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THE BOOKS OF HOMILIES: Book 1—X. An exhortation to obedience

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For the Easter season, I am reading the Books of Homilies, using John Griffiths' 1859 edition (https://prydain.files.wordpress.com/2012/09/the_two_books_of_homilies.pdf).

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Transcript

An exhortation concerning good order and obedience to rulers and magistrates. Almighty God hath created and appointed all things, in heaven, earth, and waters, in a most excellent and perfect order. In heaven he hath appointed distinct or several orders and states of archangels and angels.

In earth he hath assigned and appointed kings and princes, with other governors under them, all in good and necessary order. The water above is kept and raineth down in due time and season. The sun, moon, stars, rainbow, thunder, lightning, clouds, and all birds of the air do keep their order.

The earth, trees, seeds, plants, herbs, corn, grass, and all manner of beasts keep themselves in their order. All the parts of the whole year, as winter, summer, months, nights, and days, continue in their order. All kinds of fishes in the sea, rivers, and waters, with all fountains and springs, yea, the seas themselves, keep their comely course and

order.

And man himself also hath all his parts both within and without, as soul, heart, mind, memory, understanding, reason, speech, with all and singular corporal members of his body, in a profitable, necessary, and pleasant order. Every degree of people, in their vocation, calling, and office, hath appointed to them their duty and order. Some are in high degree, some in low, some kings and princes, some inferiors and subjects, priests and laymen, masters and servants, fathers and children, husbands and wives, rich and poor, and every one have need of other, so that in all things is to be lauded and praised the goodly order of God, without the which no house, no city, no commonwealth can continue and endure, or last.

For where there is no right order, there reigneth all abuse, carnal liberty, enormity, sin, and Babylonical confusion. Take away kings, princes, rulers, magistrates, judges, and such estates of God's order. No man shall ride or go by the highway unrobbed.

No man shall sleep in his own house or bed unkilld. No man shall keep his wife, children, and possessions in quietness. All things shall be common, and there must needs follow all mischief and utter destruction, both of souls, bodies, goods, and commonwealths.

But blessed be God, that we in this realm of England feel not the horrible calamities, miseries, and wretchedness, which all they undoubtedly feel and suffer, that lack this godly order. And praised be God, that we know the great excellent benefit of God showed toward us in this behalf. God hath sent us his high gift, our most dear sovereign lady, Queen Elizabeth, with godly, wise, and honourable counsel, with other superiors and inferiors, in a beautiful order and goodly.

Wherefore let us subjects do our bounden duties, giving hearty thanks to God, and praying for the preservation of this godly order. Let us all obey, even from the bottom of our hearts, all their godly proceedings, laws, statutes, proclamations, and injunctions, with all other their godly orders. Let us consider the scriptures of the Holy Ghost, which persuade and command us all obediently to be subject, first and chiefly to the Queen's Majesty, Supreme Governor over all, and next to her honourable counsel, and to all other noble men, magistrates, and officers, which by God's goodness be placed and ordered.

For almighty God is the only author and provider of this forenamed state and order, as it is written of God in the book of the Proverbs, Through me kings do reign, through me counsellors make just laws, through me do princes bear rule, and all judges of the earth execute judgment. I am loving to them that love me. Here let us mark well and remember that the high power and authority of kings, with their making of laws, judgments, and officers, are the ordinances, not of man, but of God, and therefore is this word, through me, so many times repeated.

Here is also well to be considered and remembered, that this good order is appointed of God's wisdom, favour, and love, specially for them that love God, and therefore he saith, I love them that love me. Also in the book of wisdom we may evidently learn that a king's power, authority, and strength is a great benefit of God, given of his great mercy to the comfort of our great misery. For thus we read there spoken to kings, Hear, O ye kings, and understand, learn, ye that be judges of the ends of the earth, give ear, ye that rule the multitudes, for the power is given you of the Lord, and the strength from the highest.

Let us learn also here by the infallible and undeceivable word of God, that kings and other supreme and higher officers are ordained of God, who is most highest, and therefore they are here diligently taught to apply and give themselves to knowledge and wisdom, necessary for the ordering of God's people to their governance committed, or whom to govern, they are charged of God. And they be here also taught by almighty God, that they should re-knowlege themselves to have all their power and strength, not from Rome, but immediately of God most highest. We read in the book of Deuteronomy, that all punishment pertaineth to God by this sentence, Vengeance is mine, and I will reward.

But this sentence we must understand pertain also to the magistrates, which do exercise God's room in judgment and punishing by good and godly laws here in earth. And the places of scripture which seem to remove from among all Christian men judgment, punishment, or killing, ought to be understand, that no man of his own private authority may be judge over other, may punish, or may kill, but we must refer all judgment to God, to kings and rulers and judges under them, which be God's officers to execute justice, and by plain words of scripture have their authority and use of the sword granted from God, as we are taught by St. Paul, the dear and chosen apostle of our Saviour Christ, whom we ought diligently to obey, even as we would obey our Saviour Christ if he were present. Thus St. Paul writeth to the Romans, Let every soul submit himself under the authority of the higher powers, for there is no power but of God.

The powers that be be ordained of God. Whosoever therefore withstandeth the power, withstandeth the ordinance of God. But they that resist, or are against, shall receive to themselves damnation.

For rulers are not fearful to them that do good, but to them that do evil. Wilt thou be without fear of the power? Do well then, and so shalt thou be praised of the same, for he is the minister of God for thy wealth. But if thou do that which is evil, then fear, for he beareth not the sword for naught, for he is the minister of God, to take vengeance on him that doeth evil.

Wherefore ye must needs obey, not only for fear of vengeance, but also because of conscience, and even for this cause pay ye tribute, for they are God's ministers, serving

for the same purpose. Here let us all learn of St. Paul, the chosen vessel of God, that all persons having souls, he accepteth none, nor exempteth none, neither priest, apostle, nor prophet, saith St. Chrysostom, do owe, of bounden duty, and even in conscience, obedience, submission, and subjection to the high powers which be set in authority by God. For as much as they be God's lieutenants, God's presidents, God's officers, God's commissioners, God's judges, ordained of God himself, of whom only they have all their power and all their authority, and the same St. Paul threateneth no less pain than everlasting damnation to all disobedient persons, to all resistors against this general and common authority, for as much as they resist not man, but God, not man's device and invention, but God's wisdom, God's order, power, and authority, for as much as God hath created and disposed all things in a comely order, we have been taught in the first part of this sermon concerning good order and obedience, that we also ought in all commonwealths to observe and keep a due order, and to be obedient to the powers, their ordinances and laws, and that all rulers are appointed of God, for a godly order to be kept in the world, and also how the magistrates ought to learn how to rule and govern according to God's laws, and that all subjects are bound and to obey them as God's ministers, yea, although they be evil, not only for fear, but also for conscience' sake.

And here, good people, let us all mark diligently that it is not lawful for inferiors and subjects in any case to resist or stand against the superior powers, for St. Paul's words be plain, that whosoever withstandeth shall get to themselves damnation, for whosoever withstandeth withstandeth the ordinance of God, our Saviour Christ himself and his apostles received many and diverse injuries of the unfaithful and wicked men in authority, yet we never read that they, or any of them, caused any sedition or rebellion against authority, we read oft that they patiently suffered all troubles, vexations, slanders, pangs and pains, and death itself obediently, without tumult or resistance, they committed their cause to him that judgeth righteously, and prayed for their enemies heartily and earnestly, they knew that the authority of the powers was God's ordinance, and therefore both in their words and deeds they taught ever obedience to it, and never taught nor did the contrary. The wicked judge Pilate said to Christ, Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power also to loose thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above, whereby Christ taught us plainly that even the wicked rulers have their power and authority from God, and therefore it is not lawful for their subjects by force to withstand them, although they abuse their power, much less then is it lawful for subjects to withstand their godly and Christian princes, which do not abuse their authority, but use the same to God's glory, and to the profit and commodity of God's people. The holy apostle St. Peter commandeth servants to be obedient to their masters, not only if they be good and gentle, but also if they be evil and froward, affirming that the vocation and calling of God's people is to be patient and of the suffering side.

And there he bringeth in the patience of our Saviour Christ, to persuade obedience to

governors, yea, although they be wicked and wrongdoers. But let us now hear St. Peter himself speak, for his own words certify best our conscience. Thus he uttereth them in his first epistle.

Servants obey your masters with fear, not only if they be good and gentle, but also if they be froward. For it is thankworthy if a man for conscience toward God suffereth grief, and suffereth wrong undeserved. For what praise is it, when ye be beaten for your faults, if ye take it patiently? But when ye do well, if you then suffer wrong and take it patiently, then is there cause to have thank of God.

For here unto verily were you called, for so did Christ suffer for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps. All these be the very words of St. Peter. St. David also teacheth us a good lesson in this behalf, who was many times most cruelly and wrongfully persecuted of King Saul, and many times also put in jeopardy and danger of his life by King Saul and his people.

Yet he never withstood, neither used any force or violence against King Saul, his mortal or deadly enemy, but did ever to his liege lord and master King Saul most true, most diligent, and most faithful service. In so much that, when the Lord God had given King Saul into David's hands in his own cave, he would not hurt him, when he might, without all bodily peril, easily have slain him. No, he would not suffer any of his servants once to lay their hands upon King Saul, but prayed to God in this wise, Lord, keep me from doing that thing unto my master, the Lord's anointed.

Keep me that I lay not my hand upon him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord. For as truly as the Lord liveth, except the Lord smite him, or except his day come, or that he go down to war, and in battle perish, the Lord be merciful unto me, that I lay not my hand upon the Lord's anointed. And that David might have killed his enemy King Saul, it is evidently proved in the first book of the Kings, both by the cutting off of the lap of Saul's garment, and also by the plain confession of King Saul.

Also another time, as it is mentioned in the same book, when the most unmerciful and most unkind King Saul did persecute poor David, God did again give King Saul into David's hands, by casting of King Saul and his whole army into a dead sleep, so that David and one Abisai with him came in the night into Saul's host, where Saul lay sleeping, and his spear stuck in the ground at his head. Then said Abisai unto David, God hath delivered thine enemy into thy hands at this time. Now therefore let me smite him once with my spear to the earth, and I will not smite him again the second time, meaning thereby to have killed him with one stroke, and to have made him sure for ever.

And David answered and said to Abisai, Destroy him not, for who can lay his hands on the Lord's anointed and be guiltless? And David said furthermore, As sure as the Lord liveth, the Lord shall smite him, or his day shall come to die, or he shall descend, or go down into battle and there perish. The Lord keep me from laying my hands upon the

Lord's anointed. But take thou now the spear that is at his head, and the crews of water, and let us go.

And so he did. Here is evidently proved that we may not withstand, nor in any ways hurt, an anointed king, which is God's lieutenant, vice-gerent, and highest minister in that country where he is king. But peradventure, some here would say that David in his own defence might have killed King Saul lawfully, and with a safe conscience.

But holy David did know that he might in no wise withstand, hurt, or kill his sovereign lord and king. He did know that he was but King Saul's subject, though he were in great favour with God, and his enemy King Saul out of God's favour. Therefore, though he were never so much provoked, yet he refused utterly to hurt the Lord's anointed, he durst not, for offending God and his own conscience, although he had occasion and opportunity, once lay his hands upon God's high officer the king, whom he did know to be a person reserved and kept for his office's sake only to God's punishment and judgment.

Therefore he prayeth so oft and so earnestly that he lay not his hands upon the Lord's anointed. And by these two examples, St. David, being named in Scripture a man after God's own heart, giveth a general rule and lesson to all subjects in the world, not to withstand their liege lord and king, not to take a sword by their private authority against their king, God's anointed, who only beareth the sword by God's authority for the maintenance of the good and for the punishment of the evil, who only by God's law hath the use of the sword at his commandment, and also hath all power, jurisdiction, regiment, coercion and punishment, as supreme governor of all his realms and dominions, and that even by the authority of God and by God's ordinances. Yet another notable story and doctrine is in the second book of the kings that maketh also for this purpose.

When an Amalekite, by King Saul's own consent and commandment, had killed King Saul, he went to David, supposing to have had great thank for his message that he had killed David's deadly enemy. And therefore he made great haste to tell to David the chance, bringing with him King Saul's crown that was upon his head, and his bracelet that was upon his arm, to persuade his tidings to be true. But godly David was so far from rejoicing at these news, that immediately and forthwith he rent his clothes off his back, he mourned and wept, and said to the messenger, How is it that thou wast not afraid to lay thy hand on the Lord's anointed to destroy him? And by and by David made one of his servants to kill the messenger, saying, Thy blood be on thy own head, for thy own mouth hath testified and witnessed against thee, granting that thou hast slain the Lord's anointed.

These examples being so manifest and evident, it is an intolerable ignorance, madness and wickedness for subjects to make any murmuring, rebellion, resistance or withstanding, commotion or insurrection against their most dear and most dread

sovereign lord and king, ordained and appointed of God's goodness for their commodity, peace and quietness. Yet let us believe undoubtedly, good Christian people, that we may not obey kings, magistrates or any other, though they be our own fathers, if they would command us to do any thing contrary to God's commandments. In such a case, we ought to say with the apostles, We must rather obey God than man.

But nevertheless in that case we may not in any wise withstand violently or rebel against rulers, or make any insurrection, sedition or tumult, either by force of arms or other ways, against the anointed of the Lord or any of his appointed officers. But we must in such case patiently suffer all wrongs and injuries, referring the judgment of our cause only to God. Let us fear the terrible punishment of almighty God against traitors or rebellious persons, by the example of Corrie, Dathan and Abiron, which repugned and grudged against God's magistrates and officers, and therefore the earth opened and swallowed them up alive, other for their wicked murmuring and rebellion, were by a sudden fire sent of God utterly consumed, other for their froward behavior to their rulers and governors, God's ministers, were suddenly stricken with a foul leprosy, other were stung to death with wonderful strange fiery serpents, other were sore plagued, so that there was killed in one day the number of fourteen thousand and seven hundred, for rebellion against them whom God had appointed to be in authority.

Absalom also, rebelling against his father King David, was punished with a strange and notable death. Ye have heard before in this sermon of good order and obedience, manifestly proved both by scriptures and examples, that all subjects are bound and to obey their magistrates, and for no cause to resist or withstand, rebel or make any sedition against them, yea, although they be wicked men, and let no man think that he can escape unpunished, that committeth treason, conspiracy, or rebellion against his sovereign lord the king, though he commit the same never so secretly, either in thought, word, or deed, never so privily in his privy chamber by himself, or openly communicating and consulting with other, for treason will not be hid, treason will out at the length, God will have that most detestable vice both opened and punished, for that it is so directly against his ordinance, and against his high principle judge and anointed in earth, the violence and injury that is committed against authority is committed against God, the common wheel, and the whole realm, which God will have known, and condignly or worthily punished one way or other, for it is notably written of the wise man in scripture, in the book called Ecclesiastes, wish the king no evil in thy thought, nor speak no hurt of him in thy privy chamber, for a bird of the air shall betray thy voice, and with her feathers shall she beray thy words. These lessons and examples are written for our learning.

Let us all therefore fear the most detestable vice of rebellion, ever knowing and remembering that he that resisteth, or withstandeth common authority, resisteth, or withstandeth God and his ordinance, as it may be proved by many other more places of holy scripture. And here let us take heed that we understand not these or such other like

places, which so straightly command obedience to superiors, and so straightly punisheth rebellion and disobedience to the same, to be meant in any condition of the pretended or coloured power of the bishop of Rome. For truly the scripture of God alloweth no such usurped power, full of enormities, abusions, and blasphemies, but the true meaning of these and such places be to extol and set forth God's true ordinance, and the authority of God's anointed kings, and of their officers appointed under them.

And concerning the usurped power of the bishop of Rome, which he most wrongfully challengeth, as the successor of Christ and Peter, we may easily perceive how false, feigned, and forged it is, not only in that it hath no sufficient ground in holy scripture, but also by the fruits and doctrine thereof. For our Saviour Christ and St. Peter teach most earnestly and agreeably obedience to kings, as to the chief and supreme rulers in this world, next under God. But the bishop of Rome teacheth, that they that are under him are free from all burdens and charges of the commonwealth, and obedience towards their prince, most clearly against Christ's doctrine and St. Peter's.

He ought therefore rather to be called Antichrist, and the successor of the scribes and Pharisees, than Christ's vicar or St. Peter's successor, seeing that not only in this point, but also in other weighty matters of Christian religion, in matters of remission and forgiveness of sins and of salvation, he teacheth so directly against both St. Peter and against our Saviour Christ, who not only taught obedience to kings, but also practised obedience in their conversation and living. For we read that they both paid tribute to the king. And also we read that the Holy Virgin Mary, mother to our Saviour Christ, and Joseph, who was taken for his father, at the emperor's commandment went to the city of David, named Bethlehem, to be taxed among other, and to declare their obedience to the magistrates for God's ordinances sake.

And here let us not forget the blessed Virgin Mary's obedience. For although she was highly in God's favour, and Christ's natural mother, and was also great with child that same time, and so nigh her travail that she was delivered in her journey, yet she gladly, without any excuse or dredging, for conscience sake, did take that cold and foul winter journey, being in the mean season so poor that she lay in the stable, and there she was delivered of Christ. And according to the same, lo, how St. Peter agreeth, writing by express words in his first epistle, Submit yourselves, or be subject, saith he, unto kings, as unto the chief heads, or unto rulers, as unto them that are sent of him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well, for so is the will of God.

I need not to expound these words, they be so plain of themselves. St. Peter doth not say, Submit yourselves unto me as supreme head of the church, neither he saith, Submit yourselves from time to time to my successes in Rome, but he saith, Submit yourselves unto your king, your supreme head, and unto those that he appointeth in authority under him, for that he shall so show your obedience. It is the will of God, God will that you be in subjection to your head and king.

This is God's ordinance, God's commandment, and God's holy will, that the whole body of every realm, and all the members and parts of the same, shall be subject to their head, their king, and that as St. Peter writeth, for the Lord's sake, and as St. Paul writeth, for conscience sake, and not for fear only. Thus we learn by the word of God to yield to our king that is due to our king, that is, honour, obedience, payments of due taxes, customs, tributes, subsidies, love, and fear. Thus we know partly our bounden duties to common authority.

Now let us learn to accomplish the same. And let us most instantly and heartily pray to God, the only author of all authority, for all them that be in authority, according as St. Paul willeth, writing thus to Timothy in his first epistle. I exhort therefore that, above all things, prayers, supplications, intercessions, and giving of thanks be done for all men, for kings, and for all that be in authority, that we may live a quiet and a peaceable life, with all godliness and honesty, for that is good and accepted, or allowable in the sight of God our Saviour.

Here St. Paul maketh an earnest and a special exhortation concerning giving of thanks and prayer for kings and rulers, saying, Above all things, as he might say, in any wise principally and chiefly, let prayer be made for kings. Let us heartily thank God for his great and excellent benefit and providence concerning the state of kings. Let us pray for them that they may have God's favour and God's protection.

Let us pray that they may ever in all things have God before their eyes. Let us pray that they may have wisdom, strength, justice, clemency, zeal to God's glory, to God's verity, to Christian souls, and to the common wealth. Let us pray that they may rightly use their sword and authority for the maintenance and defence of the Catholic faith contained in Holy Scripture, and of their good and honest subjects, and for the fear and punishment of the evil and vicious people.

Let us pray that they may faithfully follow the most faithful kings and captains in the Bible, David, Ezechias, Josias, Moses, with such other. Let us pray for ourselves that we may live godly in holy and Christian conversation, so we shall have God of our side, and then let us not fear what man can do against us, so we shall live in true obedience, both to our most merciful King in heaven, and to our most Christian Queen in earth. So shall we please God, and have the exceeding benefit, peace of conscience, rest and quietness here in this world, and after this life we shall enjoy a better life, rest, peace, and the everlasting bliss of heaven, which He grant us all that was obedient for us all, even to the death of the cross, Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost be all honour and glory, both now and ever.

Amen.