

MAN VERSUS NATURE



away harmless, I thank God that I and my dear ones have escaped the danger. But without faith I have no surety. I cannot trust a ferry to carry me safely across the river, for God can cause a disaster which plunges me and my dear ones into death.

It is the will of God that, trusting Him, we protect our lives and the lives of our dear ones from all danger. He who fails to do what he can to rescue life is guilty of murder. He who neglects his own health or does not protect himself with the remedies which God provides, becomes guilty of suicide.



IV

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War

WE have now come to the third question—what must be our reaction when men oppose us or injure us, or interfere with our holiest activities?

We shall begin our discussion with the worst manifestation of the struggle between men—war.

On the basis of God's Word, what must our attitude be toward war?

Every Christian hates war as a horrible slaughter of human life. But some object to war *as such*, believing that it is unlawful, and that he who makes war or participates in war is guilty before God.

There is within us a strong aversion to the very thought of shedding the blood of a fellowman.

But there is also a voice within us which says, "My honor above my life!"

If your child must have an arm amputated, you will go through agonies before you decide to say to the surgeon, "Go ahead." But such amputations are occasionally necessary. And a similar situation may arise among the nations. A nation may forfeit its honor or fail in its calling if it has not the courage to resist oppression and wrong. •

Yet, there are those who say, "War? Never!"

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They argue as follows:

“We must follow the example of Jesus, who ‘when He suffered threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth uprightly.’

“And while it is true that in Old Testament times the Lord led His people into battle, we are living in a different age, a new dispensation.

“War is a denial of faith in God and His mercy and care. We are assured that ‘all things work together for good to those who love God’—also the most cruel persecutions; and no one can be against us if God is for us. Therefore we may not resort to war to protect ourselves, even as Christ and His Apostles did not resist when they were persecuted.

“Even if someone should hatefully injure you or steal your worldly goods, you should do no more than try by friendliness and reason to induce him to desist from his wickedness, praying God meanwhile for help. As Paul says, ‘Why not rather take the wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?’

“And if your life is in danger, flee, even as Paul did, praying for grace and courage that you may triumph in patience, following the example of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ Himself, and of His disciples.”

All of these arguments are based upon Scripture.

But these words of Scripture were not intended for governments and nations. They are, instead, injunctions intended for the life of God’s people among each other. That is the great error of those who hold that all war is intrinsically sinful.

There were many conscientious objectors in the days of the Netherlands’ war with Spain. And when the Beggars sailed in boldly and bravely to drive out the enemy, they

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condemned the action unconditionally. They clung to the conviction that man must not fight his own battles, but must sit still and wait for the direct intervention of the almighty Arm of God—by means of nature, or the angels, or His Spirit, but *not by means of men*.

Most whole-heartedly we would join them in the cry, "Not unto *us*, O Lord, but *to Thy Name* be the glory!" Yet we protest against the teaching that we must meekly wait for God's help without putting forth any effort of our own.

When the Lord blessed the rebellion against Spain, and subsequently built* Himself a church in the Netherlands, men could no longer deny that He works directly through His people. It was too evident.

We must indeed submit to authority which God has ordained. "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves." And "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." Therefore what the government bids, you must do, even though it may seem unwise or unfair to you. If obedience requires no further sacrifice than that of comfort or money or pleasure, you are to obey. Implicitly.

On the contrary, if the government demands or commands something that is forbidden by God and His Church, then you may not obey.

You *may* not. God is the ruler over all. He has given authority to the powers that be. But their authority ends when *their* command runs contrary to *His*. They have no right to make any such requirements. In doing so, *they* become rebels against God.

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Just where “rebellion of the authorities” begins is extremely difficult to say. Each of us must be convinced in his own heart, before his own Lord. And the Name of the Lord must never be used as a cloak for a rebellious spirit.

But supporting and abetting a government that rebels against the Lord of Hosts in demanding something contrary to His will, makes you, too, a rebel.

Under such circumstances, let there be passive resistance. What the government bids you do, you leave undone. Or what the government forbids, you do nevertheless, quietly and seriously, without fuss or display.

And if the authorities, moved to anger, cast you into prison, you must bear it. Should they take your life, you must submit, with eyes uplifted to the eternal reward.

All this, however, does not imply the exclusion of all war under all circumstances. Our church fathers held to four principles in regard to resistance against the authority.

First: Not every government has absolute authority. Frequently there are certain rights and privileges remaining to the people, by law or custom or tradition. When the government imposes its strength upon the subjects to take away these rights or in violation of these rights, it thereby forfeits its authority.

Second: Among most people there are leaders, lawfully appointed or elected, who are to protect the rights of the people against possible inroads of the government. These leaders retain their right and duty to defend the people, even against a government that has turned tyrannical.

Third: A nation may resist hired soldiers that are sent to destroy it.

Fourth: It may well be that God Himself calls a certain man, or a group, to lead in the resistance against tyranny.

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The Huguenots in France, the Covenanters in Scotland, the Beggars in the Netherlands—there can be no doubt that God called them to fight the enemies of God with the sword. Not one of the great church fathers has ever condemned their action in principle.

We will not go further into a study of Scripture on the subject. Others have done so most carefully and devoutly, and we respect the conclusions which they have reached, the more readily since with the Word of God in their hand they drove out the enemy to prepare a place for the church of God.

Politics

Just a few words about the attitude of God's people toward the politics of the nation.

There are those who feel that a Christian should not meddle in politics. Let the child of God care for his spiritual welfare, for his family, and for the little circle of Christians to which he belongs. But let him not become embroiled in political questions. Let Christians who would take the lead in political issues rather use their talents in evangelistic work. It were even well that we did not have to vote, did not have to choose representatives, had nothing at all to do with government.

People who hold such opinions have a deep realization of the fact that our sojourn on earth is but short, and that the fatherland above is our home, the place where our hearts long to be. They are convinced, too, that political struggles are useless; they claim to have historical proof that all this to-do and busy-ness is never productive of lasting results. And moreover, they protest that there is too much filth and crookedness about politics, so that no child of God can

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meddle in political affairs without becoming contaminated and suffering spiritual loss.

Their attitude seems to be, "Let us leave the realm of politics to the world." For "Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this, to visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

But this is not the Christian view.

Neither was it the view or the practice of the Reformers.

A life of pious isolation and meditation was not their idea of obedience to God. They militated against such inactivity and passivity. And by the grace of God they were instrumental in stirring Christendom to new life and courage, in Switzerland, Netherlands, France and Scotland.

We can never accuse them of indifference to affairs of their country. They did not dream of leaving the reins of government in the hands of the world. In fact, the ideal of the reformers was a government within the church, the control of civic affairs under church supervision. They had no conception of separation between church and state as we now know it. Calvin and Zwingli were theocratic in their concept of church and politics.

The same ideas prevailed in France and Scotland in those days, and we might point to the Pilgrim Fathers of America as further evidence that our forebears did not shun politics.

Nor do we. For we believe that God's Word requires us to make our influence felt. And there is evidence of His blessing in the remarkable influence of the principles of reformed faith upon the history of people and nations.

Not that we should judge right and wrong by the results. For those who are on the side of right do not always triumph.

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In fact, they seldom do. Too frequently the wrong has the upperhand.

But we may not sit back, separating ourselves from national life, and expect the Lord to deliver us from oppression by a miracle from heaven.

He could do so. But that is not His pleasure.

Our God works by means. He uses men.

Therefore in the affairs of the nation, as well as in all other spheres of life, the Christian is called upon to fight the fight of faith, to be a soldier of Jesus Christ.

If we fail to obey the command of God, if we fail to defend the right, we shall suffer the downfall of the church and of our nation.

Exercising Authority

There are many relationships among men. One of them concerns the authority which some exercise over others,

Jesus said, "Judge not, that ye be not judged."

Does this imply, as some would have it, that we should not have courts of justice? That we should not punish evildoers, but instead should overlook as much as possible, and try to turn the evildoer from his wicked ways by kindness and gentleness? For what right has one man to judge another?

If we follow this suggestion to its logical conclusion, we shall have to condemn even the most palatial prison as too cruel; we may no longer frown upon our children when they do wrong; we must let evil have its way; and "whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the left also."

But such a position is evidently untenable. It is also essentially contrary to God's Word, and a false interpretation.

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It results from a confusion between the duty of private persons and the duty of magistrates.

To persons in private life Jesus spoke the injunction: Judge not, that ye be not judged. But He did not intend thereby to deny the right of human administration of justice. In fact, He himself honored and acknowledged both Jewish and Roman courts. Furthermore, Paul even recommended that there be judges in the church to settle disputes among Christians. And Paul also reminds us that the rulers do not bear the sword in vain.

We do well to distinguish carefully between private and official judging.

“Judge not, that ye be not judged”—what other rule of life could Christ give to creatures such as we are, wholly sinful, unworthy, condemnable, short-sighted and short-lived? The Holy Scripture shows you your utter unworthiness, leaves you nothing to boast of; and then necessarily teaches you not to be presumptuous, but to be humble and meek.

But that does not deprive a man of the authority which he may have by reason of his position. True, even the highest magistrate is a mere man, and in private life he is as insignificant and unworthy as any other man. As an office-bearer, however, he is clothed with dignity, a dignity which does not emanate from himself but which is God-given. He has authority which God has entrusted to him, and which ought to glorify not himself but God.

Even Christians, and devout Christians, frequently fall short of honoring authority as it should be honored. This evil usually arises from a too high evaluation of self, as if we gave the authority to our leaders and therefore we may choose whether or not we shall recognize and obey

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that authority. That is a warped concept. Authority is derived from God; the person in authority is responsible to God only; and we owe him honor and respect because his authority is God's.

In general, we are willing to acknowledge the authority of our national leaders. But they are by no means the only ones who must be honored and obeyed. We owe respect to anyone, in any position of office, who has rightful claim to authority.

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Fathers and mothers are in such a place of authority. They did not create their children; God made them. Nor do they own the children; they are God's. Neither may they demand obedience because they are stronger or more worthy than the children. The obedience of children to parents is a matter of *God's* honor and majesty. The child must obey his God—obey absolutely—because God is his Creator and Lord. And the parents have been endowed by God to represent *Him* and *His authority* toward the child.

Therefore disobedience should be punished not first of all because it is bothersome to the parents, or because the child may otherwise be spoiled, but first of all and principally because the child's disobedience is *opposition to God*.

That is the reason why parents must discipline and chastise the child and must insist upon obedience. Even when they are moved with pity, even though they know that their own sins and inconsistencies have affected the child, yet they may not neglect the responsibility of asserting their authority.

A mother may be frail, may be a widow, and her son may be a young giant, yet he is and must be subject to her, and must obey her for God's sake.

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Our civil laws support the parents in this, for they give parents the right even to put a child in detention if necessary.

We may not say, "Just let it pass!"* or "Oh, all children are like that nowadays." We may not think, "I'd rather avoid trouble and a scene." Parents are in duty bound to uphold the honor of God by demanding obedience. Note—not *their* honor, but God's. *That* is why indulgence or leniency is sin.

This does not mean, of course, that parents should be stern and hard. There is need of wisdom, discretion, and careful justice: and we should take into account extenuating circumstances. But right must triumph, even in the life of a child. The child must obey — if not willingly, then unwillingly.

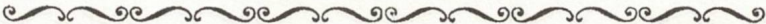
One thing, however,- we must add in all earnestness: be sure that your child feels that you are punishing him not because *you* are angry, but because *God's* anger rests upon sin. Let him realize that you yourself are deeply and penitently conscious of your own guilt before God.



There are others in authority —in the shop, in the office, at school, in societies — and they, too, are called upon to exercise their authority.

Too often leaders do all in their power to make paths smooth and to avoid trouble. We seek our ease. Or perhaps we are cowardly; we do not want to, or do not dare to, office opposition and anger. We would rather just keep still and let the matter go its way. Often our guiding thought is: How can I best keep peace? When it should be: What

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is right? According to the Word of God, what ought to be done?

For obedience is better than sacrifice.

God has so ordered human relationships that there are those who command and those who obey. He who is in command must take his task seriously, for he is responsible to God for honest and fair exercise of his authority — whether he be a king, or a chairman of a meeting, or a foreman in a factory. Authority is not a pretty plaything, nor is it honorary ornament. It is a duty.

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We must not forget that there is a distinction between one's behavior as a private person and his behavior as having authority. Too often the tables are strangely turned. People who are vested with authority are apt to be lax in their official duties and hesitant in enforcing the right, yet they will assert themselves vigorously in private life. In their positions as leaders when they should be firm in the cause of right, they are pliable and easily swayed. But as private persons, when Jesus' command of meekness and tolerance applies to them, they easily take offence, they are irritable and self-willed, and quick to assert their rights.

Thus God's order is reversed.

In the exercise of rightful authority, not *our* honor but *God's* is at stake; and we are prone to be indifferent or we lack the necessary courage. In private life, when our personal honor is threatened, we bristle with quick resentment.

Such calls down upon us the judgment of God. For He is a jealous God, jealous also of His honor.

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST



V

The Church of Jesus Christ

Doctrines of the Church

THE subject of differences in doctrine within the church has been discussed at length by theologians and church leaders.

The question is this: Cannot two different doctrines be held within a church? Ought we not to allow for differences? Should we not be tolerant, and cover up or ignore these points of difference in order to keep peace? Cannot we at least moderate the differences and keep them within bounds?

As always, we seek the answer in God's Word. *There* we find bounds within which we must stay.

There are three phases to be considered: our own attitude in regard to such differences, the points of difference themselves, and to persons with whom we differ.

As to our attitude—we may not let personal interests or any feeling of animosity toward those who differ with us mingle with our zeal in defense of the truth. We are to hate all untruth and evil for *God's* sake, and try to win back to the right path those who have strayed.

When Moses dashed the tables of the law to pieces on the mount, and ground the golden calf to powder, he was not giving vent to his personal bitter anger, but was expressing