

THANKSGIVING and PRAYER for PUBLIC  
RULERS,

RECOMMENDED IN A

DISCOURSE, *D*

DELIVERED AT THE

SECOND PARISH, in CAMBRIDGE,

FEBRUARY 19, 1795,

Being the DAY of NATIONAL THANKS-  
GIVING in the UNITED STATES.

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## A DISCOURSE, &c.

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*My Christian Friends,*

**W**E are indebted, under GOD, to those that are in authority, and to the free and equal government, which they administer, for the continued enjoyment of our invaluable civil and religious privileges. From the ruins of the old confederation, has arisen the excellent fabric of our present Federal Constitution, which, for its wise construction and great advantages, commands the admiration of the world, establishes among us, *liberty with order*, and gives us an important and distinguished rank among the other Nations of the earth.

Without government, no nation or society can exist ; without its necessary and effectual restraints, the passions of men, gaining an ascendant influence over reason and the rules of morality, would spread universal anarchy, ruin and misery over the world. The establishment and execution of just and equal laws are essential to the peace and safety, the liberty and happiness both of individuals, and nations. They arrest the rapacious arm of injustice ; they restrain the corrupt and ferocious passions, and suppress  
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the rebellion, of the disobedient ; they protect the lives and property of the virtuous and peaceable, and secure to the whole, the enjoyment of their just rights.

Civil government, which has just and equal liberty for its foundation and object, allows to each individual, every privilege, except that of injuring others, of violating that which is right, or of exhibiting examples pernicious to the welfare and peace of society. And these necessary restraints are enjoined upon man, by the laws of nature, in order to secure and preserve the proper enjoyment of liberty ; and without these restrictions, liberty at once loses its name and degenerates either into licentiousness or tyranny.

The great officers of a republican government, when prudent and faithful in its administration, become instrumental, in spreading every where among its free subjects, the blessings of social order, peace and security, and in leading them onward, to prosperity and glory.

The present flourishing and happy state of our country, under the administration of the national government, has suggested the above remarks, testifies to their truth, and renders it highly fit and proper, in compliance with the request of our civil Fathers, publicly to make our most fervent and grateful acknowledgments to the Supreme Ruler of nations, for the beneficent instruments of our common prosperity, and to devote this day, to thanksgiving and prayer.

Agreeably

Agreably to this design, and as the ground of the following observations, I have made choice of part of St. Paul's address unto Timothy, in his first Epistle, 2d chapter, 1st and 2d verses.

*“ I exhort therefore that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks be made for all men.*

*“ For kings and for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.”*

In leading your minds into some suitable thoughts, on this occasion, it may be necessary 1. To bestow some remarks on the general import and extent of the duty contained in this exhortation. And, 2. Consider and apply the reasons, or motives, which recommend and enforce it.

This exhortation unites the exercises of thanksgiving and prayer, and enjoins, that they *be made for all men, and especially for kings and all in authority. Supplication, prayers and intercessions*, are terms similar in their import and signification, and may be considered as used by the Apostle merely to give energy and strength to his expression, when inculcating a duty that is indispensable. They equally imply an earnest and devout address unto God for the averting his judgments, and the obtaining his mercies, and combine in setting forth the duty of commending ourselves and others to his divine benediction, of imploring the guardian care of  
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his beneficent providence, and of being solicitous for the welfare and prosperity of civil government, in order that we might continue quietly and peaceably to enjoy our privileges both civil and religious.

As civil rulers are particularly mentioned in the exhortation, of consequence, we are directed to present the address more especially in their behalf.

This exhortation comports with the duty enjoined us, on this day, to accompany our *thanksgivings for the blessings we experience*, with devout supplications for their continuance.

The proclamation recommends to us, to offer up fervent prayers and thanksgivings for the whole family of mankind, as well as for the singular privileges and mercies of our own favoured land. And while *prayer and giving of thanks are to be made for all men*, our intercessions and pious gratitude are to be offered up, in an especial manner *for those that are in authority*, and for the national government, which secures to us these invaluable blessings. Civil government is an ordinance of God ; 'tis essential to the existence of society, and the righteous officers thereof are designed *to be his ministers for good unto his people*. And when they answer the beneficent purpose of their appointment to office, their constituents have abundant reason for devout thanksgivings unto the Supreme Ruler of nations, *who guides the prudent in council*, and gives a propitious direction to  
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the affairs of states and kingdoms. 'Tis an instance of the divine benevolence, that governing *powers* are ordained for the support and happiness of human society; and since by the administration of our civil rulers, *we enjoy great quietness, and many worthy deeds are done to this nation by their providence, 'tis our duty, to accept it always, and in all places, with all thankfulness.*

The unequal bestowment of mental talents, and external prosperity, naturally tends to produce distinctions and subordinations among mankind; and while laws are essential to the security of their enjoyments, there will be a necessity for some to govern, and others to obey.

But unhappily such are the corruption, pride and ambition of the human heart, that they, who are elevated to the possession and exercise of power over others, are liable to abuse it, and make it subservient to their own aggrandizement. Hence has originated the despotism of kings and princes, and the slavery and oppressions of their subjects. Hence have arisen the tyranny and cruelties of aristocratic and democratic power. And hence it is, that the best forms of government become corrupted and their spirit and laws perverted, by ambitious rulers, who are unduly avaricious of power over others, and who, by the means of force, intrigue, or faction, usurp authority and dominion.

A republican form of government is undoubtedly the best calculated to secure and preserve

serve the freedom and just rights of a people, and the least in danger of being corrupted by its administrators: Still it may happen, that they, who are invested with its authority, may become more tenacious of the rights and peculiar advantages of their station, than of those of their constituents. They may fancy that their station invests them with the uncontrollable right of compelling obedience *in all cases whatever.*

Power, like every other privilege, may be abused, or imprudently exercised by its possessors, and occasion just uneasiness among the people, and involve them in the horrors of civil war. But when the great officers of a republican government become the guardians of the people's rights, and the beneficent instruments of their prosperity, by averting dangers, and continuing their enjoyments, their constituents have abundant reason for the most fervent thanksgivings and praise.

The apostolic exhortation before us, reminds us also, that kings are to be remembered in our intercessions. The primitive christians, who were interspersed among nations, over whom kings and emperors reigned, were more immediately interested than we are, in the discharge of this part of the duty. The reason however, for which it was recommended to them, in some measure, recommends it to us, viz. that we might peaceably and quietly enjoy our rights and privileges, without being molested by them.

them. As the spirit of true liberty is the most formidable enemy that kings have to fear, 'tis natural for them to combine to arrest its progress, consequently nations that are free are always liable to be invaded and crushed by them. The enlightening and powerful *energy of opinion* is more to be dreaded by them, than external force. Fleets and armies instead of becoming an object of their fear, only serve to cherish their lust of dominion and conquest, and to feed their ambition and rapacity. In general they delight in war, especially when there is a prospect of encreasing or extending their despotic power, and sovereignty. History scarcely acquaints us with any wars, which have not been instigated by Kings, or in which they have not readily come in for a share. Nimrod arose to his power and dominion, by invading the rights of his neighbours, and the same disposition has discovered itself in most of his successors. As they are always ready to embrace every opportunity, to extend their power and dominions, and as their *hearts are in the hands of God; who can turn them as the rivers of water are turned*; so we are to commend them unto Him, that he would dispose them to be merciful and just to their own subjects, and especially to desist from their iniquitous combinations against the peace, the liberty and rights of others.

The destruction of the French Republic is now the favourite and eager object of the powerful



erful Despots and Princes of Europe, who have entered into an infamous confederacy to effect it. Should they become successful in this unjust and iniquitous design, it does not require the spirit of prophecy to predict, what will be their next attempt. They will make a powerful exertion to extirpate the principle of equal liberty from the globe, lest its existing spirit should again revive and finally triumph over the ruins of all despotic and oppressive government. The wretched fate of *Poland* shows what would be that of France, yea, America also, should despotism become triumphant. Each Despot would be eager to send his troops to take their share in the general scramble and plunder.

There can be nothing more unjust or atrocious, than the present confederacy of European Powers against France. If the domestic government of families and individuals be universally acknowledged to be sacred, what justifiable reason can there be offered for one nation to interfere in the internal concerns of another? Has not every nation an equal right to form and establish its own laws and government? Or are the rights of nations less sacred, than those of individuals? Surely no. If a foreigner should come into one of your families, and in an insolent and hostile manner, interfere in the concerns of your household, should endeavour to overturn your family government, and in its stead, give you such  
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laws as he pleased ; would not the warmest active indignation at such iniquitous conduct be justifiable ? Would not such intrusion be condemned and reprobated by every friend of order and justice ? Surely then the combination of despotic princes, to invade and give laws and government, by force, to a nation engaged in the cause of liberty and justice, is not less reprehensible. Such kings and despots, as they are capable of reformation, are on that account the subjects of our prayers, and therefore we are to remember them, in our intercessions.

But considering the exhortation of the text, as particularly to be applied, to ourselves, our intercessions are to be accompanied with devout thanksgiving *for those that are in authority* over us, our national government and the great officers of it.

The federal government is undoubtedly to be considered as the foundation of all our political enjoyments and blessings. It was framed by the collected wisdom of our country, and is considered by those who are viewed as judges, to be as perfect a form as the world has yet ever seen. For this instrument of our national freedom, prosperity and happiness, our public, devout thanksgivings and prayers are to be made.

The worthy and skilful officers and managers of it, who have hitherto so prudently and wisely administered it, are especially to have an interest

interest in our gratitude and intercessions, on this day, to the Supreme Governour of nations; our pious and grateful acknowledgments for these public instruments of our blessings, will be a good evidence of the sincere thankfulness of our hearts, to him who is the Great Author of them.

Hence I proceed to the 2d part of our subject, to consider and apply the reasons or motives, by which the Apostle recommends and enforces the duty, which are, *that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.*

The reasons or motives suggested here, are two; one taken from the consideration of the enjoyment of the blessing of peace; the other, from that of the advancement of piety and virtue.

1st. That the enjoyment of the blessing of peace may be continued, is a powerful motive to this duty.

The continuance of this greatest and best of blessings, both in an external and domestic view, is owing, under divine providence, to the prudence and wisdom of our rulers, in conducting our political and commercial interests. The wars or peace of nations are, in a great measure, dependent on *those in authority.* They lead the great affairs of states and kingdoms, and become instrumental in producing war, or in effecting and continuing peace.

Had it not been for the skilful and prudent management of the great officers of our national

al government, in all probability, we should have been plunged, before this time, into all the horrors of the present war in Europe. They firmly opposed and defeated an iniquitous confederacy both of foreign influence and domestic faction. They exhibited unexampled patience and forbearance under the most wanton encroachments upon our rights and property at home and abroad, by European despoilers and by the enemy of the wilderness. Amidst many unprovoked insults and invasions, the Members of Congress have conducted with unrivalled wisdom and moderation. Had they been hasty to manifest even a just indignation and resentment towards the agents or instigators of such unjustifiable conduct, war would inevitably have been the issue, and they would thus have sacrificed the peace, yea the blood of our country, to the feelings of the moment. Here I cannot forbear to mention, that the skill and prudence, the firmness and moderation of our beloved WASHINGTON, displayed both in council and in conduct, were as unexceeded in the management and guidance of the affairs of our nation, through this difficult period, as they had been heretofore, in obtaining for us the victory in the field. By such wisdom and forbearance, we have hitherto been exempted and sheltered from the dreadful thunder and tempest of a war, which has spread its horrors and devastations far and wide in the fairest part of Europe. By such management the late formidable insurrec-

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tion in one of the sister states has been happily suppressed without the shedding of kindred blood. By such means, our neighbours of the wilderness are consenting to terms of friendship and peace; and by such means, the remonstrances and negociations of an Envoy extraordinary at the Court of England, have been successful, and issued in an amicable treaty.

Thus the benign spirit of peace and tranquillity has been every where cherished and carefully preserved by the friends of our Country, and is daily becoming more and more permanent among us, under their beneficent exertions. Thus our favoured land has now become a happy asylum for all the persecuted and unfortunate of other nations, and invites them from every part of the contending globe, to come to its peaceful shores, and enjoy *liberty with order*, and have none to molest them. In this respect, what a contrast do we make with most all other nations of the earth! *In viewing the calamities of other nations, our present condition affords much matter of consolation and satisfaction.*

The contrast of *our present condition* is a state of war, into which many other countries are now involved. War is the greatest scourge and calamity that can befall a nation. Among the numerous evils that are sent to afflict and destroy mankind, there is not one that can be named, so dreadfully efficacious and horrid, as that of war. Its path is always marked with the blood of thousands, and ruin and desolation follow

follow in its train. And they who exert themselves to prevent such a calamity must be considered among the true friends of justice and humanity.

He that casts an eye over Europe, and beholds what slaughter, distress and desolation, the present war has already occasioned, must be a stranger to the emotions of compassion and benevolence, not to deplore and weep over its ravages and horrors. How many millions have already been slain in the field! What countless numbers, massacred in cool blood! How many thousands, whose habitations and property being laid waste, have been forced into forlorn and distressing exile! What destruction to the treasures of nature! What ravages among the richly monuments of art! That our country has hitherto been exempted from such calamities and distress, is owing, under God, to the men and measures of our national government, *to those that are in authority over us*, for whom our thanksgivings and prayers are to be offered up, on this festive day, to the Supreme Ruler of the World.

2d. The other reason or motive, by which this duty is recommended, is the further advancement of piety and virtue. Under the continued enjoyment of peace, we are to become exemplary *in all godliness and honesty*. Peace and prosperity are to be made subservient to the great interests of religion and morality.

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Without the principles and rules of religion and morality, a republican government would soon fall into ruin. Godliness alone can prevent the arrogance of prosperity, or the wanton abuse of liberty, and give proper subjection, order and tranquillity, to the great body of a free people. The characters of the great officers of government, therefore; should ever be eminently marked with the commanding influence and effects of established principles of religion. And 'tis with pleasure, I can remark; that the proclamation for the religious observance of this day, is fraught with ample evidence, that the interests of piety and morality, have a share among the important concerns of our national rulers. It solemnly enjoins piety to God, and the sacred observance of those principles and precepts which christianity inculcates. And while our government and rulers secure to us the enjoyment of our religious privileges, and enjoin a diligent and faithful improvement of them, it highly becomes us to exhibit to the world, an eminent example of *godliness and honesty*.

Religion is the only safeguard of a free people, and they who disregard its principles, or manifest a disposition or conduct that tends to lessen a veneration for the deity, are essentially unqualified to be at the head of government. That men destitute of religion, or the fear of God, are unfit to lead and govern the important affairs of nations, we have a recent and unhappy example in the late rulers of France, in  
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her revolution. Liberated from the shackles of the grossest superstition, it might have been expected, that the French would have fallen into the other extreme, and become religious enthusiasts. But that the leaders of the revolution should reject all religion, even its first principles, the being and attributes of God, which the light of nature inculcates on the rudest Pagan, is a matter that may well excite the astonishment of the world.

Considering death as an eternal sleep, and rejecting the belief of a God and every religious principle, they let the people loose from every restraint, and prepared them for every species of injustice, wickedness and abomination. Having no fear of God before their eyes, and consequently no check to the blind fury of their ferocious passions, they became totally unconscientious in their conduct towards their fellow creatures. Though Robespierre, (whose name will be execrated, through all succeeding generations, by every friend of humanity and justice,) inculcated the principles of religion and morality; yet being at the head of a sanguinary, factious party, whose ruling influence occasioned those shocking enormities which have stained the French Revolution, he could not have been that friend to the interests of religion and virtue, which he wished the world to believe him. He assumed that religious, hypocritical appearance as a shelter and covering for his iniquity and abominations. What unjust executions! what horrid massacres! what dreadful effusion



of human blood were occasioned by him ! The humane and benevolent mind is struck with horror at the bare representation of that awful scene of carnage, murder and death, which marked the reign of this bloody tyrant. This infamous Robespere and his party, caused some of the first men of science among the French, both in philosophy and politicks, to be put to death, and occasioned the loss or murder of many of the best generals of the French army. In short, he aimed at the supreme sovereign power over the people, and determined to cut down all in his way and every one that obstructed his progress to it. And had he obtained his object, he would have become the greatest tyrant the world ever saw, and would have ruled France with a rod of iron. But in mercy to the French, he was arrested in his horrid career, and met the fate he had long deserved. Since his fall, the affairs of France, under the management of the more rational, moderate and virtuous, have assumed a new and more pleasing aspect. Rational liberty and humanity now begin to triumph in that much afflicted country, and order to arise out of confusion. They begin to trace back the ground they had so hastily and imprudently gone over, to acknowledge the being and providence of God, and to inculcate the principles of religion and the rules of morality. In this cause of civil and religious liberty we heartily wish them success ; we wish them peace, religion, and a free, equal and efficient government. May the experiment they  
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have tried, be to them, a convincing proof, that religion and virtue are the sole foundation and security of order, liberty and happiness to a Republic.

What cause have we for thanksgiving and praise, that we have hitherto been protected from such dangers and calamities, and that we have *one* at the head of our national government, who is the confidence and boast of his country; the admiration and envy of the world, and whose life and character are replete with those personal and christian virtues which manifest his real veneration for religion, and warrant his future fidelity in guarding the people's rights. And may our devout thanksgivings and prayers be united *for all that are in authority over us, that we may continue to lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty,*

We can hardly remember the time, when our country has been more flourishing and prosperous, than it is at present, under the fostering care of our civil rulers ; and its encreasing wealth, its rising credit and glory, the rank it holds among the nations of the earth, and the prosperity of all classes of citizens, are a pleasing testimony of the benign and propitious influence, of the government which they administer. It secures to us peace, liberty and happiness at home, and respectability abroad ; and we exhibit an example of enlightened freedom, social order, and growing prosperity to all the nations of the world. Being thus peculiarly distinguished, and singularly favoured by  
Heaven,

Heaven, it becomes us, to be eminent and exemplary *in all godliness and honesty.*

May a deep sense of gratitude be impressed on all our hearts, and evinced "by a correspondent conduct as citizens and as men." May we practise that universal righteousness, which exalteth and rendereth a nation secure and happy. "May we become firmly established in the habits of sobriety, order, morality and piety" as the only safe and unshaken foundation of a Republic; and "may all the blessings we possess or ask for ourselves be speedily imparted to the whole family of mankind." For this purpose may all governments, that are oppressive to mankind, be demolished, and make way for the universal prevalence and establishment of the kingdom and government of Christ. May civil and religious liberty become every where triumphant, and the laws of christianity become the Supreme laws of nations. *Then wars and fightings will be no more: Then there will be peace and good will among all mankind; and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the Saints of the Most High, and all dominions will serve and obey him.* That such may speedily become the happy state of the world, you will unite with me in saying, AMEN.