in the establishment of a correct public opinion upon a point so vitally important in the present position of our national affairs as that treated of, we respectfully request a copy for publication.

With the highest regard,  
Yours most truly,

THOMAS C. ALRICH,  
JOHN B. PORTER,  
J. F. VAUGHAN,  
J. P. McLEAR,  
SAMUEL McCLARY, JR.,  
SAMUEL FLOYD,  
JAS. L. DEVOU, JR.



To REV. WM. AIKMAN.

Messrs. THOS. C. ALRICH, JOHN B. PORTER, J. F. VAUGHAN, M. D.,  
J. P. McLEAR, SAMUEL McCLARY, JR., SAMUEL FLOYD,  
J. L. DEVOU, JR.,

GENTLEMEN :

Your approval of my Sermon is, I assure you, very gratifying to me. Hoping with you, that its publication may possibly help the great cause of our Country which we all have so much at heart, I cheerfully put the manuscript in your hands.

Yours, with high esteem,

WILLIAM AIKMAN.

WILMINGTON, July 25, 1863.

## SERMON.

The teachings of the Gospel are intended to touch a man at every point. They are designed to reach all human relations. They instruct men in regard not only to personal duty to God, but, as a part of that, their duty to the family, the neighborhood, the nation and the world. Nothing lies beyond their sphere. The Gospel is intended to go with a man not simply into his place of prayer, but into his counting room and his workshop.

In this wide sweep had the Bible not treated of a man's civil and political relations, had it given no directions how to regulate his conduct as a citizen, the omission would have been marked and noticeable. While so much is dependent upon these civil relations, when all his personal and domestic, nay, even all his religious comfort and prosperity are so interwoven with his political condition, it would have been strange had he no clear instruction in regard to the Government under which he lived.

But the Gospel is complete, nothing is wanting. We find the duties of citizenship, a man's relations to the Government over him, accurately defined and clearly exhibited. I ask your thoughts to a consideration of these teachings as they are given in *Romans* 13: 1—5.

“Let every soul be subject to 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 unto themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou not then 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.”

We have here 1st, AN EMPHATIC COMMAND, and 2d, REASONS GIVEN FOR IT.

I. THE COMMAND. "*Let every soul be subject to the higher powers.*" What were these "higher powers" is explained in the clause which almost immediately follows. "The powers that be," or the existing authorities, the magistracy under which you live. This magistracy was the Roman government now administered by Claudius Nero. What Nero was I need not stop to say. His very name has been ever since the synonym of all that is malignantly base and cruelly despotic. He came to the imperial throne after Tiberius, Caligula and Claudius with all their abominations and crimes had occupied it. The command has from that fact an additional interest and significance.

You will notice the peculiarity of the Apostle's language, "the existing authorities." There was danger that Nero's administration of the imperial power, by reason of the turpitude and wickedness of the man, might be not only hated and despised, but opposed and trampled upon. Paul divinely inspired would guard his readers against this. Whatever Nero or his ministers might be, after all he was the executive officer, the embodied power of the government.

Here I am almost afraid to use the language which most naturally, readily and accurately expresses the idea, lest I shall be thought to employ it with a sinister and covert purpose. Yet how can you bring out the truth contained here in any other way than this?—The Apostle here enjoins upon his readers to *reverence and obey the Executive officers who were then administering the Roman Government.* In this choice of language it seems to me, he had a conscious intention. He did not handle the words carelessly, but most accurately and with sharp definition. He meant to express a thought of very great practical importance, an importance which has by the majestic and awful events of to-day become profound to us.

There is a subtle distinction attempted at this time and among this people between the *Administration* and

the *Government* itself, and men seek to veil their disloyalty and treason, by the plea that while they reverence and obey the one, they may repudiate and dishonor the other. Let me ask you to consider this notion in the atmosphere of this scripture. What was that "power" existing then and which the Apostle thus commanded his Roman readers to obey? Shall we say it was the Government? We shall say well. But let us attentively consider what we mean by our words. What is that thing which we call government? What was it then, that Roman Government? Do we mean the laws beginning with the Twelve Tables and floating in the edicts of kings, consuls and emperors, and not made a code for five centuries after Paul was writing? What and where were they? Lying inscribed on brazen tablets, written on parchment rolls, stored away in capitol and temple, was it these which he meant by "the powers that be," mute, dead words that they were? Was it these that they should "be afraid" of, was it these that were "a terror," was it these that gave "praise," was it these that "beareth not the sword in vain?" No I think not. These "powers that be" were something more real and tangible and living than these. These all were but laws, rules by which "the power" was regulated and ordered; "the power" was something different far from them. Had you asked what it was, the Apostle would have pointed you to the magistrate passing your door in Rome with lictors going before bearing the *fasces*, the axe with its helve wrapped in the bundle of rods, the present symbol of the power which was ever near at hand to execute the law's command; he would have called your attention to the steady tramp of a century as it marched to its post, or to the gleam of helmet and spear, as the legions wound round yonder hill toward the Capitol to leave their offering before they passed to a distant province; or more than all he would have pointed you to the palace of the Cæsars and spoken of the one man that there was the embodied power of the Empire, at whose will it moved or stayed. Here was that

“power” which was to be revered and obeyed—not intangible and unseen laws, but *power administering* them. It was, in a single sentence, The Roman government under the administration of Nero.

But I shall not have brought before you fully the Apostle's thought till I have fixed your attention more minutely upon the peculiar and varying form of his language. With the one underlying idea in mind he speaks at first of the “powers that be,” and then as if he would make the thought more specific he calls them “rulers,” and then immediately as if he would give a centralizing word he speaks of “the power;” and finally as if he would not only make it concrete but give life and personality to it, he says, “For he is the minister of God to thee.” The poor deception in terms respecting government and administration when considered as an object of obedience flees before the pointed accuracy of the Apostle's words.

Having, as I hope, gotten the meaning of the command, we are ready to consider

## II. THE REASONS ON WHICH IT IS BASED. These are

1. *The existing administration of the Government is God's appointment.* “The powers that be are ordained of God.” Civil government not only but the magistrates who administer it have their places under the over-ruling will of God, they are the ordering of His providence. All human events are God's. Most of all, in a matter which bears so mightily upon the well being of human society must God's hand be concerned. From this fact the reason follows immediately :

2. *All attempts to destroy the existing administration are blows aimed at an appointment of God.* “Whosoever resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God.” If “the power,” the existing administrator was the appointment of God, then any attack upon it became not merely a crime against man, but rose higher, towering into a crime against the majesty of Heaven.

3. A third reason is given—*The individual who thus sets himself against the existing government lays himself open to just condemnation.* “They that resist shall receive to themselves damnation” or judgment. They could have no right to complain of injustice or the exertion of arbitrary power. The thought is immediately enlarged, as the writer goes on to show that any suffering or loss that might fall upon a man under such circumstances was the result of his own conduct in placing himself where the stroke of avenging power would certainly fall. No man need fear this “power” except one who by wrong-doing made himself its foe. “For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil.” The good citizen was safe. “Do good and thou shalt have praise of the same.”

4. Another reason is—*The existing power is for the well being of society*, and for that very end, is the punisher of bad men: “For he is the minister of God to thee for good—a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.” In different forms the thought is brought out that government was for the good of those who obeyed it. He looked over the Roman Empire and saw a majestic and benign power everywhere present. It covered the known world with a sway so almost omnipresent that it was said in those days that a criminal need not even attempt to escape its vengeance, simply because it was physically impossible to go where it was not. He might take, as it were, the wings of the morning and fly to the uttermost part of the sea, but there its frown should reach him, its swift behest hastening over roads that in their remains to-day attest the power that made them, would lay its hand upon the panting fugitive. Paul looks over this great scene, and he saw everywhere order, prosperity, wealth, safety for person and property. Enormous crimes might be in Rome, maladministration might be in provinces, yet beyond and above all, quiet, repose and happiness reigned; cities teemed with busy crowds, and boys and girls played in the streets; villas lay

nestling in silent vallies, while harvests slept in the sunshine ; palaces lined the shores of bays, artisans plyed their trades, travellers passed with their treasures from one end of the empire to another in safety ; Jew and Greek alike with Roman, men of all name were safe and might be prosperous. Paul saw all this and recognized it as the result of a regulated power, a power doing good to an obedient subject. Gathering up all that he had said he now adds in a comprehensive sentence, " Wherefore ye must needs be subject not only for wrath but also for conscience sake," that is, the dictates of a wise prudence as well as a conscientious regard for duty will lead you to be loyal and obedient to the magistracy whose authority is over you. Safety and happiness depended on it, indeed, but a high regard for law as from God, for this administration of government as His ordinance and His plan for the welfare of human society would lead them to make that obedience a part of their religion.

We need not wonder that teachings so exalted, calm, wise, should have done good to the Christian Church. Suppose that contrary doctrines should have prevailed, that low, partisan, bigoted views should have led christians to be perpetually questioning the legitimacy of the government and because it was badly or wickedly administered had led them to hurl themselves against the power of Rome ; how long would it have been before they would have been swept away ? But no, the instructions of the Gospel made them law abiding men ; no revolt such as Jews were evermore fomenting brought them into collision with Roman power, they endured in time of persecution and trial, always true to principle and right, but patient and loyal. So they became the tried and veteran soldiers of Rome, they made her conquering legions, and by and by the Church came into possession of all Rome's power. The result reaching over centuries we see to-day in the spreading growth of the church of God, a vindication of the benignity and the wisdom of Apostolic teaching.



I have selected this passage of God's word because it seems to me that perhaps never were we more called upon to lay its divine lessons so well to heart.

There are several points of vital interest bearing upon the present movements and sentiments of this people. We have reached a spot when we ought to look most carefully at the teachings of the Bible. An honest study and consideration of it will brush away a cloud of sophistries which darken and bewilder the mind, and bring out into vivid light some truths which the prejudices and excitements of the hour labour to obscure.

Hold up, for instance, that almost universally accepted distinction which is made between Government and the Administration of Government; a distinction invented by designing men to hide and cover up their treason and accepted too unsuspectingly by many of the loyal who would give their lives for their country.

Let me ask you, to what do we here to-day owe the quietude and repose that we enjoy? How is it that we are assembled so peacefully in God's house? why are our homes so full of comfort? whence comes the protection which we have enjoyed? why have you so reaped the reward of your industry? why have you enjoyed all that has made your lives so safe and so happy? You answer me, and answer me right, because law has reigned supreme, because a great and strong government has protected us in all these things. You know too well, the terrific events of the last week have burned it upon the brain of this people, what is the value of order begotten and supported by law. But suppose I press the question still further and ask how is it that law has reigned? What indeed do you mean when you use this language, what do you mean by law being supreme? What can you mean but that power has acted according to wholesome law, that there has been a power which has protected, guarded you so well that violence and crime have not dared even to raise their head? What, I press you, what could laws

written never so fairly and printed in never so many ponderous volumes, have done to shield your firesides or make safe your gains? There has been power over you. Whence has come this power? There has been some *will* at work, some executive in all this. Whence, what has it been? I reply and you echo in the words of the scripture of to-day, "the powers that be," "the power" "he who has been a minister to thee for good," or using almost the word of the scripture, the existing administration of this government. I know that this sounds strangely and possibly it startles some of my hearers, but I know not how we can escape the inexorable conclusion. If the "powers that be," if the successive administrators of the mighty power of this government have not done us all the good under God which this people have ever had, then I know not where to look or what to answer. Abstractions, empty, and deceptive phrases, words have not done it. Power has been here. Power wielded by men, men have been executives of power. It has been so all along our history. It is so to-day.

In that old Roman time it was Nero, tyrant and wretch that he was, who was the representative, the embodiment of the power of Rome, and whatever of wrong and crime he may have been guilty of, and Paul knew it all well enough, yet the peace, the order and the happiness that reigned over the world, might be traced up to that existing administration of power which he was exercising. The benefits were so great and counterbalancing, that he could well pass all else by and demand from every Christian man reverence and honor, and say with divine authority, "Render therefore to all their due, tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor." And this is the lesson of this hour to all men in this land. Whatever we may think of men or of measures or of policy, yet after all the truth returns upon us that WE OWE OUR PRESENT STABILITY, OUR COMFORT, OUR REPOSE TO THE POWER OF THIS GOVERNMENT ADMINISTERED BY THE EXECUTIVE OFFICERS

WHOM GOD HAS PLACED OVER US ; and bringing the thought to its last analysis, TO THE CHIEF MAGISTRATE OF THIS NATION. In this I am as far as possible from flattery or adulation. I am simply coming up to the point to which the plainest reasoning conducts me and the word of God directs. Evils, wrongs, mistakes, wickedness may be committed, yet after all, the good which blesses us to-day, whatever that may be, under God comes from the administration of the power of this people.

Taking our stand on this word I remark again, *you can measure and estimate the conduct of those who assail the Government as it is now administered in this land.* You and I may not be pleased with it all, you and I may wish it were better, but AT PRESENT IT IS ALL THE GOVERNMENT WE HAVE. They talk of overthrowing the administration, but it is the "power that is," it is the present ordinance of God, the only minister of God to us for good. All such plottings, all such wishes are, if this word be true, a high crime against God as well as against man.

We have been taught during this week that has just gone what these teachings do legitimately reach after. Those scenes of horror from which humanity turns sickening away, and which hang a cloud of enduring shame over the great city of this nation, a city I have been proud to call my birth-place, are the true and proper result of the talk of men who have adopted the fallacy which I have been combatting. These secret plotters, who go whispering round, who have never one honest word of sympathy for the government in its death struggle with treason, who secretly exult in its disasters, who grow silent when loyal men exult in victories, whose countenances are lit up with smiles when loyal hearts are sad, who poison the minds of the ignorant with insinuations and accusations against the government, these are the men who invite you to this dance of death and this banquet of blood. The mob fiercer and bloodier than beasts of prey, in comparison with whose relentless cruelty the tiger's rage is

lamb-like mildness, is the true child of these deadly foes of your country and mine. They walk among loyal men, their homes and their persons and their wealth are overshadowed by the power they stab, they lay up their stores, they rejoice in their increasing riches, the creation of good government that is over them, while they go softly about with the venom of the silent viper under their fangs. The burning of a home over the heads of a thousand orphans, the murder of unresisting men, the hanging of ghastly corpses to the lamp-post while slow fires consume the mutilated body, striking down the officer of the law, trampling out the very form of humanity, laughing with demoniac joy at the death struggle of the form they have dragged over the pavement, dashing back the poor bruised head that faintly in its unutterable agony tries to rise, these and horrors that pen refuses to record and imagination grows sick at, all these are what those who here and elsewhere are secretly opposing and plotting against this government would have come upon us. They are co-laborers with their brethren in that guilty and bloodstained metropolis. My soul come not thou into their secret. Would that we could say with a divine charity, "Father forgive them they know not what they do." The awful days of this week in New York do tell them what. But will they heed the teaching?

The discussion of this Scripture teaches, if I mistake not, another lesson. *The necessity of prompt and vigorous measures against all those who at such a time as this set themselves in word against the government.* Talk you of infringing the liberty of speech? There is a time when men must not speak. The Alpine company following tremblingly and in dreadful silence their guide under an overhanging avalanche which a breath will bring in hurtling ruin upon them, will brook no word from even careless lips; that is not a time for free speech. It was words, only words that brought all this late murder and arson, that carnival of death, as dreadful and horridly fantastic as history tells of.

But were there no such results, how shall one find words to express his deep indignation at the utter baseness of the man who can receive all the favors which a good government gives him, who can enjoy his home, his property, simply because the arm of its executive protects and shields him, and at the same time be doing all in his power secretly to weaken and destroy it? The meanness is unspeakable. An open foe in arms is an angel in comparison with him. The one would destroy the government but give another in its place; this would destroy and give you anarchy and blood. Too cowardly to be an open enemy, he stabs the bosom on which he leans, seeks to plunge his knife in the heart exposed by the arm that embraces him. It cannot be that many who allow themselves to oppose the government and sympathize with its foes do understand the meaning of their acts.

In this light the *righteousness and the propriety of arresting such persons appears*. In arresting them, you guard against great crimes. I know and I feel the hardship and am not unmindful of the suffering caused by such arrests; but it is a foreseen evil that the subject of them could have avoided. I know well that the answer is made: The time may come when the like measure shall be meted out to you. I accept it in all its extent. I take this Scripture and from it I would regulate my life. Were that dastard flag with its three bars and I know not how many stars, waving here as the symbol of dominant power, if I choose to remain enjoying its protection, my home and my family guarded by its executive, I should deem myself vile indeed to do or say aught against it. I would by every principle of manly honor be silent and lift not a finger in opposition. If I must oppose it, let me like an honest man first go from its shelter. But let me never be guilty of asking and taking its care, and at the same time be helping its foes. Least of all let me not be evermore obtaining my safety from its magnanimity. No, my friends, there is a principle not only of manliness but

of christianity here. If a man has "the power as a minister of God to him for good," he is bound to be honestly obedient to it. He should not complain when in his resistance he finds that "He beareth not the sword in vain."

These are no private opinions of the preacher, but, as I firmly believe, the teachings of God's word, teachings which it is of immeasurable importance that all of us should understand. God has given us too good a government to be lightly trampled down. It has done you and me, yea it is doing you and me every hour good which we do not comprehend; this administration of it, which we allow ourselves sometimes to talk against, is doing us too much of good for us to plot its destruction. What that good is, learn in the holy quiet of this hour, in contrast with hoarse shoutings and the death groans that made the streets of yonder city grow pale a few hours ago. Let us bless God for it and anew pledge our hands and hearts before Him that we will hold it up. To-day we come into God's house with swelling hearts for all His undeserved favors to this people, but of all the victories which God has given us, for none have we such reason to praise Him as the victory over the recent plottings of traitors to strike down the law, over mad and hideous riot. I pray you think of all that might have been, of the nameless horrors of a mob, and henceforth have a deep reverence and love for law; see in a new light your duty to give a loyal support to those who administer it. Would that this American people might understand what God has given them to do. We are working out something for all the ages to come—The Supremacy of Law in the hands of a free people.

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