

A discourse concerning the unlimited submission and non-resistance to the high powers, 1750, Jonathan Mayhew

[Home Preachers' Pen](#) A discourse concerning the unlimited submission and non-resistance to the high powers, 1750, Jonathan Mayhew

Harvard graduate and Congregationalist minister, Jonathan Mayhew (1720-1766) served the West Church in Boston from his ordination in 1747 until his death. The Discourse was first published in Boston in 1750.

. . . Let us now trace the apostle's reasoning in favor of submission to the *higher powers*, a little more particularly and exactly. For by this it will appear, on one hand, how good and conclusive it is, for submission to those rulers who exercise their power in a proper manner: And, on the other, how weak and trifling and unconnected it is, if it be supposed to be meant by the apostle to show the obligation and duty of obedience to tyrannical, oppressive rulers in common with others of a different character.

The apostle enters upon his subject thus--*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.* Here he urges the duty of obedience from this topic of argument, that civil rulers, as they are supposed to fulfill the pleasure of God, are the ordinance of God. But how is this an argument for obedience to such rulers as do not perform the pleasure of God, by doing good; but the pleasure of the devil, by doing evil; and such as are not, therefore, *God's ministers*, but the devil's! *Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist, shall receive to themselves damnation.* Here the apostle argues, that those who resist a reasonable and just authority, which is agreeable to the will of God, do really resist the will of God himself; and will, therefore, be punished by him. But how does this prove, that those who resist a lawless, unreasonable power, which is contrary to the will of God, do therein resist the will and ordinance of God? Is resisting those who resist God's will, the same thing with resisting God? Or shall those who do so, *receive to themselves damnation! For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good; and thou shalt have praise of the same. For he is the minister of God to thee for good.* Here the apostle argues more explicitly than he had before done, for revering, and submitting to, magistracy, from this consideration, that such as really performed the duty of magistrates, would be enemies only to the evil actions of men, and would befriend and encourage the good: and so be a common blessing to society. But how is this an argument, that we must honor, and submit to, such magistrates as are not enemies to the evil actions of men; but to the good: and such as are not a common blessing, but a common curse, to society! *But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid: For he is the minister of God, a revenger, to execute wrath upon him that doth evil.* Here the apostle argues from the nature and end of magistracy, that such as did evil, (and such only) had reason to be afraid of the higher powers; it being part of their office to punish evildoers, no less than to defend and encourage such as do well. But if magistrates are unrighteous; if they are *respecters of*

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persons; if they are partial in their administration of justice; then those who do well have as much reason to be afraid, as those that do evil: there can be no safety for the good, nor any peculiar ground of terror to the unruly and injurious. So that, in this case, the main end of civil government will be frustrated. And what reason is there for submitting to that government, which does by no means answer the design of government? *Wherefore ye must needs be subject not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.* Here the apostle argues the duty of a cheerful and conscientious submission to civil government, from the nature and end of magistracy as he had before laid it down, i.e. as the design of it was to punish evildoers, and to support and encourage such as do well; and as it must, if so exercised, be agreeable to the will of God. But how does what he here says, prove the duty of a cheerful and conscientious subjection to those who forfeit the character of rulers? to those who encourage the bad, and discourage the good? The argument here used no more proves it to be a sin to resist such rulers, than it does, to *resist the devil*, that he may *flee from us*. For one is as truly the *minister of God* as the other. *For, for this cause pay you tribute also; for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.* Here the apostle argues the duty of paying taxes, from this consideration, that those who perform the duty of rulers, are continually attending upon the public welfare. But how does this argument conclude for paying taxes to such princes as are continually endeavoring to ruin the public? And especially when such payment would facilitate and promote this wicked design! *Render therefore to all their dues; tribute, to whom tribute is due; custom, to whom custom; fear, to whom fear; honor, to whom honor.* Here the apostle sums up what he had been saying concerning the duty of subjects to rulers. And his argument stands thus--“Since magistrates who execute their office well, are common benefactors to society; and may, in that respect, be properly stiled *the ministers and ordinance of God*; and since they are constantly employed in the service of the public; it becomes you to pay them tribute and custom; and to reverence, honor, and submit to, them in the execution of their respective offices.” This is apparently good reasoning. But does this argument conclude for the duty of paying tribute, custom, reverence, honor and obedience, to such persons as (although they bear the title of rulers) use all their power to hurt and injure the public? such as are not *God's ministers*, but *satan's*? such as do not take care of, and attend upon, the public interest, but their own, to the ruin of the public? that is, in short, to such as have no natural and just claim at all to tribute, custom, reverence, honor and obedience? It is to be hoped that those who have any regard to the apostle's character as an inspired writer, or even as a man of common understanding, will not represent him as reasoning in such a loose incoherent manner; and drawing conclusions which have not the least relation to his premises. For what can be more absurd than an argument thus framed? “Rulers are, by their office, bound to consult the public welfare and the good of society: therefore you are bound to pay them tribute, to honor, and to submit to them, even when they destroy the public welfare, and are a common pest to society, by acting in direct contradiction to the nature and end of their office.”

Thus, upon a careful review of the apostle's reasoning in this passage, it appears that his arguments to enforce submission, are of such a nature, as to conclude only in favor of submission to *such rulers as he himself describes*; i.e., such as rule for the good of society, which is the only end of their institution. Common tyrants, and public

oppressors, are not intitled to obedience from their subjects, by virtue of any thing here laid down by the inspired apostle.

I now add, farther, that the apostle's argument is so far from proving it to be the duty of people to obey, and submit to, such rulers as act in contradiction to the public good, and so to the design of their office, that it proves *the direct contrary*. For, please to observe, that if the end of all civil government, be the good of society; if this be the thing that is aimed at in constituting civil rulers; and if the motive and argument for submission to government, be taken from the apparent usefulness of civil authority; it follows, that when no such good end can be answered by submission, there remains no argument or motive to enforce it; if instead of this good* end's being brought about by submission, a *contrary end* is brought about, and the ruin and misery of society effected by it, here is a plain and positive reason against submission in all such cases, should they ever happen. And therefore, in such cases, a regard to the public welfare, ought to make us withhold from our rulers, that obedience and subjection which it would, otherwise, be our duty to render to them. If it be our duty, for example, to obey our king, merely for this reason, that he rules for the public welfare, (which is the only argument the apostle makes use of) it follows, by a parity of reason, that when he turns tyrant, and makes his subjects his prey to devour and to destroy, instead of his charge to defend and cherish, we are bound to throw off our allegiance to him, and to resist; and that according to the tenor of the apostle's argument in this passage. Not to discontinue our allegiance, in this case, would be to join with the sovereign in promoting the slavery and misery of that society, the welfare of which, we ourselves, as well as our sovereign, are indispensably obliged to secure and promote, as far as in us lies. It is true the apostle puts no case of such a tyrannical prince; but by his grounding his argument for submission wholly upon the good of civil society; it is plain he implicitly authorizes, and even requires us to make resistance, whenever this shall be necessary to the public safety and happiness. Let me make use of this easy and familiar *similitude* to illustrate the point in hand--Suppose God requires a family of children, to obey their father and not to resist him; and enforces his command with this argument; that the superintendence and care and authority of a just and kind parent, will contribute to the happiness of the whole family; so that they ought to obey him for their own sakes more than for his: Suppose this parent at length runs distracted, and attempts, in his mad fit, to cut all his children's throats: Now, in this case, is not the reason before assigned, why these children should obey their parent while he continued of a sound mind, namely, *their common good*, a reason equally conclusive for disobeying and resisting him, since he is become delirious, and attempts their ruin? It makes no alteration in the argument, whether this parent, properly speaking, loses his reason; or does, while he retains his understanding, that which is as fatal in its consequences, as any thing he could do, were he really deprived of it. This similitude needs no formal application.

* This does not intend, their acting so in a few particular instances, which the best of rulers may do through mistake, &c. but their acting so habitually; and in a manner which plainly shows, that they aim at making themselves great, by the ruin of their subjects.

But it ought to be remembered, that if the duty of universal obedience and nonresistance to our king or prince, can be argued from this passage, the same unlimited submission

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under a republican, or any other form of government; and even to all the subordinate powers in any particular state, can be proved by it as well: which is more than those who alledge it for the mentioned purpose, would be willing should be inferred from it. So that this passage does not answer their purpose; but really overthrows and confutes it. This matter deserves to be more particularly considered.--The advocates for unlimited submission and passive obedience, do, if I mistake not, always speak with reference to kingly or monarchical government, as distinguished from all other forms; and, with reference to submitting to the will of the king, in distinction from all subordinate officers, acting beyond their commission, and the authority which they have received from the crown. It is not pretended that any person besides kings, have a divine right to do what they please, so that no one may resist them, without incurring the guilt of factiousness and rebellion. If any other supreme powers oppress the people, it is generally allowed, that the people may get redress, by resistance, if other methods prove ineffectual. And if any officers in a kingly government, go beyond the limits of that power which they have derived from the crown, (the supposed original source of all power and authority in the state) and attempt, illegally, to take away the properties and lives of their fellow subjects, they may be forcibly resisted, at least till application can be made to the crown. But as to the sovereign himself, he may not be resisted in any case; nor any of his officers, while they confine themselves within the bounds which he has prescribed to them. This is, I think, a true sketch of the principles of those who defend the doctrine of passive obedience and nonresistance. Now there is nothing in Scripture which supports this scheme of political principles. As to the passage under consideration, the apostle here speaks of civil rulers in *general*; of all persons in *common*, vested with authority for the good of society, without any particular reference to one form of government, more than to another; or to the supreme power in any particular state, more than to subordinate powers. The apostle does not concern himself with the different forms of government.** This he supposes left entirely to human prudence and discretion. Now the consequence of this is, that unlimited and passive obedience, is no more enjoined in this passage, under monarchical government; or to the supreme power in any state, than under all other species of government, which answer the end of government; or, to all the subordinate degrees of civil authority, from the highest to the lowest. Those, therefore, who would from this passage infer the guilt of resisting kings, in all cases whatever, though acting ever so contrary to the design of their office, must, if they will be consistent, go much farther, and infer from it the guilt of resistance under all other forms of government; and of resisting *any petty officer* in the state, tho' acting beyond his commission, in the most arbitrary, illegal manner possible. The argument holds equally strong in both cases. All civil rulers, as such, are the *ordinance* and *ministers of God*; and they are all, by the nature of their office, and in their respective spheres and stations, bound to consult the public welfare. With the same reason therefore, that any deny unlimited and passive obedience to be here enjoined under a republic or aristocracy, or any other established form of civil government; or to subordinate powers, acting in an illegal and oppressive manner; (with the same reason) others may deny, that such obedience is enjoined to a king or monarch, or any civil power whatever. For the apostle says nothing that is *peculiar to kings*; what he says, extends equally to *all* other persons whatever, vested with any civil office. They are all, in exactly the same sense, the *ordinance of God*; and the *ministers of God*; and obedience is equally enjoined to be paid to them all. For, as the

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apostle expresses it, *there is NO POWER but of God*: And we are required to *render to ALL their DUES*; and not MORE than their DUES. And what these *dues* are, and to *whom* they are to be *rendered*, the apostle *sayeth not*; but leaves to the reason and consciences of men to determine.

** The essence of government (I mean *good* government; and this is the *only* government which the apostle treats of in this passage) consists in the *making and executing of good laws*--laws attempered to the common felicity of the *governed*. And if this be, *in fact*, done, it is evidently, in it self, a thing of no consequence at all, what the *particular* form of government is;--whether the legislative and executive power be lodged in *one and the same* person, or in different persons;--whether in *one* person, whom we call an *absolute monarch*;--whether in a *few*, so as to constitute an *aristocracy*;--whether in *many*, so as to constitute a *republic*; or whether in *three co-ordinate branches*, in such manner as to make the government *partake* something of *each* of these forms; and to be, at the same time, *essentially different* from them *all*. If the *end* be attained, it is enough. But no form of government seems to be so unlikely to accomplish this *end*, as *absolute monarchy*--Nor is there any one that has so little pretence to a *divine original*, unless it be in this sense, that God *first* introduced it into, and thereby overturned, the common wealth of *Israel*, as a *curse* upon that people for their *folly* and *wickedness*, particularly in *desiring* such a government. (See I *Sam.* viii. chap.) Just so God, before, sent *Quails* amongst them, as a *plague*, and a *curse*, and not as a *blessing*. *Numb.* chap. xi.

Thus it appears, that the common argument, grounded upon this passage, in favor of universal, and passive obedience, really overthrows itself, by proving too much, if it proves any thing at all; namely, that no civil officer is, in any case whatever, to be resisted, though acting in express contradiction to the design of his office; which no man, in his senses, ever did, or can assert.

If we calmly consider the nature of the thing itself, nothing can well be imagined more directly contrary to common sense, than to suppose that *millions* of people should be subjected to the arbitrary, precarious pleasure of *one single man*; (who has *naturally* no superiority over them in point of authority) so that their estates, and every thing that is valuable in life, and even their lives also, shall be absolutely at his disposal, if he happens to be wanton and capricious enough to demand them. What unprejudiced man can think, that God made ALL to be thus subservient to the lawless pleasure and frenzy of ONE, so that it shall always be a sin to resist him! Nothing but the most plain and express revelation from heaven could make a sober impartial man believe such a monstrous, unaccountable doctrine, and, indeed, the thing itself, appears so shocking--so out of all *proportion*, that it may be questioned, whether all the *miracles* that ever were wrought, could make it credible, that this doctrine *really* came from God. At present, there is not the least syllable in Scripture which gives any countenance to it. The hereditary, indefeasible, divine right of kings, and the doctrine of nonresistance which is built upon the supposition of such a right, are altogether as fabulous and chimerical, as transubstantiation; or any of the most absurd reveries of ancient or modern visionaries. These notions are fetched neither from divine revelation, nor human reason; and if they are derived from neither of those sources, it is not much matter from *whence they come*, or *whither they go*. Only it is a pity that such doctrines should be propagated in society,

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to raise factions and rebellions, as we see they have, in fact, been both in the *last*, and in the *present*, REIGN.

But then, if unlimited submission and passive obedience to the *higher powers*, in all possible cases, be not a duty, it will be asked, "HOW far are we obliged to submit? If we may innocently disobey and resist in some crises, why not in all? Where shall we stop? What is the measure of our duty? This doctrine tends to the total dissolution of civil government; and to introduce such scenes of wild anarchy and confusion, as are more fatal to society than the worst of tyranny."

After this manner, some men object; and, indeed, this is the most plausible thing that can be said in favor of such an absolute submission as they plead for. But the worst (or rather the best) of it, is, that there is very little strength or solidity in it. For similar difficulties may be raised with respect to almost every duty of natural and revealed religion.--To instance only in two, both of which are near akin, and indeed exactly parallel, to the case before us. It is unquestionably the duty of children to submit to their parents; and of servants, to their masters. But no one asserts, that it is their duty to obey, and submit to them, in all supposable cases; or universally a sin to resist them. Now does this tend to subvert the just authority of parents and masters? Or to introduce confusion and anarchy into private families? No. How then does the same principle tend to unhinge the government of that larger family, the body politic? We know, in general, that children and servants are obliged to obey their parents and masters respectively. We know also, with equal certainty, that they are not obliged to submit to them in all things, without exception; but may, in some cases, reasonably, and therefore innocently, resist them. These principles are acknowledged upon all hands, whatever difficulty there may be in fixing the exact limits of submission. Now there is at least as much difficulty in stating the measure of duty in these two cases, as in the case of rulers and subjects. So that this is really no objection, at least no reasonable one, against resistance to the *higher powers*: Or, if it is one, it will hold equally against resistance in the other cases mentioned.--It is indeed true, that turbulent, vicious-minded men, may take occasion from this principle, that their rulers may, in some cases, be lawfully resisted, to raise factions and disturbances in the state; and to make resistance where resistance is needless, and therefore, sinful. But is it not equally true, that children and servants of turbulent, vicious minds, may take occasion from this principle, that parents and masters may, in some cases be lawfully resisted, to resist when resistance is unnecessary, and therefore, criminal? Is the principle in either case false in itself, merely because it may be abused; and applied to legitimate disobedience and resistance in those instances, to which it ought not to be applied? According to this way of arguing, there will be no true principles in the world; for there are none but what may be wrested and perverted to serve bad purposes, either through the weakness or wickedness of men.ý

ý We may very safely assert these two things in general, without undermining government: One is, That no civil rulers are to be obeyed when they enjoin things that are inconsistent with the commands of God: All such disobedience is lawful and glorious; particularly, if persons refuse to comply with any legal establishment of religion, because it is a gross perversion and corruption (as to doctrine, worship and discipline) of a pure and divine religion, brought from heaven to earth by the Son of God, (the only King and

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Head of the Christian church) and propagated through the world by his inspired apostles. All commands running counter to the declared will of the supreme legislator of heaven and earth, are null and void: And therefore disobedience to them is a duty, not a crime. -- Another thing that may be asserted with equal truth and safety, is, That no government is to be submitted to, at the expense of that which is the sole end of all government,--the common good and safety of society. Because, to submit in this case, if it should ever happen, would evidently be to set up the means as more valuable, and above, the end: than which there cannot be a greater solecism and contradiction. The only reason of the institution of civil government; and the only rational ground of submission to it, is the common safety and utility. If therefore, in any case, the common safety and utility would not be promoted by submission to government, but the contrary, there is no ground or motive for obedience and submission, but, for the contrary.

Whoever considers the nature of civil government must, indeed, be sensible that a great degree of *implicit confidence*, must unavoidably be placed in those that bear rule: this is implied in the very notion of authority's being originally a *trust*, committed by the people, to those who are vested with it, as all just and righteous authority is; all besides, is mere lawless force and usurpation; neither God nor nature, having given any man a right of dominion over any society, independently of that society's approbation, and consent to be governed by him--Now as all men are fallible, it cannot be supposed that the public affairs of any state, should be always administered in the best manner possible, even by persons of the greatest wisdom and integrity. Nor is it sufficient to legitimate disobedience to the *higher powers* that they are not so administered; or that they are, in some instances, very ill-managed; for upon this principle, it is scarcely supposeable that any government at all could be supported, or subsist. Such a principle manifestly tends to the dissolution of government: and to throw all things into confusion and anarchy.--But it is equally evident, upon the other hand, that those in authority may abuse their *trust* and power *to such a degree*, that neither the law of reason, nor of religion, requires, that any obedience or submission should be paid to them: but, on the contrary, that they should be totally *discarded*; and the authority which they were before vested with, transferred to others, who may exercise it more to those good purposes for which it is given.--Nor is this principle, that resistance to the *higher powers*, is, in some extraordinary cases, justifiable, so liable to abuse, as many persons seem to apprehend it. For although there will be always some petulant, querulous men, in every state--men of factious, turbulent and carping dispositions,--glad to lay hold of any trifle to justify and legitimate their caballing against their rulers, and other seditious practices; yet there are, comparatively speaking, but few men of this *contemptible character*. It does not appear but that mankind, in general, have a disposition to be as submissive and passive and tame under government as they ought to be.--Witness a great, if not the greatest, part of the known world, who are now groaning, but not murmuring, under the heavy yoke of tyranny! While those who govern, do it with any tolerable degree of moderation and justice, and, in any good measure act up to their office and character, by being public benefactors; the people will generally be easy and peaceable; and be rather inclined to flatter and adore, than to insult and resist, them. Nor was there ever any *general* complaint against any administration, *which lasted long*, but what there was good reason for. Till people find themselves greatly abused and oppressed by their governors, they are not apt to complain; and whenever they do, in fact, find themselves thus abused and oppressed, they must be

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stupid not to complain. To say that subjects in general are not proper judges when their governors oppress them, and play the tyrant; and when they defend their rights, administer justice impartially, and promote the public welfare, is as great treason as ever man uttered;--'tis treason,--not against one single man, but the state--against the whole body politic;--'tis treason against mankind;--'tis treason against common sense;--'tis treason against God. And this impious principle lays the foundation for justifying all the tyranny and oppression that ever any prince was guilty of. The people know for what end they set up, and maintain, their governors; and they are the proper judges when they execute their *trust* as they ought to do it;--when their prince exercises an equitable and paternal authority over them;--when from a prince and common father, he exalts himself into a tyrant--when from subjects and children, he degrades them into the class of slaves;--plunders them, makes them his prey, and unnaturally sports himself with their lives and fortunes.

A people, really oppressed to a great degree by their sovereign, cannot well be insensible when they are so oppressed. And such a people (if I may allude to an ancient *fable*) have, like the *hesperian* fruit, a DRAGON for their *protector* and *guardian*: Nor would they have any reason to mourn, if some HERCULES should appear to dispatch him--For a nation thus abused to arise unanimously, and to resist their prince, even to the dethroning him, is not criminal; but a reasonable way of indicating their liberties and just rights; it is making use of the means, and the only means, which God has put into their power, for mutual and self-defense. And it would be highly criminal in them, not to make use of this means. It would be stupid tameness, and unaccountable folly, for whole nations to suffer *one* unreasonable, ambitious and cruel man, to wanton and riot in their misery. And in such a case it would, of the two, be more rational to suppose, that they that did NOT *resist*, than that they who did, would *receive to themselves damnation*. And,

This naturally brings us to make some reflections upon the resistance which was made about a century since, to that unhappy prince, KING CHARLES I; and upon the ANNIVERSARY of his death. This is a point which I should not have concerned myself about, were it not that *some men* continue to speak of it, even to this day, with a great deal of warmth and zeal; and in such a manner as to undermine all the principles of LIBERTY, whether civil or religious, and to introduce the most abject slavery both in church and state: so that it is become a matter of universal concern.--What I have to offer upon this subject, will be comprised in a short answer to the following *queries*; *viz.*

For what reason the resistance to king *Charles the First* was made?

By whom it was made?

Whether this resistance was REBELLION,§ or not?

§ N.B. I speak of rebellion, treason, saintship, martyrdom, &c. throughout this discourse, only in the *scriptural* and *theological* sense. I know not how the *law* defines them; the study of *that* not being my employment.

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How the *Anniversary* of king *Charles's* death came at first to be solemnized as a day of fasting and humiliation?

And lastly,

Why those of the episcopal clergy who are very high in the principles of *ecclesiastical authority*, continue to speak of this unhappy man, as a great SAINT and a MARTYR?

For what reason, then, was the resistance to king *Charles*, made? The general answer to this inquiry is, that it was on account of the *tyranny* and *oppression* of his reign. Not a great while after his accession to the throne, he married a *French Catholic*; and with her seemed to have *wedded* the politics, if not the religion of France, also. For afterwards, during a reign, or rather a tyranny of many years, he governed in a perfectly wild and arbitrary manner, paying no regard to the constitution and the laws of the kingdom, by which the power of the crown was limited; or to the solemn oath which he had taken at his coronation. It would be endless, as well as needless, to give a particular account of all the illegal and despotic measures which he took in his administration;--partly from his own natural lust of power, and partly from the influence of wicked councillors and ministers.--He committed many illustrious members of both houses of parliament to the *tower*, for opposing his arbitrary schemes.--He levied many taxes upon the people without consent of parliament;--and then imprisoned great numbers of the principal merchants and gentry for not paying them.--He erected, or at least revived, several new and arbitrary courts, in which the most unheard-of barbarities were committed with his knowledge and approbation.--He supported that more than fiend, arch-bishop *Laud* and the clergy of his stamp, in all their church-tyranny and hellish cruelties.--He authorized a book in favor of *sports* upon the *Lord's day*; and several clergymen were persecuted by him and the mentioned *pious* bishop, for not reading it to the people after *divine service*.--When the parliament complained to him of the arbitrary proceedings of his corrupt ministers, he told that *august body*, in a rough, domineering, unprincely manner, that he wondered anyone should be so foolish and insolent as to think that he would part with the meanest of his servants *upon their account*.--He refused to call any parliament at all for the space of twelve years together, during all which time, he governed in an absolute lawless and despotic manner.--He took all opportunities to encourage the *papists*, and to promote them to the highest offices of honor and trust.--He (probably) abetted the horrid massacre in *Ireland*, in which two hundred thousand Protestants were butchered by the Roman Catholics.--He sent a large sum of money, which he has raised by his arbitrary taxes, into *Germany*, to raise foreign troops, in order to force more arbitrary taxes upon his subjects.--He not only by a long series of actions, but also in *plain terms*, asserted an absolute uncontrollable power; saying even in one of his speeches to parliament, that as it was blasphemy to dispute what God might do; so it was sedition in subjects to dispute what the king might do.--Towards the end of his tyranny, he came to the house of commons with an armed force,* and demanded five of its principal members to be delivered up to him--And this was a prelude to that unnatural war which he soon after levied against his own dutiful subjects; whom he was bound by all the laws of honor, humanity, piety, and I might add, of *interest* also, to defend and cherish with a paternal affection--I have only time to hint at these facts in a general way, all which, and many more of the same tenor, may be proved by good authorities: So that the *figurative*

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language which St. *John* uses concerning the just and beneficent deeds of our blessed Saviour, may be applied to the unrighteous and execrable deeds of this prince, viz. *And there are also many other things which king Charles did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself, could not contain the books that should be written.* Now it was on account of king *Charles's* thus assuming a power above the laws, in direct contradiction to his coronation oath, and governing the greatest part of his time, in the most arbitrary oppressive manner; it was upon this account, that that resistance was made to him, which, at length, issued in the loss of his crown, and of *that head* which was unworthy to wear it.

* Historians are not agreed what number of soldiers attended him in this monstrous invasion of the privileges of parliament. Some say 300, some 400: And the author of *The History of the Kings of Scotland*, says 500.

But by whom was this resistance made? Not by a private *junta*;--not by a small seditious party;--not by a few desperadoes, who, to mend their fortunes, would embroil the state;--but by the LORDS and COMMONS of *England*. It was they that almost unanimously opposed the king's measures for overturning the constitution, and changing that free and happy government into a wretched, absolute monarchy. It was they that when the king was about levying forces against his subjects, in order to make himself absolute, commissioned officers, and raised an army to defend themselves and the public: And it was they that maintained the war against him all along, till he was made a prisoner. This is indisputable. Though it was not properly speaking the parliament, but the army, which put him to death afterwards. And it ought to be freely acknowledged, that most of their proceeding, in order to get this matter effected; and particularly the court by which the king was at last tried and condemned, was little better than a mere mockery of justice.--

The next question which naturally arises, is, whether this resistance which was made to the king *by the parliament*, was properly *rebellion*, or not? The answer to which is plain, that it was not; but a most righteous and glorious stand, made in defense of the natural and legal rights of the people, against the unnatural and illegal encroachments of arbitrary power. Nor was this a rash and too sudden opposition. The nation had been patient under the oppressions of the crown, even to *long suffering*;--for a course of many years; and there was no rational hope of redress in any other way--Resistance was absolutely necessary in order to preserve the nation from slavery, misery and ruin. And who so proper to make this resistance as the lords and commons;--the whole representative body of the people;--guardians of the public welfare; and each of which was, in point of legislation, vested with an equal, co-ordinate power, with that of the crown? Here were *two* branches of the legislature against *one*;--two, which had law and equity and the constitution on their side, against one which was impiously attempting to overturn law and equity and the constitution; and to exercise a wanton licentious *sovereignty* over the properties, consciences and lives of all the people;--Such a *sovereignty* as some inconsiderately ascribe to the supreme Governor of the world.--I say, inconsiderately; because God himself does not govern in an absolutely arbitrary and despotic manner. The power of this Almighty King (I speak it not without caution and reverence; the power of this Almighty King) is *limited by law*; not, indeed, by *acts of parliament*, but by the eternal *laws* of truth, wisdom and equity; and the everlasting *tables* of right reason;--

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tables that cannot be *repealed*, or *thrown down* and *broken* like those of *Moses*.--But king *Charles* sat himself up above all these, as much as he did above the written laws of the realm; and made mere humor and caprice, which are no rule at all, the only rule and measure of his administration. And now, is it not perfectly ridiculous to call resistance to such a tyrant, by the name of *rebellion*?--*the grand rebellion*? Even that--parliament, which brought king *Charles II* to the throne, and which run *loyally mad*, severely reproved one of their own members for condemning the proceedings of that parliament which first took up arms against the former king. And upon the same principles that the proceedings of this parliament may be censured as wicked and rebellious, the proceedings of those who, since, opposed King *James II*, and brought the prince of *Orange* to the throne, may be censured as wicked and rebellious also. The cases are parallel.--But whatever *some* men may *think*, it is to be hoped that, for their own sakes, they will not dare to *speak* against the REVOLUTION, upon the justice and legality of which depends (in part) his present MAJESTY'S right to the throne.

** The *English* constitution is originally and essentially *free*. The character which *J. Caesar* and *Tacitus* both give of the ancient Britons so long ago, is, That they were extremely *jealous of their liberties*, as well as a people of a *martial* spirit. Nor have there been wanting frequent instances and proofs of the same glorious spirit (in both respects) remaining in their posterity ever since,--in the struggles they have made for liberty, both against foreign and domestic tyrants.--Their kings hold their title to the throne solely by grant of parliament; i.e. in other words, by the voluntary consent of the people. And, agreeably hereto, the prerogative and rights of the crown are stated, defined and limited by law; and that as truly and strictly as the rights of any inferior officer in the state; or indeed, of any private subject. And it is only in this respect that it can be said, that "the king can do no wrong." Being restrained by the law, he cannot, while he confines himself within those just limits which the law prescribes to him as the measure of his authority, injure and oppress the subject.--The king in his coronation oath, swears to exercise only such a power as the constitution gives him. And the subject, in the oath of allegiance, swears only to obey him in the exercise of such a power. The king is as much bound by his oath, not to infringe the legal rights of the people, as the people are bound to yield subjection to him. From whence it follows, that as soon as the prince sets himself up above law, he loses the king in the tyrant: he does to all intents and purposes, unking himself, by acting out of, and beyond, that sphere which the constitution allows him to move in. And in such cases, he has no more right to be obeyed, than any inferior officer who acts beyond his commission. The subjects' obligation to allegiance then ceases of course: and to resist him is no more *rebellion*, than to resist any foreign invader. There is an essential difference betwixt *government and tyranny*; at least under such a constitution as the *English*. The former consists in ruling according to law and equity; the latter, in ruling contrary to law and equity. So also, there is an essential difference betwixt resisting a tyrant, and rebellion; The former is a just and reasonable self-defense; the latter consists in resisting a prince whose administration is just and legal; and this is what denominates it a crime. Now it is evident, that king *Charles's* government was illegal, and very oppressive, through the greatest part of his reign: And, therefore, to resist him, was no more rebellion, than to oppose any foreign invader, or any other domestic oppressor.

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If it be said, that although the parliament which first opposed king *Charles's* measures, and at length took up arms against him, were not guilty of rebellion; yet certainly those persons were, who condemned, and put him to death: even this perhaps is not true. For he had, in fact, *unkinged* himself long before, and had forfeited his title to the allegiance of the people. So that those who put him to death, were, at most only guilty of *murder*; which, indeed, is bad enough, if they were really guilty of *that*; (which is at least disputable.) *Cromwell*, and those who were principally concerned in the (*nominal*) king's death, might possibly have been very wicked and designing men. Nor shall I say any thing in vindication of the reigning *hypocrisy* of those times; or of *Cromwell's* mal-administration during the *interregnum*: (for it is *truth*, and not a *party*, that I am speaking for.) But still it may be said, that *Cromwell* and his adherents were not, properly speaking, guilty of *rebellion*; because he, whom they beheaded was not, properly speaking, *their king*; but a *lawless tyrant*.--much less, are the whole body of the nation at that time to be charged with rebellion on that account; for it was no *national act*; it was not done by a *free* parliament. And much less still, is the nation at present, to be charged with the great sin of rebellion, for what their *ancestors* did, (or rather did NOT) a century ago.

But how came the *anniversary* of king *Charles's* death, to be solemnized as a day of fasting and humiliation? The true answer in brief, to which inquiry, is, that this fast was instituted by way of *court* and *complement* to king *Charles II*, upon the *restoration*. All were desirous of making their court to him: of ingratiating themselves; and of making him forget what had been done in opposition to his *father*, so as not to revenge it. To effect this, they ran into the most extravagant professions of affection and loyalty to him, insomuch that he himself said, that it was a *mad* and *hair brain'd loyalty* which they professed. And amongst other strange things, which his first parliament did, they ordered the *Thirtieth of January* (the day on which his father was beheaded) to be kept as a day of solemn humiliation, to deprecate the judgments of heaven for the rebellion which the nation had been guilty of, in that which was no national thing; and which was not rebellion in them that did it--Thus they soothed and flattered their new king, at the expense of their liberties:--And were ready to yield up freely to *Charles II*, all that enormous power, which they had justly resisted *Charles I*, for usurping to himself.

The last query mentioned, was, Why those of the *Episcopal clergy* who are very high in the principles of *ecclesiastical authority*, continue to speak of this unhappy prince as a *great Saint* and a *Martyr*? This, we know, is what they constantly do, especially upon the 30th of *January*;--a day sacred to the *extolling* of him, and to the *reproaching* of those who are not of the *established church*. *Out of the same mouth* on this day, *proceedeth blessing and cursing*; *there with bless they their God, even Charles, and therewith curse they the dissenters*: And their *tongue can no man tame*; *it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison*. King *Charles* is, upon this solemnity, frequently compared to our Lord Jesus Christ, both in respect of the holiness of his life, and the greatness and injustice of his *sufferings*; and it is a wonder they do not add something concerning the *merits* of his death also--But *blessed Saint* and *royal martyr*, are as humble titles as any that are thought worthy of him.

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Now this may, at first view, well appear to be a very strange *phenomenon*. For king *Charles* was really a man black with guilt and *laden with iniquity*, as appears by his crimes before mentioned. He lived a tyrant; and it was the oppression and violence of his reign, that brought him to his untimely and violent end at last. Now what of saintship or martyrdom is there in all this! What of saintship is there in encouraging people to profane the Lord's Day? What of saintship in falsehood and perjury? What of saintship in repeated robberies and patriots, into gaols? What of saintship in overturning an excellent civil constitution:--and proudly grasping at an illegal and monstrous power? What of saintship in the murder of thousands of innocent people: and involving a nation in all the calamities of a civil war? And what of martyrdom is there, in a man's bringing an immature and violent death upon himself, by being wicked overmuch? Is there any such thing as grace, without goodness! As being a follower of Christ, without following him? As being his disciple, without learning of him to be just and beneficent? Or, as saintship without sanctity? If not, I fear it will be hard to prove this man a saint. And verily one would be apt to suspect that that church must be but poorly stocked with saints and martyrs, which is forced to adopt such enormous sinners into her calendar, in order to swell the number.

But to unravel this *mystery* of (*nonsense* as well as of) *iniquity*, which has *already worked* for a *long time* amongst us; or, at least, to give the most probable solution of it; it is to be remembered, that king *Charles*, this *burlesque* upon saintship and martyrdom, though so great an oppressor, was a true friend to the *Church*; so true a friend to her, that he was very well affected towards the *Roman Catholics*; and would, probably, have been very willing to unite *Lambeth* and *Rome*. This appears by his marrying a true daughter of that true *mother of harlots*; which he did with a dispensation from the Pope, that supreme BISHOP; to whom when he wrote he gave the title of MOST HOLY FATHER. His queen was extremely bigoted to all the follies and superstitions, and to the *hierarchy*, of *Rome*; and had a prodigious ascendancy over him all his life. It was, in part, owing to this, that he (probably) abetted the massacre of the protestants in *Ireland*; that he assisted in extirpating the *French* protestants at *Rochelle*; that he all along encouraged *papist*, and popishly effected *clergymen*, in preference to all other persons, and that he upheld that monster of wickedness, ARCH-BISHOP LAUD, and the bishops of his stamp; in all their church-tyranny and diabolical cruelties. In return to his kindness and indulgence in which respects, they caused many of the pulpits throughout the nation, to ring with the divine absolute, indefeasible right of kings; with the praises of Charles and his reign; and with the damnable sin of resisting the Lord's anointed, let him do what he would. So that not Christ, but Charles, was commonly preached to the people.--In *plain English*, there seems to have been an impious bargain struck up betwixt the *scepter* and the *surplice*, for enslaving both the *bodies* and *souls* of men. The king appeared to be willing that the clergy should do what they would,--set up a monstrous hierarchy like that of Rome--a monstrous inquisition like that of Spain or Portugal,--or any thing else which their own pride, and the devil's malice, could prompt them to: *Provided always*, that the clergy would be tools to the crown; that they would make the people believe, that kings had God's authority for breaking God's law; that they had a commission from heaven to seize the estates and lives of their subjects at pleasure; and that it was a damnable sin to resist them, even when they did such things as deserved more than damnation.--This appears to be the true key for explaining the *mysterious* doctrine of king *Charles's* saintship and

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martyrdom. He was a saint, not because he was in his life, a good *man*, but a good *churchman*; not because he was a lover of *holiness*, but the *hierarchy*; not because he was a friend to *Christ*, but the *Craft*. And he was a martyr in his death, not because he bravely suffered death in the cause of truth and righteousness, but because he died an enemy to liberty and the rights of conscience; i.e. not because he died an enemy to *sin*, but *dissenters*. For these reasons it is that all bigoted clergymen, and friends to church-power, paint this man as a saint in his life, though he was such a mighty, such a *royal sinner*; and as a martyr in his death, though he fell a sacrifice only to his own ambition, avarice, and unbounded lust of power. And from prostituting their praise upon king *Charles*, and offering him that incense which is not his due, it is natural for them to make a transition to the dissenters, (as they commonly do) and to load them with that reproach which they do not deserve; they being generally professed enemies both to civil and ecclesiastical tyranny. WE are commonly charged (upon the *Thirtieth of January*) with the guilt of putting the king to death, under a notion that it was our ancestors that did it; and so we are represented in the blackest colors, not only as scismaticks, but also as traitors and rebels and all that is bad. And these *lofty* gentlemen usually rail upon this head, in such a manner as plainly shows, that they are either grossly ignorant of the history of those times which they speak of; or, which is worse, that they are guilty of the most shameful prevarication, slander and falsehood.--But every *petty priest*, with a *roll* and a *gown*, thinks he must do something in imitation of his betters, in lawn, and show himself a true son of the church: And thus, through a foolish ambition to appear *considerable*, they only render themselves *contemptible*.

But suppose *our* fore-fathers did kill their *mock* saint and martyr a century ago, what is that to *us* now? If I mistake not, these gentlemen generally preach down the doctrine of the *imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity*, as absurd and unreasonable, notwithstanding they have solemnly subscribed what is equivalent to it in *their own articles of religion*. And therefore one would hardly expect that they would lay the guilt of the king's death upon US, altho' *our fore-fathers* had been the only authors of it. But this conduct is much more surprising, when it does not appear that *our* ancestors had any more hand in it than *their own*.--However, bigotry is sufficient to account for this, and many other *phenomena*, which cannot be accounted for in any other way.

Although the observation of this *anniversary* seems to have been (at least) superstitious in its *original*; and although it is often abused to very bad purposes by the established clergy, as they serve themselves of it, to perpetuate strife, a party spirit, and divisions in the Christian church; yet it is to be hoped that one good end will be answered by it, quite contrary to their intention: It is to be hoped that it will prove a standing *memento*, that *Britons* will not be *slaves*; and a warning to all corrupt *councillors* and *ministers*, not to go too far in advising to arbitrary, despotic measures--

To conclude: Let us all learn to be *free*, and to be *loyal*. Let us not profess ourselves vassals to the lawless pleasure of any man on earth. But let us remember, at the same time, government is *sacred*, and not to be *trifled* with. It is our happiness to live under the government of a PRINCE who is satisfied with ruling according to law; as every other *good prince* will--We enjoy under his administration all the liberty that is proper and expedient for us. It becomes us, therefore, to be contented, and dutiful subjects. Let us

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prize our freedom; but not *use our liberty for a cloak of maliciousness*. There are men who strike at *liberty* under the term *licentiousness*. There are others who aim at *popularity* under the disguise of *patriotism*. Be aware of both. *Extremes* are dangerous. There is at present amongst *us*, perhaps, more danger of the *latter*, than of the *former*. For which reason I would exhort you to pay all due Regard to the government over us; to the KING and all in authority; and to *lead a quiet and peaceable life*.--And while I am speaking of loyalty to our *earthly Prince*, suffer me just to put you in mind to be loyal also to the supreme RULER of the universe, *by whom kings reign, and princes decree justice*. To which king eternal immortal, invisible, even to the ONLY WISE GOD, be all honor and praise, DOMINION and thanksgiving, through JESUS CHRIST our LORD. AMEN.