

TWO QUESTIONS

CONCERNING THE

POWER OF THE SUPREME MAGISTRATE

ABOUT

RELIGION AND THE WORSHIP OF GOD,

WITH

ONE ABOUT TITHES,

PROPOSED AND RESOLVED.

BY

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Unto the Questions sent me last night, I pray accept of the ensuing Answer, under the title of Two Questions concerning the Power of the Supreme Magistrate about Religion and the Worship of God ; with one about Tithes, proposed and resolved.

QUESTION I.

‘**W**HETHER the supreme magistrate in a nation or commonwealth of men professing the religion of Jesus Christ, may or ought to exert his power legislative and executive, for the supportment, preservation, and furtherance of the profession of the faith and worship of God ; and whether he may and ought to forbid, coerce, or restrain such principles and practices as are contrary to them, and destructive of them?’

The affirmative of both the parts of this question is proved,

I. From the light and law of nature.

For,

1. That there is a God.

2. That this God ought to be believed in, and worshipped according to the revelation that he makes of himself.

3. That it is incumbent on his worshippers in their several capacities, to defend and further that worship which answers the light and knowledge they have of him.

4. That to revile, or blaspheme this God, or his name, is an evil to be punished by them who have ‘*jus puniendi*,’ or the right of restraint in them, or committed unto them ;

Are all dictates of the law of nature, principles inseparable from that light which is natural, and necessary unto rational creatures, subsisting in a moral dependence on God, and confirmed by Scripture ; Heb. xi. 6. Exod. xxii. 28.

To assert then that the supreme magistrate, as such, in any nation, ought not to exert his authority for the ends, and in the way inquired after, is contrary to the light and law of nature.

II. From the law of nations.

For,

1. The due and regular improvement of common natural notions, and inbred principles, unto universal public good, is the law of nations, whose general foundation is laid, Gen. ix. 5, 6.

2. The constant usage of mankind in their political societies, answerable unto right reason, is the revealer or discoverer of this law of nations.

3. This law is an evidence and presumption of truth and right, paramount unto, and uncontrollable by, any thing but express revelation; or it is a discovery of the will of God, less than, and subordinate unto, no way but that of immediate revelation.

4. The wilful breach or contempt of this law, in its allotments or assignation of bounds to the interests and concernments of men, is generally esteemed the most righteous ground of one nation's waging war upon another.

5. That the supreme magistrate in each commonwealth, ought to exert his power and authority for the supportment, preservation, and furtherance of the worship of God, and to coerce and restrain that which would ruin it, is a maxim of this law of nations, manifested by the common constant usage, and universal entrances, unimpeached by any one contrary instance (where this law hath prevailed) of all mankind in their political societies; nor is this practice controlled by express revelation, but is rather confirmed; Jer. ii. 10.

Therefore to deny the lawfulness of the authority inquired after, and its due execution, is contrary to the law of nations.

III. From God's institution, in and by laws positive, upon doctrines of faith, and ways of worship, of pure revelation.

For,

1. Among the people of the Jews, as is known and confessed, God appointed this as the chief and supreme care and duty of the magistrate, to provide by the authority committed to him, that his worship, as by himself revealed, should be preserved and provided for, in all the concernments of it; and that what was contrary unto it in some instances, he

should coerce and restrain; Deut. xiv. 2, 3. 18, 19. xvi. 18—22.

2. Though the instituted worship of God was for the greatest part then typical, and to endure but for a season, yet the preservation of that worship by God commanded, was a moral duty; Deut. xvi. 20.

3. God's command to the magistrate, for the exercise of his care and duty in reference unto his typical worship, did not respect it, as typical, but as his worship.

4. The law and command of God for the magistrate in that commonwealth to take care and do as above, was not only an eminent privilege, blessing, and advantage to the commonwealth, as such; but it was also a special mercy to all and every one of his chosen ones in that commonwealth; and what is given or granted by God to all or any of his saints by the way of privilege or mercy, is not disannulled, but either by express revocation, or the institution of somewhat exhibiting a greater privilege or mercy, wherewith the former proves inconsistent.

5. No revocation of this grant, or command and institution, no appointment of any thing inconsistent with it, appears in the gospel.

Then universally to deny the right and exercise of the power inquired after, is contrary to the positive law of God, given in reference unto doctrines of faith, and ways of worship, of pure revelation; such as were those possessed and walked in under the Old Testament.

IV. From the example of all godly magistrates, accepted with God from the foundation of the world.

For,

1. There is no one magistrate left on record in the whole book of God, with any commendation given unto him, or approbation of him, as such, but it is firstly and chiefly on this account, that he exerted the power and duty inquired after. David, Hezekiah, Josiah, Nehemiah, as others, are instances.

2. Since the days of the publication of the gospel, no one magistrate hath obtained a good report among the saints and churches of Christ, but upon the same account.

3. No one magistrate is remembered to have omitted

this care, work, or duty, but a mark or blot is left upon him for it, as a person disapproved and rejected of God.

4 Nothing but an express discharge by way of revelation, can acquit a magistrate from following the example of all and every one of them, who in their work have been approved of God, in that wherein they were so approved. Wherefore,

To affirm that the supreme magistrate ought not to exert his authority for the ends mentioned, is to affirm, that the magistrate is now accepted with God, in and for the not doing of that which all other magistrates have been accepted with God in and by the doing of: which seems unreasonable.

V. From the promises of gospel times.

For,

1. Promises given in a way of privilege and mercy, that men should do any thing, declare it to be their duty so to do.

2. There are many promises that in gospel times magistrates shall lay out their power, and exert their authority, for the furtherance and preservation of the true worship of God, the profession of the faith, the worshippers and professors thereof, and therein the whole interest of Zion; Isa. i. 26. xlix. 22, 23.

3. All the promises relating unto God's providential dispensations in the world, with reference unto the interest of his church and people, do centre in this, that the rulers in and of the world shall exert and exercise their power in subserviency to the interest of Christ, which lies in his truth and his worship; which cannot be done, if the power inquired after be denied; Isa. lx. 3. 11—17. Rev. xi. 15.

To say, then, that the supreme magistrate in a commonwealth of men professing the true Christian religion, ought not to exert his legislative and executive power in the defence, and for the furtherance of the truth and worship of God, and for the restraint of the things that are destructive thereunto, is to say, that 'the promise of God is of no effect.'

VI. From the equity of gospel rules.

For,

1. Whatever is of moral equity, and hath the power of obligation from thence, the gospel supposeth, and leaves

men under that obligation, pressing them unto obedience thereunto; Phil. iv. 8.

2. Whatever was instituted and appointed of God formerly, is of moral positive equity, if it be not repealed by the gospel; and therefore the forementioned institution of the magistrate's duty in the things under consideration, is supposed in the gospel.

3. The gospel rules on this supposition are, that the magistrate is to promote all good, and to hinder all evil that comes to his cognizance, that would disadvantage the whole, by its civil disturbance, or provoking God against it, and that in order to the interest of Christ and his church; Rom. xiii. 1—7. 1 Tim. ii. 2. Prov. viii. 15, 16.

4. That what is good and evil upon an evangelical account, evidently and manifestly is exempted from these rules, cannot be proved.

Therefore to say it, is contrary to the equity of gospel rules.

VII. From the confession of all the Protestant churches in the world.

That all the Protestant churches in the world assert, at least the whole of the duty contained in the affirmative of the question to be incumbent on the supreme magistrate, is known to all men that care to know what they assert.

VIII. From the confession of those in particular, who suffer in the world on the account of the largeness of their principles, as to toleration and forbearance.

The Independents; whose words in their confession are as followeth:

'Although the magistrate is bound to encourage, promote, and protect the professors and profession of the gospel, and to manage and order civil administrations in a due subserviency to the interest of Christ in the world, and to that end to take care that men of corrupt minds and conversations do not licentiously publish and divulge blasphemies and errors, in their own nature subverting the faith, and inevitably destroying the souls of them that receive them; yet in such differences about the doctrines of the gospel, or ways of the worship of God, as may befall men exercising a good conscience, manifesting it in their conversation, and holding the foundation, not disturbing others in their ways

or worship that differ from them, there is no warrant for the magistrate under the gospel to abridge them of their liberty.'

IX. From the spiritual sense of the generality of godly men in the world.

This can be no otherwise known, but by the declaration of their judgments, and as to what can by that way be found out or discovered, a thousand to one, of men truly godly, are for the affirmative, 'Vox populi Dei, est vox Dei.'

X. From the pernicious consequences of the contrary assertion; whereof I shall mention only two.

1. The condemnation and abrenunciation of the whole work of reformation, in this and other nations, so far as it hath been promoted by laws or constitutions of supreme magistrates: as in the removal of idolatry, destroying of idols and images, prohibiting the mass, declaring and asserting the doctrine of the gospel, supporting the professors of it; which things have been visibly owned and blessed of God.

2. The destruction of the plea of Christ's interest in the government of the nations; especially as stated by them, who in words contend to place him in the head of their laws and fundamental constitutions; where nothing in a government may be done for him, nothing against them who openly oppose him, men can scarce be thought to act under him, and in subordination to him.

The conclusion from hence is, to advance an opinion into any necessity of its being received, which is contrary to the law of nature and nations, God's institutions and promises, the equity of gospel rules, the example of all magistrates who have obtained testimony from God, that they discharged their duty unto acceptation with him, to the confession of all Protestant churches, the spiritual sense of the generality of godly men in the world, and attended in itself with pernicious consequences, seems to be the effect of selffulness, and readiness to impose men's private apprehensions upon others, the only evil pretended to be avoided by it.

II. The next Question is,

May the supreme magistrate, by laws and penalties, compel any one who holds the head Christ Jesus, to sub-

scribe to that confession of faith, and attend to that way of worship which he esteems incumbent on him to promote and further?

That we may answer distinctly, observe,

I. That the inquiry is concerning them only that hold the head; for others, their case is not proposed. They are left to the providence of God, in his working on the hearts of them whom he raiseth up for governors, according to the measure of light, love, and zeal, which he shall be pleased to impart unto them. And though it cannot be proved, that any magistrate is authorized from God to take away the life or lives of any man or men, for their disbelieving or denying any heads or articles of the Christian religion; yet it doth not seem to be the duty of any professing obedience to Jesus Christ, to make any stated, legal, unalterable provision for their immunity, who renounce him.

II. That things or opinions of public scandal, national demerit, and reproach to the profession of the gospel, ought to be restrained from being divulged by that public speaking of the press, or in extrafamilial assemblies, both which, according to the usage of all nations, are under the power, and at the disposal of the supreme magistrate, was before proved in our answer to the first inquiry.

III. It is agreed that the measure of doctrinal holding the head, consists in some few clear fundamental propositions.

IV. It cannot be denied but that most men in the determination of this question, have run into extremes, much upon the account of their present interest, or that of some party of men, wherein and with which as to some special self-ends, they are engaged.

These things being premised, I answer to the question negatively, and that because the authority inquired after, exerted to the ends mentioned, would immediately affect the conscience, and set up itself in direct opposition to the light of God therein; a defect of proving the conveyance of such an authority over the consciences of men holding the head, having been long since discovered.

The third Question.

'Whether it be convenient that the present way of the maintenance of ministers or preachers of the gospel be

removed and taken away, or changed into some other provision.

Ans. I. That the public preachers of the gospel ought to be maintained, by a participation in the temporal things of them to whom the word is preached, is an appointment of the Lord Christ, and of the apostles in his name and authority; 1 Cor. ix. 14. Gal. vi. 6.

II. The reasonableness of this gospel institution is manifested by the Holy Ghost: 1. From the law of nature; Luke x. 7. 1 Cor. ix. 7. 11. 2. From the law of nations in the same place. 3. From the tendency and equity of Mosaical institutions; 1 Cor. ix. 9—13.

III. Where God by providential dispensations hath laid things in a nation, in a subserviency to an institution of Christ according to his promise, Psal. ii. 8. Isa. xlix. 23. as he hath done in this case, to oppose that order of things, seems to be a fighting against God and his anointed.

IV. The payment of tithes, 1. Before the law; Gen. xiv. 20. Heb. vii. 4, 5. with, 2. The like usage amongst all nations, living according to the light of nature; 3. Their establishing under the law; with, 4. The express relation in gospel appointment unto that establishment, 1 Cor. ix. 14. do make that kind of payment so far pleadable, that no man, without being able to answer and satisfy that plea, can with any pretence of a good conscience, consent to their taking away.

V. A maintenance by a participation in men's temporals, for those who preach the gospel, being expressly appointed by Jesus Christ, and reference for the proportion, being directly made by the apostle, unto the proportion allotted by God himself under the Old Testament; for any man, or number of men, to suppose they can make a better and wiser allotment, especially when and where a near approachment thereunto is already made by Providence, seems to be a contending with him, who is mightier than they.

VI. To deprive preachers of the gospel, when sent out into their Master's harvest, and attending unto their work, according to the best of the light which the present age enjoyeth, with visible and glorious success, of the portion, hire, wages, or temporal supportment prepared for them in the good providence of God, upon pretences of inconveniencies, and dis-

satisfactions of some prejudiced men, seems to be an attempt not to be paralleled from the foundation of the world.

VII. Wherever, or in what nation soever, there hath been a removal of the maintenance provided in the providence of God, for the necessary supportment of the public dispensers of the word, the issue hath been a fatal and irrecoverable disadvantage to the gospel and interest of Christ in those nations.

It appears then, first, That to take away the public maintenance provided in the good providence of God, for the public dispensers of the gospel, upon pretences of present inconvenience, or promise of future provision, is a contempt of the care and faithfulness of God towards his church, and in plain terms, downright robbery.

Secondly, To entitle a nation unto such an action, by imposing it on them without their consent, is downright oppression.

VIII. An alteration of the way of payment of that revenue which is provided in the providence of God for public preachers, by the way of tithes, into some other way of payment, continuing the present right, is not obnoxious or liable to any of the forementioned evils, but its convenience or inconvenience may be freely debated.

Yours,

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