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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A SERMON, DELIVERED BEFORE HIS EXCELLENCY EDWARD EVERETT, GOVERNOR, HIS HONOR GEORGE HULL, LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR, THE HONORABLE COUNCIL, AND THE LEGISLATURE OF MASSACHUSETTS, ON THE ANNIVERSARY ELECTION, JANUARY 2, 1839 ***

A

SERMON

DELIVERED BEFORE
HIS EXCELLENCY EDWARD EVERETT,
GOVERNOR,
HIS HONOR GEORGE HULL,
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR,
THE HONORABLE COUNCIL,
AND
THE LEGISLATURE OF MASSACHUSETTS,
ON THE
ANNIVERSARY ELECTION,
JANUARY 2, 1839.

BY MARK HOPKINS, D. D.

President of Williams College.

Boston:
DUTTON AND WENTWORTH, PRINTERS TO THE STATE.
1839.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

SENATE, JANUARY 3, 1839.

Ordered, That Messrs. Filley, Quincy, and Kimball, be a Committee to present the thanks of the Senate to the Rev. MARK HOPKINS, D. D. for the discourse yesterday delivered by him, before the Government of the Commonwealth, and to request a copy thereof for publication.

Attest,

CHARLES CALHOUN, *Clerk*.

SERMON.

Acts v. 29.

WE OUGHT TO OBEY GOD RATHER THAN MAN.

Man was made for something higher and better, than either to make, or to obey, merely human laws. He is the creature of God, is subject to his laws, and can find his perfection, and consequent happiness, only in obeying those laws. As his moral perfection, the life of his life, is involved in this obedience, it is impossible that any power should lay him under obligation to disobey. The known will of God, if not the foundation of right, is its paramount rule, and it is because human governments are ordained by him, that we owe them obedience. We are bound to them, not by compact, but only as God's institutions for the good of the race. This is what the Bible, though sometimes referred to as supporting arbitrary power, really teaches. It does not support arbitrary power. Rightly understood, it is a perfect rule of duty, and as in every thing else, so in the relations of subjects and rulers. It lays down the true principles, it gives us the guiding light. When the general question is whether human governments are to be obeyed, the answer is, "He that resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God." "The powers that be are ordained of God." But when these powers overstep their appointed limits, and would lord it over the conscience, and come between man and his maker, then do we hear it uttered in the very face of power, and by the voice of inspiration, no less than of indignant humanity, "We ought to obey God rather than men."

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It has been in connexion with the maintenance of this principle, first proclaimed by an Apostle of Christ eighteen hundred years ago, that all the civil liberty now in the world has sprung up. It is to the fearless assertion of this principle by our forefathers, that we owe it that the representatives of a free people are assembled here this day to worship God according to the dictates of their own consciences, to seek to Him for wisdom in their deliberations, and to acknowledge the subordination of all human governments to that which is divine.

Permit me then, as appropriate to the present occasion, to call the attention of this audience,

1st. To the grounds on which all men are bound to adhere to the principle stated in the text; and

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2d. To the consequences of such adherence, on the part, both of subjects, and of rulers.

I observe, then, that we ought to obey God rather than men, because human governments are comparatively so limited and negative in their bearing upon the great purposes, first, of individual, and second, of social existence.

The purposes for which man was made, must evidently involve in their accomplishment, both his duty and his happiness; and nothing can be his duty which would contravene those purposes. Among them, as already intimated, the highest is the moral perfection of the individual; for as it is by his moral nature that man is distinguished from the inferior animals, so it is only in the perfection of that nature, that his perfection, as man, can consist. As absolute perfection can belong only to God, that of man must be relative, that is, it must consist in the proper adjustment of relations, and especially in the relation of his voluntary actions to the end for which God designed him. This is our idea of perfection, when we affirm it of the works of man. It involves, mainly, such a relation of parts as is necessary to the perfect accomplishment of the end in view. A watch is perfect when it is so constructed that its motions exactly correspond in their little revolutions with those of the sun in the heavens; and man is perfect when his will corresponds in its little circle of movement with the will of God in heaven. This correspondence, however, is not to be produced by the laws of an unconscious mechanism, but by a voluntary, a cheerful, a filial co-operation. It is this power of controlling his faculties with reference to an ultimate end, of accepting or rejecting the purpose of his being, as indicated by God in the very structure of his powers, and proclaimed in his word, that contradistinguishes man from every inferior being, and gives scope for what is properly termed, character. Inferior beings have qualities by which they are distinguished, they have characteristics, but not *character*, which always involves a moral element. A brute does not govern its own instincts, it is governed by them. A tree is the product

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of an agency which is put forth through it, but of which it is not conscious, and which it does not control. But God gives man to himself, and then sets before him, in the tendency of every thing that has unconscious life towards its own perfection, the great moral lesson that nature was intended to teach. He then causes every blade of grass, and every tree, to become a preacher and a model, calling upon him to put forth his faculties, not without law, but to accept the law of his being, and to work out a character and a happiness in conformity with that. It is, as I have said, the power which man has to accept or reject this law of his being, the great law of love, that renders him capable of character, and it is evidently as a theatre, on which this may be manifested, that the present scene of things is sustained. Not with more certainty do the processes of vegetation point to the blossoms and the fruit as the results to which they conspire, than does every thing in the nature and condition of man indicate the formation of a specific, voluntary, moral character, as the purpose for which God placed him here. But this purpose is not recognized at all by human governments, and we have only to observe the limited and negative agency which they incidentally bring to bear upon it, to see how insignificant must be their claims when they would come into conflict with those of the government of God.

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I observe then, first, that human governments regard man solely as the member of a community; whereas it is chiefly as an individual, that the government of God regards him. Isolate a man from society, take him beyond the reach of human government, and his faculties are not changed. He is still the creature of God, a dweller in his universe, retaining every thing he ever possessed that was noble in reason, or grand in destiny, and in his solitude, where yet he would not be alone, the government of God would follow him, and would require of him such manifestations of goodness as he might there exercise—the adoration of his Creator, resignation to his will, and a temperate and prudent use of the blessings within his power. Indeed, so far as responsibility is concerned, the divine government considers man, whether in solitude or in a crowd, solely as an individual, and produces an isolation of each as complete as if he were the only person in the universe. God knows nothing of divided responsibility, and whether acting alone, or as a member of a corporation or of a legislature, every man is responsible to him for just what he does as a moral being, and for nothing more. The responsibility of each is kept disentangled from that of all others, and lies as well defined in the eye of God, as if that eye were fixed upon him alone. The kingdom of God is within man, and there it is, in the secret soul of each, that the contest between light and darkness, between God and Satan is going on, and in the struggle, in the victory or the defeat, he who walks the city is as much alone as the hermit in his cell. It is over the thoughts of man, his affections, his passions, his purposes, which mock at human control, that the government of God claims dominion; it is with reference to these, and not to the artificial index of appearances which we set to catch the eye of the world, that the register of Heaven is kept. On the other hand, how very few of the moral actions of man can human government reach, how imperfectly can it reach even these! It is only of overt acts, those which it can define, and which can be proved before a human tribunal, that it can take cognizance; and its treatment even of these can never be adjusted to the varying shades of guilt. It has no eye to reach the springs of action. It may see the movements of the machinery above, perplexed, and apparently contradictory; but it cannot uncover the great wheel, and look in upon the simple principle which makes character, and sets the whole in motion.

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But I observe again, that human governments are not only thus limited, but are also chiefly negative in their influence upon the formation of individual character. There is, indeed, a positive and widely pervading moral influence connected with the character, and station, and acts, of those who are in authority. This cannot be too prominently stated, the responsibility connected with it cannot be too carefully regarded; still this influence is entirely incidental, and is the same in kind with that exerted by any distinguished private individual. Human governments have also positive power to furnish *facilities*, as distinguished from *inducements*. They can authorise and guard the issue of paper money, to give facilities to men of business; they can lay down rail-roads, thus opening facilities to the spirit of enterprise, and calling out the neglected resources of the State; they can too, and our fathers did it, construct and keep in repair the *rail-roads of the mind*, thus giving facilities to the poorest boy in the glens of the mountains to come out and be an honor to his country. Still, human government is chiefly a system of restraint for the purpose of protection. Its object is to give equal protection to all in using their faculties as they please, provided they do not interfere with the rights of others. It does not propose to furnish inducements, but to enable men to live quiet and peaceable lives, while they act in view of the great inducements furnished by the government of God.

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In saying this, I do not undervalue the benefits conferred by human governments, but only assign them their true place. The office performed by them is indispensable. They are the enclosure of the field, without which certainly nothing could come to maturity; but they are not the soil and the rain, and the sunshine, which cause vegetation to spring up. These are furnished by the government of God, which is not only a system of restraint and protection, but also, and chiefly, of inducements to excellence. Into the ear of the humblest of its subjects it whispers, as it points upward, "Glory," "Honor," "Immortality," "Eternal Life." It is parental in its character, makes us members of a family, gives us objects of affection, and by its perfect standard of moral excellence, and the character of God which it sets before us, it purifies and elevates the mind. Without a God to whom he is related and accountable, man has neither dignity nor hope. Without God, the universe has no cause, its contrivances indicate no intelligence, its providence no goodness, its related parts and processes no unity, its events no convergence to one grand result, and the glorious spectacle presented in the earth and the heavens, instead of calling forth admiration and songs, is an enigma perplexing to the intellect, and torturing to the heart. Seen in its connexion with God, the universe of matter is as the evening cloud that lies in the sunlight,

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radiant, and skirted with glory; without him it is the same cloud cold and dark when that sunlight is gone. Without God, man is an orphan; he has no protector here, and no Father's house in which he may hope for a mansion hereafter. His life is at his own disposal, and has no value except in relation to his personal and present enjoyment.

On the other hand, as the idea of God is received, and his relations to the universe are intimately felt, unity and harmony are introduced into our conceptions of that which is without, and acquiescence and hope reign within. Nature, as more significant, becomes more a companion. Her quiet teachings and mute prophecies, her indexes pointing to the spirit land, instead of being felt as a mockery, are in accordance with the best hopes, and the revealed destiny of man. Life, too, assumes a new aspect. A common destiny is set before all, and the consciousness of it runs as a thread of sympathy through the race. The poor man is elevated when he sees that the principle of duty may be tried and strengthened in his humble sphere, as well as in those that are higher, and his labor becomes a cheerful service done with good will from the heart. Every duty to man becomes doubly sacred as due also to God, and the humblest life, pursued from a conscientious regard to his will, is invested with an unspeakable dignity. It is indeed, I may remark, this view of life that furnishes the only possible ground of equality. Men are upon an equality only as they are equally upon trial in the sight of God, and nothing will ever reconcile them to the unavoidable inequalities of the present state, but the consciousness that their circumstances were allotted to them by Him who best knew what trials they would need, and whose equal eye regards solely the degree in which their moral nature is improved by the trial. When this is felt, there is, under all circumstances, a basis for dignity without pride, for activity without restlessness, for diversity of condition without discord.

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And not only the aspect of life in the relations of men to each other, but its end also is changed. The moral nature assumes its true position, and, acting in the presence of a perfect law as its standard, and of a perfect gospel as its ground of hope, the idea of true liberty dawns upon the mind. This consists in the coincidence of the affections and inclinations with correct principle. It is only when the internal constitution of a reasonable being is in harmony with the law under which he acts, that he is conscious of no restraint, and knows what true freedom is. The chief value of what is commonly called liberty, consists in the opportunity it gives to use our faculties without molestation for the attainment of this. This is that glorious liberty of the sons of God, of which the Scriptures speak. It is not a mere freedom from restraint which may be abused for the purposes of wrong-doing; and become a curse, merely making the difference between a brute enclosed and a brute at large; but it is, in its commencement, the resolute adoption of the law of conscience and of God as the rule of life; in its progress, a successful struggle with whatever opposes this law; in its completion, the harmonious and joyful action of every power in its fulfilment. This is the only liberty known under the government of God. He who knows it not is the slave of sin. He who struggles not for it, is in a contented bondage of which physical slavery is but a feeble type. The perfection of this liberty is only another name for moral perfection, which, as I have said, is the great end of the individual; and as the direct motives and means for the attainment of this are furnished only by the government of God, it is evident that "We ought to obey God rather than men."

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Having thus spoken of the effect of human government upon man in his individual character, I now proceed to inquire, whether it is equally limited and negative in its bearing upon him in his social condition.

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And here I remark, that it is only incidentally that human government is necessary to man as a social being at all. Society was before government, and if man had retained his original state, it might, perhaps, have existed without it till the end of time. Man is constituted by his Creator a social being; he has faculties to the expansion and perfection of which society is requisite, but he has no faculties the necessities of which constitute him a political being. There must be politicians, just as there must be farmers, and merchants, and physicians, that they and others may enjoy social life; but social life is corrupted when politics enter largely into it. It is not sufficiently noticed, that it is through social institutions and habits far more than through political forms, that the happiness or misery of man is produced. It was not from the oppressions of the government, but from a corrupted social state, that the prophet of old wished to flee into the wilderness. It was because his people were all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men, because every brother would supplant, and every neighbor would walk with slanders. Such a state of things may exist under any form of political organization. It may exist under ours. Men may be loud in their praise of republican forms, and yet be false, and unkind, and litigious; they may be indolent, and profane, and sabbath breakers, and gamblers, and licentious, and intemperate. Yes, and there may be neighborhoods of such men, and the place where they assemble nightly, hard by a banner that creaks in the wind, may be the liveliest image of hell that this earth can present. I certainly know, and my hearers are fortunate if they do not know, neighborhoods in this land of liberty and equality, where the only use made of liberty is to render families and society wretched, and where the only equality, is an equality in vice and social degradation, which no man is permitted even to attempt to rise above without constant annoyance. Better, far better, is family affection, and kind neighborhood under a regal, or even a despotic government, than such liberty as this.

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Government then is not an end, but a means. Society is the end, and government should be the agent of society, to benefit man in his social condition. The extent to which it can do this will depend on its form, and the power with which it is entrusted. Absolute power, which should be used for this purpose, is generally abused. Considering itself as having interests distinct from

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those of the people, it too often seeks to keep them in a state of degradation, and to appropriate to itself the largest possible share of those blessings which ought to be equally diffused. "Get out of my sunlight," said Diogenes to Alexander the Great: "Get out of my sunlight"—cease to obstruct the free circulation of blessings intended for all, might the people say under any arbitrary form of government ever yet administered. Still, such a government, when under the direction of wisdom and benevolence, has power to produce great social and moral revolutions for the good of mankind. Such a revolution was commenced by Peter the Great, and his measures, though necessary, were such as none but an absolute monarch could have adopted. Aside from christianity, the judicious exercise of such a power is the only hope of a people debased beyond a certain point. The King of Prussia can maintain a better and more efficient system of schools, than any republican government. He can provide qualified teachers, and can compel the children to attend.

But when, as in this country, government is the direct agent of society, when it is so far controlled by the people as to secure the majority at least from oppression, being merely an expression of the will of that majority, it can have no power to produce moral and social reformations. Laws do not execute themselves, and in such a state of things they cannot be effectually executed if the violation of them is upheld by public sentiment. In such a case, when vices begin to creep in, and the tendency of things is downwards, we must have a force different from that of the government; we must have *moral* power. Here religion comes in, and must come in, or "the beginning of the end" has come. The intellect must be enlightened, and the conscience quickened, and moral life infused into the mass; the good and the evil must commingle in free conflict, and public sentiment must be changed. When this is done, when patriotism, and philanthropy, and religion, have caused an ebb-tide in the flood of evil that was coming up over the land, then government may come in, not to carry forward a moral reformation by force, but to erect a barrier against the return of that tide. It can secure what these agents have gained. It can put a shield into the hands of society, with which it can, if it pleases, protect itself against that selfishness and malignity which always lurk in its borders, and which moral influence cannot reach. If, for example, polygamy were established among us as it is among the Turks, a government like ours could do nothing for its removal. But religion could awaken a sense of obligation, and statistics could point out the number of poor women and uneducated children thrown by it for support mainly upon those who had pledged themselves to be the husband of one wife, and christian and philanthropic effort might show that it was injurious to individuals, and families, and the state; and then a law might be passed, as there has been, to defend society against this evil.

This inefficacy of our government to produce moral and social reformations should be well understood, because it throws the fearful responsibility of maintaining our institutions directly upon the people, where it must rest. A government originating in society, can have but slight ground to stand on in resisting its downward tendency. That there is in society such a tendency, all history shows. As nations have become older, they have invariably become more corrupt. They have never reached that point in general morality at which men cease to corrupt each other by associating together. Such a tendency, not counteracted, must be fatal to republican governments, for republican government is self-government, and as the internal law becomes feeble, external force must be increased; and accordingly we find that every people hitherto, have either been under regal power from the beginning, or have, in time, reached a point in corruption, when that power became necessary. Republican government then, is not so much the cause of a good social state, as its sign. It can never be borne up, with its stars and stripes floating, upon the surface of a society that is not strongly impregnated with virtue. Take this away, and it goes down by its own weight, and the beast of tyranny, with its seven heads and ten horns, comes up out of the troubled waters. Here is the turning point with us. All depends upon the influences that go to form the character of our people. Those who control these influences will really govern the country. To this point we turn our eyes anxiously. At this point we look to legislators to stand in their lot, and do what is appropriate to their station. At this point we look especially to fathers and mothers, the guardians of domestic virtue.—Those waters will be sweet that are fed by sweet springs. We look to christian ministers, to enlightened teachers, to patriotic authors and editors, to every good citizen. If there ever was a country in which all these were called upon to do their utmost, this is that country; if there ever was a government that was called upon to second in every proper way the efforts of these, this is that government. To all these we look; but our trust is only in the influences they may bring to bear from the blessed gospel of Christ, from the government of God. "We ought to obey God rather than men."

I have thus shown, as fully as the time would permit, though far too briefly to do justice to the subject, the grounds on which we ought to obey God rather than men. These are to be found in the relation of the divine, and of human government respectively, to the ends of individual, and of social existence. But the occasion on which the text was uttered, a subject having directly refused obedience to rulers lawfully constituted, will lead us to consider the effects of the principle of the text when acted upon by men in those relations in which civil liberty is directly involved—in the relations of subjects and of rulers. What then will be the effect of an adherence to this principle on the part of subjects, as such?

There is a tendency in irresponsible power to accumulate. It first gains control over property, and

life, and every thing from which a motive to resistance based on the interests of the present life, could be drawn. But it is not satisfied with this. Nothing avails it so long as there is a Mordecai sitting at the King's gate that does not rise up and do it reverence. It must also control the conscience, and make the religious nature subservient to its purposes. Accordingly, the grand device of the enemies of civil liberty, has been so to incorporate religion with the government, that all those deep and ineradicable feelings which are associated with the one, should also be associated with the other, and that he who opposed the government should not only bring upon himself the arm of the civil power, but also the fury of religious zeal. The most melancholy and heart-sickening chapter in the history of man, is that in which are recorded the enormities committed by a lust of power, and by malignity, in alliance with a perverted religious sentiment. The light that was in men has become darkness, and that darkness has been great. The very instrument appointed by God for the deliverance and elevation of man, has been made to assist in his thralldom and degradation. When christianity appeared, the alliance of religion with oppressive power was universal. In such a state of things, there seemed no hope for civil liberty but in bringing the conscience out from this unholy alliance, and putting it in a position in which it must show its energies in opposition to power. This christianity did. It brought the conscience to a point where it not only might resist human governments, but where, as they were then exercised, it was compelled to resist them. This appeared when the text was uttered, and there was then a rock raised in the ocean of tyranny which has not been overflowed to this day. The same qualities which make the conscience so potent an ally of power, must, when it is enlightened by a true knowledge of God and of duty, and when immortality is clearly set before the mind, make it the most formidable of all barriers to tyranny and oppression.

By thus bringing the moral nature of man to act in opposition to power, and by giving him light, and strength, and foothold, to enable him to sustain that opposition, christianity has done an inestimable service, and has placed humanity at the only point where its highest grandeur appears. At this point, sustained by principle, and often in the person of the humblest individual, it bids defiance to all the malice of men to wrest from it its true liberty. It bids tyranny do its worst, and though its ashes may be scattered to the winds, it leaves its startling testimony, and the inspiration of its great example to coming times. The power to do this, christianity alone can give. No other religion has ever so demonstrated its evidences to the senses, and caused its adaptations to the innermost wants of the soul to be felt, as to enable man to stand alone against the influence of whatever was dear in affection, and flattering in promises, and fearful in torture. Other religions have had their *victims*, who have been led, amidst the plaudits of surrounding multitudes, to throw themselves under the wheels of a system already established; but not their *martyrs*, who, when duty has permitted it, have fled to the fastnesses of the mountains; and when it has not, have stood upon their rights, and contested every inch of ground, and met death soberly and firmly, only when it was necessary. When this has been done by multitudes it has caused power to respect the individual, to respect humanity; and while christianity was wading through the blood of ten persecutions, it was fighting more effectually than had ever been done before, the battles of civil liberty. The call to obey God rather than men met with a response, and it is upon this ground that the battle has been opened in every case in which civil liberty now exists. It is upon this ground alone that it can be maintained.

I deem it of great importance that this point should be fully and often presented, because it is vital, and because there are constant attempts made to obscure it. Whatever elevates the individual, whatever gives him worth in his own estimation and that of others, whatever invests him with moral dignity, must be favorable both to pure morality and to civil liberty. Hence it is that these are both incidental results of christianity. They are not the gifts which she came to bestow—these are life and immortality. They are not the white raiment in which her followers are to walk in the upper temple; but they are the earthly garments with which she would clothe the nations—they are the brightness which she leaves in her train as she moves on towards heaven, and calls on men to follow her there. These belong to her alone. Infidels may filch her morality, as they have often done, and then boast of their discoveries. But in their hands that morality is lopped off from the body of faith on which it grew, and produces no fruit. They may boast, as they do, of a liberty which they never could have achieved. But under its protection they advance doctrines and advocate practices which would corrupt it into license. Their only strength lies in endeavoring, in the sacred name of liberty, to corrupt the virtuous, and to excite the hatred of the vicious against those restraints without which liberty cannot exist, and society has no ground of security. "Promising liberty to others, they are themselves the servants of corruption." Liberty cannot exist without morality, nor general morality without a pure religion.

The doctrine thus stated is fully confirmed by history. The reformation by Luther was made on strictly religious grounds. He found an opposition between the decrees of the Pope and the commands of God, and it was the simple purpose, resolutely adhered to, to obey God rather than men, that caused Europe to rock to its centre. In the train of this religious reformation civil liberty followed, but became settled and valuable only as religious liberty was perfected. It was every where on the ground of conscience towards God that the first stand was taken, and in those countries where the struggle for religious liberty commenced but did not succeed, as in Spain and Italy, civil liberty has found no resting place for the sole of her foot to this day. It is conceded even by Hume that England owes her civil liberty to the Puritans, and the history of the settlement and progress of this country as a splendid exemplification of the principle in question, needs but to be mentioned here.

In speaking thus of the resistance of christian subjects to the government, perhaps I should guard against being misunderstood. In no case can it be a factious resistance. It cannot be

stimulated by any of the ordinary motives to such resistance—by discontent, or passion, or ambition, or a love of gain. In no case can it show itself in the disorganizing, the aggressive, and in a free government, the suicidal spirit of mobs. Christians have in their eye a grand and a holy object, and all they wish is to go forward, without violating the rights of others, to its attainment. In so doing they set themselves in opposition to nobody, but merely exercise an inalienable right, and if others oppose them, they must still go forward and obey God, be the consequences what they may.

We will now consider, as was proposed, the effect of an adherence to the principle of the text on the part of rulers. This becomes appropriate from the peculiar form of our government, and the relation which the rulers hold to the people. Rulers have indeed, in all countries, need to be exhorted to obey God, but when their will is supreme, and their power is independent of the people, there can be no propriety in exhorting them to obey God rather than men. In this country, however, this principle needs to be enforced upon legislators and rulers quite as much as upon the people, perhaps even more. It is at this point, if I mistake not, that we are to look for the danger peculiar to our institutions through those in authority. In other countries the danger is from the accumulation and tyrannical use of power. With us, limited as is the tenure of office, there is little danger of direct oppression. The danger is that those who are in office, and those who wish for it, will, for the sake of immediate popularity, lend the sanction of their names to doctrines and practices, which, if carried into effect, must destroy all government. How is it else that mobs should often escape with so little rebuke? How is it else that we hear such extravagant and disorganizing doctrines maintained in regard to the rights of a majority respecting property, and their power to set aside any guaranties of former Legislatures? Certainly the people are the fountain of power. They establish the government, they have a right to alter it; but when it is established, the state becomes personified through it, and its acts are to be consistent. When it is established, it *is* a government, it has authority, it becomes God's institution, and those who administer it are to obey God rather than men. Wo to this country, when the people shall become to those in place, the object of adulation and of an affected idolatry. Wo to this country, when the people shall cease to reverence the government as the institution of God because it is established through them; when they shall suppose that it is in such a sense theirs, that they can supersede its acts in any way except by constitutional forms.

There is also another reason why the principle of the text ought to be especially regarded by the rulers of this country. So far as a nation can be considered and treated as a moral person, its character must be indicated by the acts of its rulers. Accordingly, we find that under every form of government, God has made nations responsible, as in the natural course of things they evidently must be, for what is done by their rulers. But if this is so in monarchical governments, where the agency of the people is so little connected with public acts, much more must it be so in one like ours. Here the rulers represent the people more immediately. They indicate in the eyes of the world, the moral condition of the people, and hence the peculiar responsibility of those who act under the oath of God in making and administering the laws of a representative government. If it can ever be required of God to vindicate his administration by the treatment of any people, it must be of one whose government is thus administered.

I observe then that the principle of the text should be adopted by rulers, because it furnishes the only broad and safe basis of political action. The adoption of this principle I consider the first requisite of a wise, in opposition to a cunning and temporizing statesman. Statesmanship, as distinguished from that skilful combination of measures which has for its object personal advancement, consists very much in a perception of the connexion there is between the prosperity of states, and the accordance of their laws and social institutions with the laws of justice, and benevolence, and temperance, which are the laws of God. The laws of God are uniform. The general tendencies which he has inwrought into the system will take effect, and nothing, not shaped in accordance with these can stand. Now it is an attempt to evade the effect of these tendencies by expedients in particular instances and for the sake of particular ends, that has been called statesmanship; while he only is the true statesman who sees what these tendencies are, and shapes his laws and institutions in accordance with them. The mere politician, if I may so designate him, perceives the movements which take place in the different parts of society relatively to each other, and is complacently skilful in adjusting them to his purposes, but he fails to see that general movement by which the whole is drifted on together, and which is bearing society to a point where elements that he had not dreamed of will be called into action, and where his petty expedients will become in a moment, but as the barriers of sand which the child raises upon the beach, when the tide begins to rise.

"I tremble for my country," said an American statesman, in a sentence, which, though awfully ominous in the connexion in which it was uttered, does equal honor to his head and his heart, "I tremble for my country when I remember that God is just." In that sentence are involved the principles of that higher statesmanship before which the expedients of merely expert men dwindle into nothing. He knew not how, or where, or when, the blow might fall; but he knew that there was always a joint in the harness of injustice, where the arrow of retribution, though it might seem to be speeding at a venture, would surely find its way. The higher movements of Divine Providence include the lower. Sooner or later all particular, and for a time apparently anomalous cases are brought under its general rules, and he has read the history of the past with

little benefit, who has failed to see how the giant machinery of that Providence, in the intermediate spaces of which there is ample room for the free play of human agency, takes up the results of that agency as they are wrought out, and applies them to the execution of its own uniform laws, and the accomplishment of its own predicted purposes. These purposes, as declared by those divine records whose prophecies have now become history, were often such as no human sagacity, looking merely at second causes, could have anticipated, such as no human power then existing could have effected. Still, they were wrought out in conformity with that higher, and uniform, and all-encompassing movement with reference to which he who stands at the helm should guide the state, but to ascertain which, he must not take his bearings from the shifting headlands of circumstances, but must lift his eye to those eternal principles which abide ever the same. On this subject there is written upon the walls of the past a lesson for statesmen that needs no interpreter. Look at Babylon. Who is it that stands before its walls, and utters its doom? It is a despised Jew. And who is he that walks in pride upon those walls, and as he points to that mighty city as the centre of civilization and power, as combining every advantage of climate and of commerce, mocks at that doom? It is a politician of those days. The voice of the prophet is uttered, and it seems to pass idly upon the wind. The eye of sense sees no effect. No clouds gather, no lightnings descend. But that voice was not in vain. The waters of desolation heard it in their distant caves, and never ceased to rise till they had whelmed palace and tower and temple in one undistinguished ruin. Even now that voice abides there, and hangs as a spirit of the air over that desolation, and the Arabian hears it, warning him not to pitch his tent there, and the wild beast of the desert and the owl and the satyr hear it, and come up and dwell and dance there. Look at Jerusalem. Who is he that stands upon mount Olivet and weeps as he looks upon the city, and assigns, as the cause of his tears, that he would often have gathered her children together as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but she would not? Ah! what political Jew would have thought of *that!* He would have turned his attention to the purposes of governors and the intrigues of courts. Into his estimate of the causes that might affect the prosperity of Jerusalem, the moral temper of the nation as indicated by its rejection of Jesus of Nazareth, would not have entered. And yet, it was from this rejection, even in the way of natural consequence, from the want of those moral qualities which only a regard to his teachings could have produced among them, that the destruction of the Jews resulted. Nothing else could have destroyed their fool-hardy confidence in God, or have allayed those fiendish passions which led contending factions to fill the streets of the city with dead bodies even in the midst of the siege. But they would not have his spirit; they would not have him to reign over them, and we know that from the moment the words dropped from his lips, "Your house is left unto you desolate," that was a doomed city, and no political skill could have deferred the horrors of a siege and of a final overthrow, such as was not from the beginning of the world, no, nor ever shall be. And not only from Babylon and Jerusalem, but from the grave of every nation buried in antiquity, from Nineveh, and Tyre, and Edom, and Egypt, there comes a voice calling upon rulers to be "just, ruling in the fear of God." The true cause of their destruction was the attitude which they assumed towards the will, and worship, and people of God.

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It is from these moral causes, between which and the result there is no immediate, nor, to the superficial eye, perceptible connexion, that I fear most for the stability of our institutions. It is when the sun is shining most brightly, and the face of the sky shows, it may be, not a single cloud, that the elements of the tornado are ascending most rapidly; and it is when men are in prosperity and in fancied security that they become presumptuous, and that a disastrous train of causes is silently put in motion, as resistless as the tornado. Upon this point of security, the eye of the true statesman is fixed. It is here that he sees the danger and provides against it; while the mere politician knows nothing, and sees nothing, till he begins, when it is too late, to see the lightnings, and hear the thunders of embodied wrath.

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Can, then, the rulers of this country, in disregard of the warnings of all past time, with a full understanding of the claims and of the controlling agency of the great moral principles of God's government, go on in obedience to men rather than God, and make laws in disregard, or defiance of his will? If so, then, from the reciprocal influence of rulers and people, our experiment of self-government would seem to be hopeless. Then *must* God scourge this people as he has scourged others. Then are the untoward symptoms of the present time, but as the white spot that shows the leprosy. Then will the altar of liberty decay, and the fire upon it will go out, and there will be heard by those who watch in her temple, as of old in the desecrated temple of God, the voice of its presiding spirit saying, "Let us go hence," and that temple, towards which the eyes of the nations were turned with hope, shall become the haunt of every unclean thing, and shall only wait the hand of violence to leave not one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down. In view of such consequences, I cannot but feel that the solemn words of our Saviour are as applicable to Legislators and rulers in their public, as in their private capacity. "And I say unto you, my friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him which after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell, yea I say unto you, Fear him."

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To His Excellency the Governor, these sentiments are addressed, as putting him in remembrance, as he stands upon the threshold of a new official year, of that which ought ever to be uppermost in the mind of the Chief Magistrate of a Christian people, of the paramount authority of God, and

of the necessity there is that all human legislation should coincide with the principles of his government. It is a great and a sacred trust which the people of this Commonwealth commit to their Chief Magistrate, and they expect it will be used in the fear of God, and for the good of this whole people. That trust is in tried hands, and we rejoice in the belief that it is safely deposited. Especially, may I be permitted to say, does it give me pleasure to welcome to the chair of state one in whose civic wreath literary honors are entwined, and who can forget the toils and lay aside the dignities of office, to cheer the young scholar on his way. Long may our literary institutions continue to raise up those who shall add to the dignity of office, the grace of learning, and the sanctity of private virtue; and who, while they devote their labors more particularly to the good of their own State, shall be regarded as belonging to the Union and to the world.

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To His Honor the Lieutenant Governor, to the Honorable Council and Senate, and to the assembled Representatives of the people, the sentiments of this discourse are addressed, as the descendants of those who showed in the hour of peril, that they feared God rather than men. Following their example, you have come up, as you are about to enter upon your responsible duties, to present, in this venerable house, thanksgivings and supplications to the Lord God of our fathers; and to do homage in the name of the Republic, to His Institutions. This is well. But that Republic expects of you that you will imitate, not merely in form, but also in spirit, the bright examples that are set before you, that you will act from principle, that you will "obey God rather than men." So doing the Commonwealth will be safe, for it is the simple wisdom of goodness, that alone is truly wise.

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Transcriber's note:

Minor typographical errors and inconsistencies have been silently normalized. Inconsistent capitalizations of christian and christianity have been left as in the original.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A SERMON, DELIVERED BEFORE HIS EXCELLENCY EDWARD EVERETT, GOVERNOR, HIS HONOR GEORGE HULL, LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR, THE HONORABLE COUNCIL, AND THE LEGISLATURE OF MASSACHUSETTS, ON THE ANNIVERSARY ELECTION, JANUARY 2, 1839 ***

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