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SERMON CCLXI.

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SUBMISSION TO CIVIL AUTHORITY.

1st. PET. ii, 13 -17.—Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake; whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: as free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the King.

THE duty here inculcated is that of submission to civil authority. We shall notice,

I. The ground on which the scriptures rest the obligation to obedience.

II. Inquire to what extent obedience is required.

I. The ground on which the scriptures rest the obligation to obedience.

Why must I obey the laws of the land? "Because," say some, "in entering into society, you promised to yield to the conditions of that society." The people are supposed to have assembled; to have yielded, each, a portion of his natural rights; to have established some form of polity, under which the government assumed certain responsibilities, and the people promised, to a certain extent, obedience.

By others this theory has been rejected as inadequate and unsound. There never was such a compact. A fiction conveys no rights and imposes no obligation. If there had been such a compact, it might be just as difficult to tell why the individuals who made it were obliged to keep their engagements, as to answer the original question. Suppose a hundred men had stood

Now, our duties in all these matters, are matters of religious concern. God requires them. If we fail in these, he will bring us to account in the day of judgment. It may be that some among us have thought this field of civil duties exempt from the supervision of the law of God. If so, oh fatal mistake! Let us see to it that we have, in this department of duty, no accounts with God left unsettled till the judgment; for "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."

SERMON CCLXII.

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TRUE FREEDOM.

JOHN viii. 36.—If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

THERE are those who imagine that the religion of Christ is made up of little else than unwelcome and onerous restraints. "The truth shall make you free?" They think, rather, that if Christianity be truth, it will bind them, and fetter them, and make this pleasant earth in the pleasant light of the sun henceforth a gloomy prison. If, for fear of worse evils, they think of turning to Christ before they die, they think of it as putting off their liberty, and taking up a yoke, which, for its own sake, they would never choose to bear.

The Lord Jesus Christ, however, declares that this "yoke is easy" and his "burden is light," He declares that if we "know the truth, the truth shall make us free;" and that, if the Son shall make us free, we shall be free indeed."

He does not mean that he has no laws. He has laws, which are to be obeyed under the most dreadful of all penalties. He does not mean that his yoke is easy and his burden light, because he requires little and gives large indulgences. He requires much. He gives not the least indulgence to the least transgression of any one of all his commandments. He requires perfect obedience.

The wonder with many is, how men can come fully under this holy government of Christ, and yet be free.

The wonder is, how those who are completely subdued to this authority are said to be "called unto liberty;" and to be brought into the "glorious liberty of the children of God."

Now, how is this? Why are not our "Free-thinkers," as they vaunt themselves, the true freemen? Why are not the men who scoff at all religion, the truly free; and, what they claim to be, the best friends of liberty, having, of all things, the greatest horror of religious restraints, lest they should in time grow into a coalition of church and state, or into something else equally destructive of freedom?

In order to arrive at just views concerning these matters, we will

I. Inquire into the proper idea of liberty; and

II. Show that the liberty wherewith Christ maketh free is true freedom.

1. The proper idea of liberty.

I once heard an aged man, who had kept a dram-shop unlawfully, inveigh with great bitterness against the law that punished him, and against the men who were instrumental in bringing him to justice. "I fought for liberty," exclaimed he; "I have a right to do what I please." "This is a free country."

The notion appears to be becoming quite common, that, in a free country, every man ought to be allowed to do just what he pleases, and that just so far as this license is curtailed, freedom is taken away. Many seem to think there is no freedom unless men can be free from all obligation, human or divine.

It is to be granted, that every man ought to be allowed to do what he pleases, provided he pleases not to do what is wrong in itself, or what injures his neighbor or the community. From doing what is in itself a moral wrong the laws of God ought to prohibit him; from working mischief to his neighbor, to society, or to the state, the laws of man ought to restrain him. These laws should be armed with penalties sufficient to coerce the lawless and the disobedient. This is freedom. Without this there is no freedom.

If a company are on ship-board in the middle of the ocean, I suppose no one would be allowed to blow up the ship, or sink

it, under the notion of having a right to do what he pleases. No one of the ship's company would think his freedom infringed upon, if debarred from setting the ship on fire; or from throwing the provisions overboard; or from drenching them with sea water; or from maiming his shipmates, or throwing them overboard; or from furnishing strong drink to those who manage the ship, and who are known to be grossly addicted to intoxication. A man complain that his liberty is infringed upon, because he is debarred from doing these things! No. If he has a particle of common sense he will see that his liberty consists in these laws, which do not so much restrain him as defend him, and secure to him freedom to preserve his life, and to use it in the pursuit of happiness. It would be proper for that ship's company to make additional laws concerning their general policy:—for example,—that none should use fire carelessly; that in a savage port none should leave the ship, or engage in traffic, save under certain regulations; and these regulations do but enlarge and secure freedom, provided they are wise and good. None but a villain could desire a liberty to do these things which such regulations forbid. To none other would they be any restraint. "The law is not made for a righteous man." It is no restraint or embarrassment to him. The law is made "for the lawless and disobedient." If any number should be disposed to do what such regulations forbid, then law is needed; and its arm should be strong. If there may be no law; or, if the law may not be enforced, then there is no longer liberty, nor is life itself desirable. That fated ship would be but a floating hell; and the sooner some explosion rends it to atoms, or some conflagration consumes it, or some tempest hurls it to the bottom of the ocean, the greater the mercy to its wretched inhabitants. There is no liberty—there is no living without law.

Every community is in the condition of that ship upon the ocean; save only that, in a community upon land, there is no tornado, nor conflagration to prove the last refuge from anarchy. There is no deep to open her mouth in mercy and put an end at once to the community and its miseries. Here law is doubly important; and if there may not be law, there must be despotism or lingering ruin. If any sober man were to form a plan of a community, ordered under the fullest regard to liberty, he would not allow treason, or murder, or theft, or perjury, or arson, or kidnapping, or forgery. Why not? If he has fought for liberty, and means to be free, why not allow people to do as they please in such matters? It would destroy freedom. Allow every man to do as he pleases in the simple matter of punishing those who injure or insult him, as he thinks they deserve, and there is no freedom. No one has any longer any liberty to speak his opinion, or to utter or publish most wholesome and necessary truths. No one can be safe in pursuing his own righteous business, or in seeking hi

own happiness. The absence of law destroys his freedom. Law gives him his rights ; law secures them. Law gives him his liberty ; law secures it. He has no rights ; he has no liberty without law. Let reason answer, whether he who demands the liberty of doing what he pleases, without the restraints of law, is a friend of liberty.

The old man, who had "fought for liberty," did not consider how the law which forbade him to keep a tippling house, defended him and the rest of the community from pauper taxes, and from the mischiefs of a general licentiousness. He did not consider to how many families such a law was even more necessary than one to protect them from violence or murder. He did not consider that, but for such a law, there might soon be no liberty ; that a corrupt people might soon sell him and his children, and his whole country into the hands of despots ; or worse, that general licentiousness and depravation of principle would take away the liberty of travelling the highways in safety ; of working in the fields in security ; or even of lying down in the bed at night without the danger of being murdered and burnt up before morning. The old man had "fought for liberty," and surely, had he thought a little further, his patriot soul would have been ready to enter the field once more, to contend for the liberty of law. Sure, he would not have taken part with the enemies of his country in the revolution, and why should he now ?

The people of this country, for the very purpose of enlarging and enjoying their liberties, have framed for themselves laws. We have laws against blasphemy and profane swearing ; laws against printing or distributing obscene books ;—against purchasing them, or introducing them into schools or families ; laws against lewdness ; laws against lotteries, or selling lottery tickets ; laws against horse-racing, or abetting the same ; laws against gaming ; against selling playing-cards, or having them in possession for sale ; laws against taverners keeping any implements used in gaming ; laws against making or using any circus of any description ; laws against mountebanks and tumblers, and against suffering such persons to exhibit their tricks in our houses ;—in fine, the people of this land have found it indispensable to the possession and enjoyment of liberty, to have regulations of law on all subjects touching wrongs against persons or their property ; on all subjects touching the public policy or the public morals. Who is it that pleads that all these laws should be swept away, under the notion of enlarging our liberties ? What honest man and good citizen feels his liberties infringed upon by these laws ? Who but villains want a liberty to do the things which these laws forbid ?

The principle illustrated by these views, is this :—that wise and necessary laws are not inconsistent with liberty, but essential to it : that liberty to do in a community what every one may please to do, without any restraint of law, is an absurdity ;

that both righteousness and mercy demand that wise and just laws be armed with penalties amply sufficient to coerce the wicked. Such a government of law is the only perfect and the only possible freedom.

The same holds true, in relation to the government of God. Admit that his laws are "holy and just and good," and they are not only not incompatible with perfect freedom, but essential to it. No righteous and benevolent being will desire to do what these laws forbid. To righteous and benevolent beings, therefore, they are no restraint or incumbrance. If any desire to indulge in unrighteousness and malevolence, then laws are indispensable, and must be maintained by adequate penalties, if the great Jehovah is just and good. The highest offence in any community, is that which strikes at the foundations of government. If God, therefore, were to tolerate impiety towards himself, this would be to tolerate contempt and disloyalty towards the supreme Ruler and his whole authority. And if these "Foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" There is no power beyond His throne; there is no future existence beyond the life to come, to which the groaning world may look for relief. Offences against our neighbor may be heinous, but as offences against our neighbor, they are only partial and limited wrongs. Their damning guilt, is their relation to the law and the authority of God. As sin, they strike at the foundation of all government and all happiness. In this light, simple impiety rises into an evil which nothing less than infinite can measure. Sin, the offence against God; is the deepest guilt that can darken the character of man; the most heinous wrong which the universe knows. It is with infinite reason that the "First and the great commandment" requires piety to God; and that in the eye of divine law, no virtue, no goodness, nothing but entire and damning corruption is attributed to beings destitute of piety to God. Nor does it appear that the perdition to which divine justice dooms the incorrigibly wicked, is at all worse, even for the wicked themselves, than it would be to sweep away the divine laws; or, which is the same thing, to sweep away their awful sanctions.

And these laws are "holy, just, and good." No upright, pure-minded being can possibly feel that they infringe upon his liberty. They forbid nothing in which he desires to be allowed; they require nothing from which he would desire to be excused.

Does any one of you think it essential to his freedom, that he be allowed to lie, to deceive, and to defraud? Does your idea of liberty involve a notion that you ought to be allowed to be revengeful and malicious, a slanderer, a thief, or a murderer? Does your notion of liberty demand a freedom to contemn God? to blaspheme his holy name? to scoff at his authority, to set at naught his laws? Is your heart so disposed, that you feel your

liberty infringed upon by the prohibition of such things? Would you use the liberty, if the prohibition were removed? Have you no love, no virtue, does nothing but the terror of Hell deter you from the perpetration of such wrongs? Would you feel freer and happier, if such things were tolerated in the government of God? Who wants a liberty to hate the truth, to hate righteousness, and to be impious? Who is it that finds it essential to his happiness, to have such a license permanent and universal? Miserable man! Is there nothing that can give full loose to the feelings of your heart, but to hate, and to destroy all righteousness; to destroy the laws, and overturn the very throne of God? Is this your freedom! Is this your good? It is even so, "The carnal mind is enmity against God." Wonder not that there are laws! Wonder not that there is a hell!

And what do our "Free-thinkers" want? The liberty of thinking that falsehood is truth, and truth is falsehood—that truths proved by demonstration are doubtful, if they threaten evil to evil-doers? Do they want a freedom to think that two and two are not four; that there are no seas nor mountains upon the earth; that the worlds do not move; that in the machinery of the heavens, and in the beauties of the earth there are no tokens of the knowledge and power, and skill, and taste, and goodness of the Creator? freedom to think that there is no right, there is no wrong, there is no truth, no error, no reason, in the universe?

For my part, I know not what free thinking is, save to be free to love and pursue the truth; I know not what freedom is, but to love and obey the Lord. If it were forbidden to love truth, to hate falsehood, to be grateful, to be kind, to follow the dictates of reason, or to live at peace with our own conscience, this would be an infringement upon liberty. If it were required of us to blaspheme the adorable name of God, or to be undutiful to him as our sovereign; this would be tyranny. It would be hard living under a government which should forbid us to love God or our neighbor. But to require what is right, and to forbid what is wrong, is no curtailment of liberty, unless, indeed, some one should wish a liberty to be an enemy of all righteousness, and a child of the devil. But this is not liberty. It is not a change from bondage to freedom, but from freedom to bondage. "Know ye not, that his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" The desires of an evil heart are now the masters of the soul that has thought it freedom to break away from the government of God. He is "sold under sin;" "led captive by Satan at his will." He is not free to love and obey the truth. His imperious lusts will not allow him to follow his own better judgment. He often struggles with his appetites, like a captive who would have liberty or death; but they drag him along, force him into warfare with

his conscience and with God, make his soul a cage for every unclean bird, and finally compel him to sacrifice honor, integrity, life, and his very salvation, to a bondage from which he shall not be free till he dies, nor while eternity endures. He is in "the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity."

We have now looked at these things sufficiently to have formed proper ideas of the nature of true freedom.

II. The liberty wherewith Christ maketh free is true freedom.

He brings us under the government of law, but it is "the perfect law of liberty;" liberty to love man and to love God; liberty to follow the dictates of reason and of conscience; liberty to pursue our highest dignity, and our highest good; entire freedom to trample under our feet every fetter of vice, and every bond of Satan and of sin. Follow his instructions, and every veil of prejudice and error shall be removed; every delusion, every snare shall be revealed. He will teach us how to break every yoke, and how to vanquish every enemy. "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." He will bring us into the "glorious liberty of the children of God;" and yet the children of God are under law. Heaven itself is under law. The law that reigns there is perfect. Obedience is perfect. All disobedience is excluded. Every desire is conformed to the law. This is true freedom; this is perfect liberty.

More particularly, the way in which the Son of God makes us free is this:—

1. He opens the prison doors. We were already condemned; convicts shut up, without the possibility of escape, to be brought forth only to execution. The world was but a prison. Ascend to heaven, make our bed in hell, dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, it was impossible to flee from the presence of an offended God. It would be impossible to escape his notice amid the convulsions of the last day. The earth would melt with fervent heat; the heavens would pass away with a great noise; but the eye of God would be upon every guilty soul, and he could by no means escape. The pity of all created beings could not save him. No cries, no tears could dispose the Judge to reverse or abate his heavy sentence. But "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." He came "to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." Fellow, sinner, if the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed; if not, there is no other arm that can save; there is no other redemption for your soul.

2. He breaks our fetters. By his spirit, he slays the sins that have kept us in bondage. We are no longer to be led captive at the will of Satan. We are to be no longer the servants of sin. We feel that a heavy load is taken off. As a man who had been pinioned for years, feels relieved when his

manacles are broken, so the soul that has been delivered from the dominion of sin feels light, and in the possession of a freedom of which it had formed no conception before.

3. He sets us free; by creating in us a new heart; and renewing in us a right spirit. Now we loathe the bondage which we loved. Now we understand the excellency of his laws; now we love them. Now we "hunger and thirst after righteousness." We feel that we shall be satisfied when we are completely renewed after the image of him who created us, and made completely holy. The laws of Christ are no restraint to us now we love the things which the law requires; we abhor the things which it forbids. We want no other liberty. We should abhor ourselves if we could use any other liberty.

So Christ makes free; not by annulling law; not by lowering down the demands of law; not by disarming the law; but by redeeming us from its curse; by disposing us to love righteousness and spontaneously to pursue the path which the law requires. Our reason, our conscience, our inclination, all agree with the law. We are delivered from the misgivings, the self-condemnation, and the fears of them that are in bondage to sin. But,

4. He admits us to the glorious franchise of the "sons of God." "The servant abideth not in the house forever." The servant of sin is not to abide in this earthly house of God forever; much less in that building of God eternal in the heavens. As an undutiful and wicked servant is to be turned away in disgrace and sorrow; so the sinner is to be driven away from the presence of God. The time of retribution will come; "and they shall gather out of his kingdom all them that offend, and them that work iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." "But the Son abideth forever." They whom Christ maketh free are henceforth privileged with the franchise of sons. They are to abide in the house of their father. They shall go no more out. They shall receive an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. Oh the liberty wherewith Christ maketh free! Oh the eternal chains and darkness reserved for them who wear the chains of sin upon the earth! Dying fellow sinner, wilt thou be released from bondage? Wilt thou be delivered from condemnation? Wilt thou be saved from everlasting captivity in an eternal prison? Wilt thou be enfranchised with the glorious liberty of the children of God? Christ can make you free. He died for you. He has compassion on you. Come to him: come in all your pollution; come with all your guilt and chains upon you; only come, repenting and believing, and you shall be set free.