

**Appeal to the Public for Religious Liberty,
Against the Oppressions of the Present Day**

Isaac Backus

“Brethren, ye have been called unto Liberty; only use not Liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another,” Gal. 5:13.

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INTRODUCTION

In as much as there appears to us a real need of such an appeal, we would previously offer a few thoughts concerning the general nature of liberty and government and then shew wherein it appears to us that our religious rights are encroached upon in this land.

It is supposed by multitudes, that in submitting to government we give up some part of our liberty, because they imagine that there is something in their nature incompatible with each other. But the word of truth plainly shews, that man first lost his freedom by breaking over the rules of government; and that those who now speak great *swelling words* about *liberty*, while they *despise government*, are themselves *servants of corruption*. What a dangerous error, yea, what a root of all evil then must it be, for men to imagine that there is any thing in the nature of true government that interferes with true and full liberty! A grand cause of this evil is, ignorance of what we are, and where we are; for did we view things in their true light, it would appear to be as absurd and dangerous, for us to aspire after any thing beyond our capacity, or out of the rule of our duty, as it would for the frog to swell till he bursts himself in trying to get as big as the ox, or for a beast or fowl to dive into the fishes element till they drown themselves. *Godliness with contentment is great gain: But they that will take a contrary course fall into temptation, and a snare; and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which DROWN men in destruction and perdition* (I Tim. 6: 6, 9).

The true liberty of man is, to know, obey and enjoy his Creator, and to do all the good unto, and enjoy all the happiness with and in his fellow creatures that he is capable of; in order to which the law of love was written in his heart, which carries in its nature union and benevolence to Being in general, and to each being in particular, according to its nature and excellency, and to its relation and connexion to and with the Supreme Being, and ourselves. Each rational soul, as he is a part of the whole system of rational beings, so it was and is, both his duty and his liberty to regard the good of the whole in all his actions. To love ourselves, and truly to seek our own welfare, is both our liberty and our indispensable duty; but the conceit that man could advance either his honor or happiness, by disobedience instead of obedience, was first injected by the *father of lies*, and all such conceits ever since are as false as he is.

Before man imagined that submission to government, and acting strictly by rule was confinement, and the breaking over those bounds would enlarge his knowledge and happiness, how clear were his ideas! (even so as to give proper names to every creature) and how great was his honor and pleasure! But no sooner did he transgress, than instead of enjoying the boldness of innocency, and the liberties of paradise, he sneaks away to hide himself; and instead of clear and just ideas, he adopted that master of all absurdities (which his children follow to this day) of thinking to hide from OMNISCENCY, and of trying to deceive HIM who knows every thing! Instead of good and happiness, he felt evil, guilt and misery; and in the room of concord was wrangling, both against his Creator and his fellow-creature, even so that she who was before loved as his *own flesh*, he now *accuses* to the great Judge. By which it appears, that the notion of man's gaining any dignity or liberty by refusing an intire submission to government, was so delusive, that instead of its advancing him to be as *Gods*, it sunk him down into a way of acting like the beasts and like the devil: the beasts are actuated by their senses and inclinations, and the devil pursues his designs by deceit and violence. With malicious reflections upon God, and flattering pretences to man, he drew him down to gratify his eyes and his taste with forbidden fruit: and he had no sooner revolted from the authority of heaven, than the beauty and order of his family was broken; he turns accuser against the wife of his bosom, his first son murders the next, and then

lies to his Maker to conceal it; and that lying murderer's posterity were the first who broke over the order of marriage which God had instituted; and things proceeded from bad to worse, till all flesh had corrupted his way, and the earth was filled with violence, so that they could no longer be borne with, but by a just vengeance were all swept away, only one family.

Yet all this did not remove the dreadful distemper from man's nature, for the great Ruler of the universe directly after the flood, gave this as one reason why he would not bring such another while the earth remains, namely, *For the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth*; so that if he was to drown them as often as they deserved it, one deluge must follow another continually. Observe well where the distemper lies; evil imaginations have usurped the place of reason and a well informed judgment, and hold them in such bondage, that instead of being governed by those noble faculties, they are put to the horrid danger of seeking out inventions, for the gratification of *fleshly lusts, which war against the soul*; and to guard against having these worst of all enemies detected and subdued, enemies which are so far from being God's creatures, that strictly speaking, they have no being at all in themselves, only are the privation of his creatures well-being; therefore sin with it's offspring death, will, as to those who are saved, be *swallowed up in victory*. Sin is an enemy both to God and man, which was begotten by Satan, and was conceived and brought forth by man; for lust when it is conceived bringeth forth sin, and sin when it is finished bringeth forth death.

Now how often have we been told, that he is not a freeman but a slave, whose person and goods are not at his own but another's disposal? And to have foreigners come and riot at our expence and in the fruit of our labours, has often been represented to be worse than death. And should the higher powers appear to deal with temporal oppressors according to their deserts, it would seem strange indeed, if those who have suffered intolerably by them, should employ all their art and power to conceal them, and so to prevent their being brought to justice! But how is our world filled with such madness concerning spiritual tyrants! How far have pride and infidelity, covetousness and luxury, yea deceit and cruelty, those foreigners which came from hell, carried their influence, and spread their baneful mischiefs in our world! Yet who is willing to own that he has been deceived and enslaved by them? Who is willing honestly to bring them forth to justice! All acknowledge that these enemies are among us, and may complain aloud of the mischiefs that they do; yet even those who lift their heads so high as to laugh at the atonement of Jesus, and the powerful influences of the Spirit, and slight public & private devotion, are at the same time very unwilling to own that they harbour pride, infidelity, or any other of those dreadful tyrants. And nothing but the divine law referred to above, brought home with convincing light and power, can make them truly sensible of the soul slavery that they are in: and 'tis only the power of the gospel that can let them *free from sin*, so as to become the servants of *righteousness*; can *deliver* them from these *enemies*, so as to *serve God in holiness* all their days. And those who do not thus *know the truth*, and have not been *made free* thereby, yet have never been able in any country to submit long without some sort of government; neither could any of them ever make out to establish any proper government without calling in the help of the Deity. However absurd their notions have been, yet they have found human sight and power to be so short and weak, and able to do so little toward watching over the conduct, and guarding the rights of individuals, that they have been forced to appeal to heaven by oaths, and to invoke assistance from thence to avenge the cause of the injured upon the guilty. Hence it is so far from being necessary for any man to give up any part of his real liberty in order to submit to government, that all nations have found it necessary to submit to some government in order to enjoy any liberty and security at all. We are not insensible that the general notion of liberty, is for

each one to act or conduct as he pleases; but that government obliges us to act toward others by law and rule, which in the imagination of many, interferes with such liberty; though when we come to the light of truth, what can possibly prevent its being the highest pleasure, for every rational person, to love God with all his heart, and his neighbour as himself, but corruption and delusion? which, as was before noted, are foreigners and not originally belonging to men. Therefore the divine argument to prove, that those who promise liberty while they despise government are servants of corruption is this; *For of whom a MAN is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage* (2 Pet. 2:18-19). He is so far from being *free* to act the *man*, that he is a *bond slave* to the worst of tyrants. And not a little of this tyranny is carried on by such an abuse of language, as to call it liberty, for men to yield themselves up, to be so *foolish, disobedient and deceived*, as to *serve divers lusts and pleasures* (Tit. 3:3).

Having offered these few thoughts upon the general nature of government and liberty, it is needful to observe, that God has appointed two kinds of government in the world, which are distinct in their nature, and ought never to be confounded together; one of which is called civil, the other ecclesiastical government. And tho' we shall not attempt a full explanation of them, yet some essential points of difference between them are necessary to be mentioned, in order truly to open our grievances.

Some essential points of difference between civil and ecclesiastical government.

1. The forming of the constitution, and appointment of the particular orders and offices of civil government is left to human discretion, and our submission thereto is required under the name of their being, the *ordinances of men* for the Lord's sake (I Pet. 2: 13-14). Whereas in ecclesiastical affairs we are most solemnly warned not be *subject to ordinances, after the doctrines and commandments of men* (Col. 2: 20, 22). And it is evident that He who is the only worthy object of worship, has always claimed it as his sole prerogative, to determine by express laws, what his worship shall be, who shall minister in it, and how they shall be supported. How express were his appointments concerning these things by Moses? And so wise and good a ruler as Solomon, was not intrusted with any legislative power upon either of these articles, but had the exact dimensions of the temple, the *pattern and weight* of every vessel, with the *treasuries of the dedicate things*, and the *courses of the Priests and Levites*, all given to him in *writing by the Spirit*, through the hand of his father David (I Chron. 28: 11-19). And so strict were God's faithful servants about these matters, that Daniel who in a high office in the Persian court, behaved so well that his most envious and crafty foes, could find no occasion against him, nor fault in him *concerning the kingdom*, till they fell upon the device of moving the king to make a decree about worship, that should interfere with Daniel's obedience to his God; yet when that was done, he would not pay so much regard to it as to shut his windows (Dan. 6: 4-11). And when the Son of God, who is the great Law-giver and King of his church, came and blotted out the hand-writing of the typical ordinances, and established a better covenant, or constitution of his church, upon better promises, we are assured that he was *faithful in all his house, and counted worthy of more glory than Moses*. What vacancy has he then left for fallible men to supply, by making new laws to regulate and support his worship? especially if we consider,

2. That as the putting any men into civil office is of men, of the people of the world; so officers have truly no more authority than the people give them: And how came the people of the world by any ecclesiastical power? They arm the magistrate with the *sword*, that he may be a minister of God *to them for good*, and might execute wrath upon *evil doers*; and for this cause they pay them *tribute*: upon which the apostle proceeds to name those divine commandments which are comprehended in love to our neighbour, and which work no ill to him. Surely the

inspired writer had not forgotten the first and great command of love to God; but as this chapter treats the most fully of the nature and end of civil government of any one in the new testament, does it not clearly show that the crimes which fall within the magistrates jurisdiction to punish, are only such as work ill to our neighbour (Rom. 13: 1-10)? While church government respects our behaviour toward God as well as man.

3. All acts of executive power in the civil state, are to be performed in the name of the king or state they belong to; while all our religious acts are to be done in the *name of the Lord Jesus*; and so are to be performed *heartily as to the Lord, and not unto men*. And it is but *sin service, and vain worship*, if our *fear toward him is taught by the precepts of men* (Col. 3: 17, 23, Isa. 28: 13, Matt. 15: 9). It is often pleaded, that magistrates ought to do their duty in religious as well as civil affairs. That is readily granted; but what is their duty therein? Surely it is to *bow to the name of Jesus*, and to serve him with holy reverence; and if they do the contrary they may expect to *perish from the way* (Phil 2: 10, Psa. 2: 10-12). But where is the officer that will dare to come in the name of the Lord to demand, and forcibly to take, a tax which was imposed by the civil state. And can any man in the light of truth, maintain his character as a minister of Christ, if he is not contented with all that Christ's name and influence will procure for him, but will have recourse to the *kings of the earth*, to force money from the people to support them under the name of an ambassador or the *God of heaven*! Does not such conduct look more like the way of those who made *merchandize of slaves and souls of men*, than it does like the *servants* who were content to be as their Master, who said, *He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me* (Rev. 18: 9, 13, Luke 10: 3-16)?

4. In all civil governments some are appointed to judge for others, and have power to compel others to submit to their judgment: but our Lord has most plainly forbidden us, either to assume or submit to any such thing in religion (Matt. 23: 1-9, Luke 22: 25-27). He declares, that the *cause* of his coming in to the world, was to bear *witness unto the truth*; and says he, *Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice*. This is the nature of his *Kingdom*, which he says, *Is not of this world*: and gives that as the reason why his servants should not *fight*, or defend him with the *sword* (John 13: 36-37). And it appears to us that the true difference and exact limits between ecclesiastical and civil government is this, That the church is armed with *light and truth*, to pull down the strong holds of iniquity, and to gain souls to Christ, and into his church, to be governed by his rules therein; and again to exclude such from their communion, who will not be so governed; while the state is armed with the *sword* to guard the peace, and the civil rights of all persons and societies, and to punish those who violate the same. And where these two kinds of government, and the weapons which belong to them, are well distinguished, and improved according to the true nature and end of their institution, the effects are happy, and they do not at all interfere with each other: but where they have been confounded together, no tongue nor pen can fully describe the mischiefs that have ensued of which the Holy Ghost gave early and plain warnings. He gave notice to the church, that the main of those antichristian confusions and abominations, would be drawn by philosophy and deceit, from the *hand-writing of ordinances* that Christ has *blotted out*. And to avoid the same, directs the saints to walk in Christ Jesus *as they received him*, rooted and built up in *him*, and established in the faith *as they have been taught*; viewing that they are *complete in him, which is the HEAD over ALL PRINCIPALITY and POWER*. Therefore he charges them not to be beguiled into a *voluntary humility*, by such *fleshly minds* as do not hold this *Head*, but would subject them to ordinances after the doctrines and commandments of men (Col. 2).

Now 'tis well known that this glorious Head made no use of secular force in the first setting up of the gospel church, when it might seem to be peculiarly needful if ever; and it is also very evident, that ever since men came into the way of using force in such affairs, their main arguments to support it have been drawn from the old Jewish constitution and ordinances. And what work has it made about the head as well as members of the church?

First they moved Constantine, a secular prince, to draw his sword against heretics; but as all earthly states are changeable, the same sword that Constantine drew against heretics, Julion turned against the orthodox. However, as the high priest's sentence in the Jewish state, divided matters both for prince and people, the same deceitful philosophy that had gone so far, never left plotting till they had set up an ecclesiastical head over kingdoms as well as churches, who with Peter's keys was to open and shut, bind and loose, both in spiritual and temporal affairs. But after many generations had groaned under this hellish tyranny, a time came when England renounced that head, and set up the king as their head in ecclesiastical as well as civil concernments; and though the free use of the scriptures which was then introduced, by a divine blessing, produced a great reformation, yet still the high places were not taken away, & the *lord bishops* made such work in them, as drove our fathers from thence into America. The first colony that came to this part of it carried the reformation so far, as not to make use of the civil power to save the people to support religious ministers (for which they have had many a lash from the tongues & pens of those who were fond of that way) but the second colony, who had not taken up the cross so as to separate from the national church before they came away, now determined to pick out all that they thought was of universal and moral equity in Moses's laws, and so to frame a christian common-wealth here. And as the Jews were ordered not to set up any rulers over them who were not their *brethren*; so this colony resolved to have no rulers nor voters for rulers, but brethren in their churches. And as the Jews were required to inflict corporal punishments, even unto death, upon non-conformers to their worship, this common-wealth did the like to such as refused to conform to their way and they strove very hard to have the church govern the world, till they lost their charter; since which they have yielded to have the world govern the church, as we shall proceed to shew.

SECTION II

A brief view of how civil and ecclesiastical affairs are blended together among us, to the depriving of many of God's people of that liberty of conscience which he has given them.

We are not insensible than an open appearance against any part of the conduct of men in power, is commonly attended with difficulty and danger; and could we have found any way wherein with clearness we could have avoided the present attempt, we would gladly have taken it. But our Lord & only Redeemer, has commanded us, to *stand fast in the liberty wherewith he has made us free*; and things appear so to us at present that we cannot see how we can fully obey this command, without refusing any active compliance with some laws about religious affairs that are laid upon us. And as those who are interested against us, often accuse us of complaining unreasonably, we are brought under a necessity of laying open particular facts which otherwise we would gladly have concealed: and all must be sensible that there is a vast difference between exposing the faults, either or individuals or communities, when the cause of truth and equity would suffer without it, and the doing of it without any such occasion. We view it to be our incumbent duty, to render unto Caesar the things that are his, but that it is of as much importance not to render unto him any thing that belongs only to God, who is to be obeyed rather than man. And as it is evident to us, that God always claimed it as his sole prerogative to determine by his

own laws, what his worship shall be, who shall minister in it, and how they shall be supported; so it is evident that their prerogative has been, and still is, encroached upon in our land. For,

1. Our legislature claim a power to compel every town and parish within their jurisdiction, to set up and maintain a pedobaptist worship among them; although it is well known, that infant baptism is never expres'd in the Bible, only is upheld by men's reasonings, that are chiefly drawn from Abraham's covenant which the Holy Ghost calls, *The covenant of circumcision*, (Acts 7: 8). And as circumcision was one of the handwriting of ordinances which Christ has *blotted out*, where did any state ever get any right to compel their subjects to set up a worship upon that covenant?

2. Our ascended Lord gives *gifts unto men* in a sovereign way as seems good unto him, and he requires *Every man, as he has received the gift, even so to minister the same*; and he reproved his apostles when they forbid one who was improving his gift, because he followed not them (1 Pet. 4: 10, 11, Luke 9: 49). But the Massachusetts legislature, while they claim a power to compel each parish to settle a minister, have also determined that he must be one, who has either an accademical degree, or a testimonial in his favour from a majority of the ministers in the county where the parish lies. So that let Christ give a man ever so great gifts, yet hereby these ministers derive a noble power from the state, to forbid the improvement of the same, if he follows not their schemes. And if the apostles assumed too much in this respect to themselves, even when their Lord was with them, can it be any breach of charity to conclude that ministers are not out of danger of doing the like now? especially if we consider how interest operates in the affair! For,

3. Though the Lord hath *ordained that they which preach the gospel shall live of the gospel*; or by the free *communications to them*, which his gospel will produce (1 Cor. 9: 13, 14, Gal. 6: 6-7). Yet the ministers of our land have chosen to *live by the law*; and as a reason therefore, one of their most noted writers, instead of producing any truth of God, recites the tradition of a man, who said, "Ministers of the gospel would have a poor time of it, if they must rely on a *free contribution of the people* for their maintenance." And he says, "The laws of the province having had the royal approbation to ratify them, they are the king's laws. By these laws it is enacted, that there shall be a public worship of God in every plantation; that the person elected by the majority of the inhabitants to be so, shall be looked upon as the minister of the place; that the salary for him, which they shall agree upon, shall be levied by a rate upon all the inhabitants. In consequence of this, the minister *thus* chosen by the people, is (not only Christ's but also) in reality, the *king's minister*; and the salary raised for him, is raised in the *king's name*, and is the king's allowance unto him."

Now who can hear Christ declare, that his kingdom is, NOT OF THIS WORLD, and yet believe that this blending of church and state together can be pleasing to him?

For though their laws call them "orthodox ministers," yet the grand test of their orthodoxy, is the major vote of the people, be they saints or sinners, believers or unbelievers. This appears plain in the foregoing quotation; and another of their learned writers lately says, "It is the congregation in its parocical congregational capacity, that the *law* considers; and this as such does not enough partake of an ecclesiastical nature to be subject to ecclesiastical jurisdiction."

Hence their ministers and churches must become subject to the court, and to the majority of the parish in the *king's name*: But how are either of them in the mean time subject to the authority of Christ in his church? How can any man reconcile such proceedings to the following commands of our Master which is in heaven (Matt. 23: 9-10)? What matter of grief and lamentation is it, that men otherwise so knowing and justly esteemed, should by the traditions of

men be carried into such a *crooked* way as this is! For though there is a shew of equity in allowing every society to choose it's own minister; yet let them be ever so unanimous for one who is of a different *mode* from the court, their choice is not allowed. Indeed as to doctrine ministers who preach differently, yea directly contrary to each other, about Christ and his salvation, yet are supported by these laws which at the same time limit the people to one circumstantial mode.

It is true the learned author just now quoted says, "If the most of the inhabitants in a plantation are episcopalians, they will have a minister of their own persuasion: and the *dissenters*, in the place, if there be any, must pay their proportion of the tax for the support of this *legal minister*." But then his next words shew that they did not intend ever to have such a case here; for he says, "In a few of the towns, a few of the people, in hope of being released from the tax for the legal minister, sometimes profess themselves episcopalians. But when they plead this for their exemption, their neighbours tell them, *They know in their conscience they do not as they would be done unto*. And if a governor go by his arbitrary power, to supersede the execution of the law, and require the justices and constables to leave the episcopalians out of the tax, they wonder he is not aware, that he is all this while, forbidding that the king should have his dues paid unto him; and forbidding the king's ministers to receive what the king has given him."

How essentially and how greatly does this constitution differ, and from the institutions established in God's word, both in their nature and effects?

I. In their *nature*. Here you find that every religious minister in that constitution, is called the king's minister, because he is settled by direction of the king's laws, and the tax for such a minister's support is raised in the king's name, and is called the king's dues: whereas no man in the Jewish church might approach to minister at the holy altar, but such as were *called of God, as was Aaron*: and the means of their support, were such things as God required his people to *offer and consecrate to Him*; and when they withheld the same, he says, *ye have robbed ME, even this whole nation*; and it is represented as his peculiar work to reward obedience, and to punish disobedience in such affairs. It is evident from sacred record, that good men in every station, used their influence by word and example to stir up their fellow servants to do their duty toward God in these respects; and good rulers, in conjunction with church-officers, took care to have what was offered to him secured and distributed according to God's commandments. But what is there in all this that can give the least countenance to the late method, of mens making laws to determine who shall be Christ's ministers, and to raise money for them in their *own name*! Christ said to the Jews, *I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not, if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive. How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor thus cometh from GOD ONLY* (John 5: 43-44)?

Even a heathen monarch, when he was moved to make a decree in favour of God's minister's and worship at Jerusalem, it was to refrain their enemies from injuring or interrupting of them, and to order that a portion of the *king's goods* should be *given unto the elders of the Jews* for the building of the *house of God*, and for the *burnt-offerings of the God of heaven* (Ezra 6: 6-9). Nothing appears of his levying any new tax for worship, only that he gave the articles there specified out of his *own goods*; yet some professed Christians have imposed new taxes upon people on purpose to compel

them to support their way of worship, and have blended it with other rates, and then called it all a civil tax. But as the act itself is deceitful so 'tis likely that the worship supported by such means is hypocrisy. For,

2. The *effects* of the constitution of our country are such, that as it makes the majority of the people the test of orthodoxy, so it emboldens them to usurp God's judgment seat, and (according to Dr. Mather's own account, which we have often seen verified) they daringly give out their sentence, That for a *few* to profess a persuasion different from the *majority*, it must be from bad motives; and that, *they know in their conscience* that they do not act by the universal law of equity, if they plead to be exempted from paying the *money* which the *majority* demand of them! And though in our charter the king grants to all protestants *equal liberty of conscience*: yet for above thirty years after it was received, the congregationalists made no laws to favour the consciences of any men, in this affair of taxes, but their own sect; and it is here called arbitrary power, and even a forbidding that the king should have his dues, it a governor shewed so much regard to the Charter, as to oppose their extorting money from people of the king's denomination, for their congregational ministers. And perhaps the learned author now referred to, never delivered a plainer truth, than when he said, "The reforming churches flying from Rome, carried some of them more, some of them less, all of them something of Rome with them, especially in that spirit of *imposition* and *persecution* which too much cleaved to them."

These evils cleaved so close to the first fathers of the Massachusetts, as to move them to imprison, whip and banish men, only for denying infant baptism, and refusing to join in worship that was supported by violent methods: yet they were so much blinded as to declare, That there was this *vast difference* between these proceedings and the coercive measures which were taken against themselves in England, viz. We compel men to "God's institutions;" they in England compelled to "mens inventions." And they asserted that the baptists were guilty of "manifest contestations against the order and government of *our* churches, established (we know) by God's law." Though they professed at the same time that, "It is not lawful to censure any, no not for error in fundamental points of doctrine or worship, till the conscience of the offender, be first convinced (out of the word of God) of the dangerous error of his way, and then if he still persist, it is not out of conscience, but against *his conscience* (as the apostle saith, Tit. 3: 11) and so he is not persecuted for cause of conscience, but punished for sinning against *his conscience*." In reply to which Mr. Williams says, "The truth is, the carnal sword is commonly the judge of the conviction or obstinacy of all supposed hereticks. Hence the faithful witnesses of Christ, Cranmer, Ridley, Latimer, had not a word to say in the disputations at Oxford: Hence the non-conformists were cried out as obstinate men, abundantly convinced by the writings of Whitgist and others; and so in the conference before king James at Hampton court, &c."

But says he, "Every lawful magistrate, whether succeeding or elected, is not only the minister of God, but the minister or servant of the people also (what people or nation so ever they be all the world over) and that minister or magistrate, goes beyond his commission, who intermeddles with that which cannot be given him in the commission from the people. If the civil magistrate must keep the church pure, then all the people of the cities, nations and kingdoms of the *world* must do the same much more, for primarily and fundamentally they are the civil magistrate. Now the world faith John *lieth in wickedness*, and consequently according to its disposition endures not the light of Christ, nor his golden candlestick the true church, nor easily chooseth a true christian to be her officer or magistrate. The practicing civil force upon the consciences of men, is so far from preserving religion pure, that is a mighty bulwark or

barricado, to keep out all true religion, yea and all godly magistrates for ever coming into the world.”

How weighty are these arguments against confounding church and state together? Yet this author's appearing against such confusion, was the chief cause for which he was banished out of the Massachusetts colony. And though few if any will now venture openly to justify those proceedings, and many will exclaim against them at a high rate; yet a fair examination may plainly shew, that those fathers had more appearance of a warrant for doing as they did, than their children now have, for the actings which we complain of. For those fathers were persuaded, that the judicial laws of Moses which required Israel to punish blasphemers, and apostates to idolatry with death, were of moral force, and binding upon all princes and states; especially on such as these plantations were. And how much more countenance did this give for the use of force to make men *conform* to what they believed to be the right way, than men can now have for compelling any to *support* a way which at the same time they are allowed to dissent from? For the Jews also were required to pull down houses, and to have persons away out of their camps or cities, if the priests pronounced them unclean; and they were not permitted to set up any king over them who was not a *brother* in their church. Did not these things afford arguments much more plausible, for their attempt to compel the world to submit to the church, than any can have for the modern way, of trying to subject the church in her religious affairs to rulers, and the major vote of inhabitants, a great part of whom are not brethren in any church at all! Though the state of Israel was obliged thus to inflict death or banishment upon non-conformers to their worship, yet we have not been able to find, that they were ever allowed to use any *force* to collect the priests or prophets maintenance. So far from it, that those who made any such attempts were *Sons of Bethel*, and persons that *abhorred judgment, and perverted ALL EQUITY* (1 Sam. 2: 12-16, Mic.3: 5, 9).

Many try to vindicate their way by that promise, that kings shall become nursing fathers, and queens nursing mothers to God's people. But as the character carries in its very nature an *impartial care and tenderness for all their children*; we appeal to every conscience, whether it does not condemn the way of setting up one *party* to the injury of another. Our Lord tells us plainly, that *few* find the narrow way, while *many* go in the *broad way*; yet the scheme we complain of, has given the *many* such power over the *few*, that if the few are fully convinced that the teacher set up by the many, is one that *causeth* people to *err*, and is so far from bringing the pure *gospel doctrine*, that they should break the divine command, and become *partakers of his evil deeds*; if they did not *cease to hear him*, or to receive him *into their houses* a gospel minister; yet only for refusing to put into such a minister's mouth, the many are *prepared* with such instruments of *war against them*, as to seize their goods, or cast their bodies into prison, where they may starve and die, for all what that constitution has provided for them. In cases of common debts the law has provided several ways of relief, as it has not in the case before us; for here the assessors plead, that they are *obliged* to tax all according to law, and the collector has the same plea for gathering of it, and the ministers says, I agreed with the society for such a sum, and it is not my business to release any. So that we have had instances of serious christians, who must have had died in prison for ministers rates, if christianity and humanity had not moved people to provide them that relief, which neither those ministers nor the law that upholds them have done.

Another argument which these ministers often mention, is the apostolic direction to us, to pray for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all *godliness and honesty*. But do they pray and act according to that direction? One while they cry up the great

advantages of having religion established by law; and some have caused near as loud a clamour about it as the *craftsmen* did at Ephesus; but when it comes to be calmly represented, that, Religion is a *voluntary obedience unto God*, which therefore *force* cannot promote; how soon do they shift the scene, and tell us, that *religious liberty* is fully allowed to us, only the state have in their wisdom though fit to tax all the inhabitants, to support an order of men for the good of *civil society*. A little while ago it was for religion, and may have declared, that without it we should soon have no religious left among us: but now tis to maintain civility. Though by the way, it is well known, that no men in the land, have done more to promote uncivil treatment of dissenters from themselves, than some of these pretended ministers of civility have done. In 1644 the court at Boston passed an act to punish men with banishment, if they opposed infant baptism, or departed from any of their congregations when it was going to be administered. And after they had acted upon this law, one of their chief magistrates observed, that such methods tended to make hypocrites. To which a noted minister replied, That if it did so, yet such were better than profane persons, because said he, "Hypocrites give God part of his due, the outward man, but the profane person giveth God neither outward nor inward man." By which it seems that in that day, they were zealous to have the outward man if no more *given to God*; but now that conduct is condemned as persecution, by their children, who profess to allow us full liberty of conscience, because they do not hinder our giving our inward man to God, only claim a power to seize our outward man to get money for themselves. And though many of us have expended ten or twenty times as much, in setting up and supporting that worship which we believe to be right, as it would have cost us to have continued in the fashionable way, yet we are often accused of being covetous, for dissenting from that way, and refusing to pay more money out of our little incomes, to uphold men from whom we receive no benefit, but rather abuse. How far is this from leading a *peaceable life*, either of *godliness or honesty*!

SECTION III

A brief account of what the baptists have suffered under this constitution, and of their reasons for refusing any active compliance with it.

Many are ready to say, the baptists are exempted from ministerial taxes, therefore why do they complain? Answer, We would be far from forgetting or undervaluing of our privileges: but are willing thankfully to acknowledge, that our honored rulers do protect our societies, so as not to allow men to be interrupted in their worship; and as the taking cognizance of marriage belongs to them, we take it as a favour that they grant our ministers power to administer it, so that we may have marriage solemnized among ourselves. Many other liberties we also enjoy under the government that is set over us, for which we desire to be thankful, both to the Author, and to the instruments of them. Yet if our opponents could once put themselves into our place, we doubt not but they would think it was high time, to seek for more full liberty than we have hitherto enjoyed, a short view of but a little part of what we have met with, may be sufficient to evince this.

Our charter, as before observed, gives us equal religious liberty with other christians: yet the pedobaptists being the greatest party, they soon made a perpetual law to support their one way, but did nothing of that nature to exempt our denomination from it, for 36 years; and since that time, what they have done in that respect has only been by temporary acts, which have been so often changed, that many times their own officers have hardly known what the law was, that was in force; and as an exact conformity to the letter of their laws is much insisted upon in their executive courts, while those acts have never been enforced with penalties upon their own people, they have often broken them, and we have had but little chance to get them punished for

so doing. For in all their acts till the last, they have imposed a name upon us, that signifies *re-baptizers*, which we cannot standingly own. In many acts the words, "belonging thereto," were inserted so ambiguously, as to leave it disputable, whether a being church members, or only a belonging to the congregation or worshipping assembly were intended; and in the case of Haverhill, where their certificate was otherways compleat, and the case had been determined in the baptists favor, in that which both parties had agreed should be the final trial; yet another hearing was obtained, in which the want of them ambiguous words in the certificate, was made the main plea by which an action was turned against us, of near three hundred dollars. All their latter acts have required a list or lists of our societies, to be given in annually by a certain day, signed by three principal members, and the minister if there be any; and because one of our churches of above 50 members (and which is now a church in good credit) happened one year to have such a difficulty with their minister, as prevented the giving in of said list, they were taxed to pedobaptist ministers; and tho' some of the society were advised to apply to their county court for relief, yet instead of obtaining any, the court took away 20 dollars more from them. Another church gave in their list by the direction of a noted lawyer, yet they were all taxed to the pedobaptist worship, and one of the principal members of the baptist church, which the law directed to sign the list, was strained upon; and both the inferior and superior court turned the case against him, because he was a *party concerned*.

Here note, the inhabitants of our mother-country are not more of a party concerned in imposing taxes upon us without our consent, than they have been in this land who have made and executed laws, to tax *us* to uphold *their worship*. This *party influence* has appeared in a much larger number of instances than we are willing to trouble the public with at this time; but one instance more will set our case in such a striking light, that we must ask for a very serious attention to it; we mean that of Ashfield, formerly called Hunts-town in the county of Hampshire. One of the conditions on which that plantation was granted by our legislature, was their settling a learned orthodox minister, and building a meeting house. Now in the year 1761, full two thirds of the inhabitants called and settled a minister, who they believed was taught of God and truly orthodox. But not being of the same mode with the court (for they were baptists) other people were prompted on, before this society could get up a meeting house, to settle another minister, and to tax the first minister with all his people to support their way. This burden the baptists bore for a number of years, till 1768, they presented a petition to our general court for relief; who ordered that they should serve the town and proprietors of Ashfield with a copy of the petition, that they might shew cause, if any they had, at the next session of the court why it should not be granted, and that a further collection of taxes from the petitioners should be suspended in the mean time. Yet in the same session of the court, a law was made which cut the baptists in that place, off from any exemption from ministerial taxes at all. In consequence of which several hundred acres of their lands were sold at public auction, for but a small part of the real value; of which ten acres belonged to the baptist minister. And after five or six journies of above an hundred miles to seek relief, and long waiting periods without success, their messenger was at last plainly told, by a neighbor of our representatives, "That they had a right to make that law, and to keep the baptists under it as long as they saw fit." Hereupon notice was given in some Boston papers, of a design among our churches of joining to seek redress from another quarter.

Accordingly at an association or general meeting of our churches at Bellingham, in September, 1770, these things were considered, and it was unanimously agreed upon to apply to his Majesty for help, if it could not speedily obtained here and a committee and agents were

chosen for that purpose. When news hereof was spread, our committee were urged by leading men both in church and state, to apply again to our general court; which thereof they did in October following. In the meantime a piece dated from Cambridge, where the court was then sitting, was published in all the Boston newspapers, wherein it was represented that, "All possible care had been take to prevent our suffering the *least disadvantage* from our religious sentiments;" and we were challenged to shew the contrary if we could.

Upon this the pious and learned Mr. John Davis, who from Pennsylvania had not long before been ordained pastor of the second baptist church in Boston, and who was clerk of our committee, called them together to consider of this matter. And though they were far from desiring to enter into a news-paper controversy, yet they advised him to make some reply to that challenge: He did so; and on Dec. 27, published a brief and plain view of the case of Ashfield: but instead of any fair and manly treatment upon it, he in the Evening-Post or Jan. 7, 1771, was not only insulted with the names of, "A little upstart gentleman; enthusiastical bigot; and, this stripling high-fliar;" but had it also insinuated that he was employed "by the *enemies* of America to *defame* and *blacken* the colonies, and this town in particular." And they had the impudence to pretend to the world, that all this was wrote by a CATHOLIC BAPTIST. And they inflamed the populace so against Mr. Davis, that his most judicious friends were afraid of his being mobbed. But can it be in the power of others to *blacken* any people so much, as by this treatment of a worthy stranger (now at rest) they have blackened themselves! Instead of honestly *coming to the light* (which our Lord gives as the criterion to know him *that doth truth*, John 3: 21) how do they hover in the works of darkness.

The first article in our committee's petition to the legislature, being for Ashfield, they were ordered to notify the proprietors thereof: They did so; and in the spring session of the assembly, they came with a long address against us in which they begin, with saying more generally of the baptists in that part of the province, "The proprietors conceive it to be a duty they owe to God and their country, not to be dispensed with, to lay open the characters, and real *springs of action* of some of these people." Then they go on to say, "The *rule* the petitioners have set up, and on which alone they seem to ground their claim of exemption, is *falsely applied*, and therefore all arguments bottomed on it must be inconclusive. *Natural rights*, as the respondents humbly conceive, are in this province *wholly* superceded in this case by *civil obligation*, and in matters of taxation individuals cannot with the least propriety plead them." Having thus denied us any claim from *natural rights*, they resume what they call an indispensable duty, viz. an attempt to lay before our honored legislature the baptists' character, and the *springs* of their actions; and after a number of mean reflections without any proof at all, they sum up the springs of the actions of most of them to be "Pride, vanity, prejudice, impurity and uncharitableness." Very dreadful indeed if it could be proved! but that is referred to a hereafter, and they say, "At present we shall content ourselves with assuring your excellency and honors, that the foregoing account is not exaggerated."

From this they proceed to observe, that as it belongs to rulers to "protect and support all regular religious societies of protestants," so they say, "Whenever any religion or profession wears an *ill aspect to the state*, it is become a proper object of attention to the legislature. — And this is the religious of the people whom we have been describing." How much does this resemble the language of him who said, *It is not for the king's profit to suffer them!* or theirs who cried, *If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend!*

After thus representing that the religion of the baptists that way, wears an *ill aspect to the state*, they go on to speak of the conditions upon which Ashfield was granted; and they try to

prove that Mr. Ebenezer Smith, pastor of the baptist church there, “is not a minister in law,” because he has neither an accademical degree, nor a testimonial in his favor from the majority of the ministers of that county. And to give an idea of the smallness of his ability for teaching, they say, “Taking occasion in one of his discourses upon that passage of Scripture, in which mention is made of the thick bosses of God’s buckler; instead of *buckler*, he gave his hearers the word *butler*. Being interrogated by one occasionally present as to his meaning, he explained himself so as clearly shewed, he meant to connect the other part of the sentence with the word butler, in the commonly received sense of the word.”

The clearest light we have gained in the matter is this. After Mr. Smith had been preaching in a neighbouring town some years ago, a minister who was present asked him what a butler was? he readily replied, *Pharoah’s cup-bearer*. After a little more talk, said minister asserted, That Mr. Smith used the word butler instead of buckler in his sermon. He did not remember that he had; but if he did so, how injurious is the above representation? is it not the evil which we read of in Isa. 29: 20, 21? Having made this reflection upon Mr. Smith, they say, “He has none of the qualification of a minister according to the laws of Christ, or of this province, unless those of *simplicity* and *orthodoxy*.” We with his accusers were so well qualified (2 Cor. 1: 12 and 4: 2).

In April, 1771, the address we have made a few remarks upon was referred to a committee of both houses of our general court, who reported that, “Your committee find, that in the sale of those lands there was no unfairness, but every thing was quite fair, quite neighbourly, and *quite legal*.” And as to our plea for exemption from ministerial taxes they say, “There is an essential difference between persons being taxed where they are not represented, therefore against their wills, and being taxed when represented.” So they advised the court to dismiss our petition as unreasonable; and though the honorable house of representatives did not accept that advice, but voted to repeal the Ashfield law; yet the council refused to concur with them therein; so that if his gracious Majesty in council had not disannuled said law for us, our brethren of Ashfield must, for ought that appeared to the contrary, have been entirely stripped of the inheritances, which they had purchased, and subdued at the peril of their lives, because of the sword of the wilderness.

It may be remembered that the pedobaptist proprietors of Ashfield, represented that the baptists there were not worthy of the *protection* of our legislature. The following narrative may help to explain what they meant by it. The news of what our king had done for them, arrived and was published in Boston the latter end of October, 1771, at which their oppressors discovered great uneasiness; and on the 8th of November came two officers with numerous attendants, to the house of Mr. Smith, father of the baptist minister in Ashfield, (and very much of a father to that society) with a warrant from the chief judge of that county, to seize his person, and to search his house and shop for bad money: and it was said they had a like warrant for the minister, but he happened to be then absent on a journey. His father was made a prisoner before he was out of his bed in the morning, and though the promised the use of his keys, and desired that no lock might be broken, yet while he was at prayer with his family, for which he obtained leave of one officer, the other broke open his shop, and did considerable damage there; and after searching both that and his house as much as they pleased, they carried him before the aforesaid judge and others; where it plainly appeared that the complaint was entered against Mr. Smith from a report, that he had put off a counterfeit dollar; which report was then proved to be a false one. Ye the old gentleman was not released, but was kept a prisoner through a cold night, in circumstances that greatly injured his health, and next

day was bro't on further examination, when even his frequent retirement for secret devotion, which he had practiced for about forty years was caught hold of to raise a suspicion of his being guilty: and he was bound over with two sureties to the next superior court in that county. Hereupon the following men who had been called as witnesses against him, gave him their testimony in writing, declaring that they were ready to make oath to it, in the following terms, viz.

Ashfield, Nov. 11, 1771.

“We the subscribers, who have been summoned to prove an indictment against Chileab Smith, of his coining and putting off bad money do testify and say, That we did not nor cannot understandingly attest to one tittle of the indictment, nor of any circumstance tending to prove the same. And we never saw nor heard any thing in him that gave the least ground to mistrust, that he kept a shop of secrecy, or did any thing there that he was afraid should be known; and do believe the reports to the contrary are entirely false. As neither did we in our judgments hear any of the said indictment in any measure prov'd by any of the rest of the evidences; an witness our hands,

Ebenezer Sprague
Nathaniel Harvey,
Jonathan Sprague,
Nathan Chapin,
Moses Smith, 2d.
Chileab Smith, jun.
Nehemiah Sprague.

Also *Leonard Pike*, to whom the report was that Mr. Smith had put off a bad dollar, gave from under his hand that said report had no truth in it. These are eight of the ten witnesses that were summoned against Mr. Smith; & tho' much pains was taken to procure evidence against him at the superior court, yet he was entirely acquitted; and the law was open for him to come back for damages, for a *malicious prosecution*; but they had contrived to have the complaint against him entered by a bankrupt, so that no recompence might be obtained by him. Are these the goodly fruits of having a particular mode of worship established by law, and their ministers supported by force!

Though we are often accused of complaining without reason, yet no longer ago than the 26th of last January, three men of good credit, belonging to a numerous and regular baptist society in Chelmsford, were seized for ministerial rates (notwithstanding they had given in a list according to law) and though one of them was above four score years old, another very infirm in body, while the third had no man at home, able to take care of the out-door affairs of his numerous family, yet they, in that cold season, were all carried prisoners to Concord goal.

These accounts we have received from good authority, and have taken great pains to have them stated as exactly and truly as possible; and if any can point out the least mistake in what has been now related, we shall be glad to correct it. At the same time we are far from charging all the evils we complain of, upon the whole congregational denomination without distinction; for we believed there were many among them in various stations, who are sorely grieved at these oppressions. We are willing also to make all the allowance that is reasonable, for the influence of old customs, education and other prejudices, in those who have injured their neighbours in these affairs; but is not high time now to awake, and seek for a more thorough reformation! We agree with the committee of our honored legislature in saying, There is an essential difference

between persons being taxed *where they are represented*, and being taxed where they are not so; therefore the whole matter very much turns upon this point, viz. Whether our *civil* legislature are in truth our representative in *religious* affairs or not? As God has always claimed it as his prerogative to appoint who shall be his ministers, and how they shall be supported, so under the gospel, the peoples communications to Christ's ministers and members, are called *sacrifices* with which *God is well-pleased* (Phil. 4: 18, Heb.13: 16-18). And what government on earth ever had, or ever can have any power to make or execute any laws to appoint and enforce *sacrifices to God!*

In civil states the power of the whole collective body is vested in a few hands, that they may with better advantage defend themselves against injuries from abroad, and correct abuses at home, for which end a few have a right to judge for the whole society; but in religion each one has an equal right to judge for himself; for we must all *appear* before the judgment seat of Christ, that *every one* may receive the things *done in his body*, according to that *he hath done* (not what any earthly representative hath done for him) (2 Cor. 5: 10). And we freely confess that we can find no more warrant from divine truth, for any people on earth to constitute any men the representatives, to make laws, to impose religious taxes, than they have to appoint Peter or the Virgin Mary to represent them before the throne above. We are therefore brought to a stop about paying so much regard to such laws, as to give in annual certificates to the other denomination, as we have formerly done.

1. Because the very nature of such a practice implies an acknowledgement, that the civil power has a right to set one religious sect up above another, else why need we give certificates to them any more than they to us? It is a tacit allowance that they have a right to make laws about such things, which we believe in our consciences they have not. For,

2. By the foregoing address to our legislature, and their committees report thereon, it is evident, that they claim a right to tax us from *civil obligation*, as being the representatives of the people. But how came a civil community by any ecclesiastical power? how came the kingdoms of *this world* to have a right to govern in Christ's kingdom which is *not of this world!*

3. That constitution not only emboldens people to *judge the liberty of other mens consciences*, and has carried them so far as to tell our general assembly, that they conceived it to be a *duty they owed to God* and their country, not to be dispensed with, to lay before them the *springs* of their neighbours actions; but it also requires something of the same nature from us. Their laws require us annually to certify to them, what our belief is concerning the *conscience* of every person that assembles with us, as the condition of their being exempted from taxes to other's worship. And only because our brethren in Bellingham, left that clause about the *conscience* out of their certificates last year, a number of their society who live at Mendon were lately taxed, and suffered the spoiling of their goods to uphold pedobaptist worship.

4. The scheme we oppose evidently tends to destroy the purity and life of religious; for the inspired apostle assures us, that the church is *espoused as a chaste virgin to Christ*, and is obliged to be *subject to him in every thing*, as a true wife is to her husband. Now the most chaste domestic obedience, does not at all interfere with any lawful subjection to civil authority; but for a woman to admit the highest ruler in a nation into her husband's place, would be *adultery* or *whoredom*; and how often are *mens inventions* about worship so called in the sacred oracles? And does it not greatly concern us all, earnestly to search out and put away such evils, as we would desire to escape the awful judgments that such wickedness has brought on other nations! Especially if we consider that not only the purity, but also the very life and being of religion among us is concerned therein; for 'tis evident that Christ has given as plain laws to determine

what the duty of people is to his ministers, as he has the duty of ministers to his people; and most certainly he is able to enforce the one as the other. The common plea of our opponents is, that people will not do their duty if rulers do not enforce it; but does not the whole book of God clearly shew, that ministers as often fail of doing their duty as the people do? And where is the care of rulers to punish ministers for their unfaithfulness? They often talk about *equality* in these affairs, but where does it appear! As Christ is THE HEAD of all *principality and power*; so the *not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having NOURISHMENT MINISTERED, and KNIT TOGETHER, increaseth with the increase of God*, but bringing in an *earthly power* between Christ and his people, has been the grand source of anti-christian abominations, and of settling men down in a *from of godliness*, while they *deny the power thereof*. Has not this earthly scheme prevailed so far in our land, as to cause many ministers, instead of taking *heed to the ministry received from the Lord*, and instead of *watching for souls as those who must give an account*, rather to act as if they were not accountable to any higher power, than that of the *men who support them?*—and on the other hand, how do many people behave as if they were more afraid of the collector’s warrant, and of an earthly prison, than of Him who sends his ministers to preach his gospel, and says, *He that receiveth whomsoever I send, receiveth me*; but declares, That it shall be more tolerable in the day of judgment for *Sodom*, that for those who *receive them not*? Yea, as if they were more afraid of an earthly power than of our great King and Judge, who can *this night* require the soul of him that layeth up *treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God*; and will sentence all either to heaven or hell, according as they have treated Him well or ill, in his ministers and members.

5. The custom which they want us to countenance, is very hurtful to civil society: for by the law of Christ *every man*, is not only allowed, but also required, to judge for himself, concerning the circumstantial as well as the essentials, of religion, and to act according to the *full persuasion of his own mind*; and he contracts guilt to his soul if he does the contrary (Rom.14: 5, 23). What a temptation then does it lay for men to contract such guilt, when temporal advantages are annexed to one persuasion, and disadvantages laid upon another? i.e. in plain terms, how does it tend to hypocrisy and lying? than which, what can be worse to human society? Not only so, but coercive measures about religion also tend to provoke to emulation, wrath and contention, and who can describe all the mischiefs of this nature, that such measures have produced in our land! But where each person, and each society, are equally protected from being inured by others, all enjoying equal liberty, to attend and support the worship which they believe is right, having no more striving for mastery or superiority than *little children* (which we must all come to, or not *enter into the kingdom of heaven*) how happy are it’s effects in civil society? In the town of Boston they enjoy something of these blessings and why may not the country have the same liberty? The ministers who have had the chief hand in stirring up rulers to treat us as they have done, yet have sometimes been forced to commend the liberty we plead for. When they wanted to get footing in the town of Providence, they wrote to governor Jencks and other rulers there, in the following words, viz.

“*Honorable gentlemen,*

“How pleasing to almighty God and our glorious Redeemer, and how conducive to the public *tranquility and safety*, an hearty union and good affection of all pious protestants whatsoever particular denomination on account of some differences in opinion would be, by the divine blessing, yourselves as well as we, are not insensible: and with what peace and love societies of different modes of worship have generally entertained one another in your

government, we cannot think of it without admiration: and we suppose under God, 'tis owing to the *choice liberty* granted to protestants of all persuasions in the royal *charter* graciously given you; and to the wife and prudent conduct of gentlemen that have been improved as governors justices in your colony.” And after more of this nature, they close with saying, “We hope and pray, that ancient matters (that had acrimony unhappily in them) may be buried in oblivion; and that grace and peace and holiness and glory may dwell in every part of New-England; and that the several provinces and colonies in it, may love one another with a pure heart fervently—We take leave to subscribe ourselves, your friends and servants,

Dated Oct. 27. 1721.

Peter Thatcher,
John Danforth,
Joseph Belcher,
“Committee of the Association.”

The town of Providence wrote them an answer the next February, in which they say, “We take notice how you praise the love and peace that dissenters of all ranks entertain one another with in this government.—We answer, this happiness principally consists in their not allowing societies any *superiority* one over another; but each society support their own ministry of their own free will, and not by constraint or force upon any man’s person or estate. But the contrary that takes any man’s estate by force to maintain their own or any other ministry, it serves for nothing but to provoke to wrath, envy and strife, and *this wisdom cometh not from above, but is earthly, sensual and devilish.*—And since you wrote this letter, the constable of Attleborough has been taking away the estates of our dear friends, and pious dissenters to maintain their minister; the like hath been done in the town of Mendon. Is this the way of peace? Is this the fruit of your love? Why do you hug the iniquity of Eli’s sons, and walk in the steps of the false prophets, to *bite with the teeth*, and cry *peace*; but no longer than men put into your mouths that you prepare war against them.—Since you admire our love and peace, we pray you to use the same methods, and write about our copy: and for the future never let us hear of your pillaging conscientious dissenters to maintain your ministers. You desire that all former injury done by you may be buried in oblivion. We say, far be it from us to revenge ourselves; or to deal to you as you have dealt to us, but rather say, *Father forgive them, they know not what they do.* But if you mean that we should not speak of former actions, done hurtfully to any man’s person, we say, God never called for that, nor suffered it to be hid, as witness Cain, Joab and Judas, are kept on record to deter other men from doing the like.”

Here the public may take notice, how desirous pedobaptists ministers are to have pious things on their side buried out of sight, but how contrary has their practice ever been toward us? Even to this day they can hardly preach a sermon, or write a pamphlet for infant baptism, without having something to say about the mad men of Munster, who they tell us rebelled against their civil rulers: Whereas in truth we never had the least concern with them, any more than our opponents have with the Pope or Turk. Indeed they often assert, that those mad men were the first that ever renounced infant baptism; but there is proof enough from their own historians, that this story which they have so often told from their pulpits, is as absolute a falshood as ever was uttered by man. And though one learned and pious president of Cambridge college, was brought to embrace our sentiments, and to bear his testimony in the pulpit there, “against the administration of baptism to any infant whatsoever;” for which he suffered considerable abuse with much of a christian temper: While his successor, another “very learned and godly man,” (who therefore must have been well acquainted with the original) held that “baptism ought ONLY

to be by *dipping* or *plunging* the whole body under water: yet these and other honorable examples in our favor have been passed over, and every scandalous thing that could be pick'd up, has been spread, to prejudice people's minds against our profession in general. And let it be remembered, that when pedobaptist ministers wanted to be favored in Providence, they declared, that they could not think of the peace and love which societies of different modes of worship have *generally* entertained one another with in that government without admiration; and they experienced so much of this from the baptists in Providence, that when some others made a difficulty about admitting Mr. Josiah Cotton (the first minister of the pedobaptists there) as an inhabitant in the town, Col. Nicholas Powers (a leading member of the baptist church) became his bondsman to the town: therefore we hope that our honorable rulers and others will be cautious about giving credit to stories, of contrary nature, when they are told to procure or to justify the use of force in supporting ministers; especially since ministers refuse to share in the reproach of such proceedings. For a minister who has exerted himself very much of late, to support the cause of those called *standing churches*, yet says, "It is wholly out of rule, and quite injurious, to charge the *churches* or their *ministers* with sending men to goal for rates,—for these proceedings are evidently the acts of the *civil state*, done for it's OWN utility. The doings of the civil authority, and of that ALONE." Where are the rulers that will stand *alone* in that practice, without either ministers or truth to support them!

CONCLUSION

And now our dear countrymen, we beseech you seriously to consider of these things. The great importance of a general union through this country, in order to the preservation of our liberties, has often been pleaded for with properly; but how can such a union be expected to bring as that dearest of all rights, equal liberty of conscience is not allowed? Yea, how can any reasonably expect that HE who has the hearts of kings in his hand, will turn the heart of our earthly sovereign to hear the pleas for liberty, of those who will not hear the cries of their fellow subjects, under their oppressions? Has it not been plainly proved, that so far as any man gratifies his own inclinations, without regard to the universal law of equity, so far he is in bondage? So that it is impossible for any one to tyrannize over others, without thereby becoming a miserable slave himself: a slave to raging lusts, and a slave to guilty fears of what will be the consequence. We are told that the father of Cyrus, tho' a heathen, "Had often taught him to consider, that the prudence of men is very short, and their views very limited; that they cannot penetrate into futurity; and that many times what they think must needs turn to their advantage proves their ruin; whereas the Gods being eternal, know all things, future as well as past, and inspire those that love them to undertake what is most expedient for them: which is a favor and protection they owe to no man, and grant only to those that invoke and consult them." And we are told by the same author, of another wife heathen, who said, "Tis observable, that those that fear the Deity most, are least afraid of man." And shall not christians awake to a most hearty reverence of HIM who has said, (and will ever make good his word) *With what measure ye meet, it shall be measured to you again.*

Suffer us a little to expostulate with our fathers and brethren, who inhabit the land to which our ancestors fled for religious liberty. You have lately been accused with being disorderly and rebellious, by men in power, who profess great regard for order and the public good; and why don't you believe them, and rest easy under their administrations? You tell us you cannot, because you are taxed where you are not represented; and is it not really so with us? You do not deny the right of the British parliament to impose taxes within her own realm; only complain that she extends her taxing power beyond her proper limits; and have we not as good

right to say you do the *same thing*? And so that wherein you judge others you condemn yourselves? Can three thousand miles possibly fix such limits to taxing power, as the difference between civil and sacred matters has already done? One is only a distance of *space*, the other is so great a difference in the *nature* of things, as there is between *sacrifices to God*, and the *ordinances of men*. This we trust has been fully proved.

If we ask why have you not been easy and thankful since the parliament has taken off so many of the taxes that they had laid upon us? You answer that they still claim a power to tax us, when, and as much as the please; and is not that the very difficulty before us? In the year 1747, our legislature passed an act to free the baptists in general from ministerial taxes for ten years: yet because they increased considerably, when that time was about half expired, they broke in upon the liberty they had granted, and made a new act, wherein no baptist church nor minister was allowed to have any such exemption, till they had *first* obtained certificates from three other churches. By which the late Mr. John Procter observed (in a remonstrance that he drew, and which was presented to our court) that they had as far as in them lay, “disfranchised, unchurched and usurped an illegal power over all the religious societies of the people in said act called Anabaptists throughout this province:—For where is it possible for the poor anabaptists to find the *first* three authenticated ministers and churches to authenticate the first three!” So we have now related a case, in which a number of our brethren were put to new cost for copies to notify others, with hope of relief to themselves, and yet in the same session of court, they had a worse burden laid upon them than before; and their repeated cries, and then the petition of our united churches, were all rejected.

A very great grievance which our country has justly complained of is, that by some late proceedings a man’s house or locks cannot secure either his person or his property, from oppressive officers. Pray then consider what our brethren have suffered at Ashfield.

Many think it hard to be frowned upon only for pleading for their rights, and laying open particular acts of encroachment thereon; but what frowns have we met with for no other crime? And as the present contest between Great-Britain and America, is not so much about the greatness of the taxes already laid, as about a submission to their taxing power; so (though what we have already suffered is far from being a trifle, yet our greatest difficulty at present concerns the submitting to a taxing power in ecclesiastical affairs. It is supposed by many that we are exempted from such taxes, but they are greatly mistaken, for all know that paper is a money article, and writing upon it is labour, and this tax we must pay every year, as a token of submission to their power, or else they will lay a heavier tax upon us. And we have one difficulty in submitting to this power, which our countrymen have not in the other case: that is, our case affects the conscience, as their’s does not: and equal liberty of conscience is one essential article in our CHARTER, which constitutes this government, and describes the extent of our rulers authority, and what are the rights and liberties of the people. And in the confession of faith which our rulers and their ministers have published to the world, they say, “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in *any thing* contrary to his word; or *not contained in it*; so that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such command, out of conscience, is to *betray* true liberty of conscience; and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience and reason also.”

And a most famous historian of their’s, after mentioning some former violations of that liberty, says, “The great noise that hath been made in the world about the *persecution* made in New-England, I will now stop with transcribing the words uttered in a sermon to the first great

and general assembly of the Massachusetts Bay, after the two colonies of Massachusetts and Plymouth were by Royal Charter united (from 2 Chron. 12: 12).

“Things will *go well*, when magistrates are great promoters of the thing that good is, and what the Lord requireth of them. I do not mean that it would be well for the *civil* magistrate, with *civil* penalty to compel men to this or that *way of worship*, which they are *conscientiously* indisposed unto. He is most properly the officer of *human* society, and a christian by non-conformity to this or that *imposed way of worship*, does not break the terms on which he is to enjoy the benefits of human society. A man has a *right* unto his life, his estate, his liberty, and his family, although he should not come up unto these and those blessed *institutions* of our Lord.—*Violences* may bring the erroneous to be hypocrites, but they will never bring them to be believers; no, they naturally prejudice men’s minds against the *cause*, which is therein pretended for, as being a weak, a wrong, an evil cause.”

These things were then delivered and were received with the *thanks* of the house of representatives, and ten years after were spread by the historian thro’ the nation, with the express design of stoping any further complaints about New-England’s persecutions. But if the constitution of this government, gives the magistrate no other authority than what belongs to *civil society*, we desire to know how he ever came to *impose* any particular *way of worship*, upon any town or precinct whatsoever? And if a man has a right to his *estate*, his *liberty* and his *family*, notwithstanding his non-conformity to the magistrates way of worship, by what authority has any man had his goods spoiled, his land sold, or his person imprisoned, and thereby deprived of the enjoyment both of his liberty and his family, for no crime at all against the peace or welfare of the state, but only because he refused to conform to, or to support an *imposed* way of worship, or an *imposed* minister.

In a celebrated oration for liberty, published last spring in Boston, a maxim was recited which carries it’s own evidence with it, which is this, NO MAN CAN GIVE THAT WHICH IS ANOTHER’S. Yet have not our legislature from time to time made acts to empower the major part of the inhabitants in towns and precincts, to *give away* their neighbours estates to what ministers they please! And can we submit to such doctrines and commandments of men, and not *betray* true liberty of conscience! Every person is or ought to be, benefited by civil government, and therefore they owe rulers honor and a tribute on that account; but the like cannot be truly said of an imposed minister; for as the gospel ministry is an ordinance of God and not of man, so the obligation that any person or people are under to obey and support any man as a minister of Christ, arises from the *consideration* of his appearing to them to resemble his Master in *doctrine* and *conversation*, and from the benefit which people receive under the ministrations. From whence the law of equity makes the free communication of our *carnal things* to Christ’s ministers, to be a matter that as really concerns the exercise of a good conscience toward God, as prayer and praise do; for they are both called *sacrifices* to him in the same chapter (Heb.13: 15, 16).

Thus we have laid before the public a brief view of our sentiments concerning liberty of conscience, and a little sketch of our sufferings on that account. If any can show us that we have made any mistakes, either about principles or facts, we would lie open to conviction: But we hope none will violate the forecited article of faith so much, as to require us to yield a *blind obedience* to them, or to expect that spoiling of good or imprisonment can move us to *betray* the cause of true liberty.

A late writer in the Boston papers, has taken much pains to prove, that some other colonies have imposed upon people in such affairs worse than New-England has; and to prove it

he informs us, that an act for ministers maintenance, was passed in New York near eighty years ago, which succeeding rulers have turned to support a denomination that had very few representatives in court when the act was made, while the denomination who made it, have been denied any benefit from it. If so, how loud is the call to every man that is a friend to liberty, and who regards the good of posterity, to rise and exert all his influence, to demolish the engine which has done so much mischief in all ages! We are far from trying to represent the fathers of New-England as the worst of the colonists; We believe the contrary. But our veneration for their memory, is so far from reconciling us to, that it fills us with greater detestation of, that *mystery of iniquity*, which carried them into such acts of imposition and persecution and have left a great blemish upon their character. And since these are tedious things to dwell upon, we shall close with this remark.

The Massachusetts ministers, in their letter to governor Jencks and other baptists in Providence, said, We hope and pray that ancient matters that had *acrimony* unhappily in them may be buried in oblivion. Now we are told that acrimony signifies that quality in one body whereby it corrodes, eats up or destroys another. This *eating destroying* quality is truly unhappy: but how can it be buried before it is dead? The worst of criminals are to be executed before they are buried. Therefore let this cruel *man-eater* be fairly executed, and we are ready to join heart and hand to bury him, and not to have a bone of him left for contention in all the land. If it be so hard to our opponents to hear of these matters, what has it been to those who have felt their eating and destroying influence for these hundred and forty years? And how can any person lift up his head before God or man, and say he hopes to have these things buried, if he at the same time holds fast, and tries hard to keep alive the procuring cause of them!

The foregoing appeal, having been examined and approved by many of his brethren, is presented to the public, by their humble servant,

ISAAC BACKUS

POSTSCRIPT

Since the above was written, I have received direct accounts, that at Montague (whose case is mentioned p. 33) they continue from time to time, to make distress upon the principal members of the baptist church there, whom the law directs to sign their certificates while they let the rest of the society alone. Also that William White a regular member of the baptist church in Ashfield, who lives in Chesterfield, and has had his standing in said church certified according to law; yet had a cow taken from him on August 25, 1773, and sold the 30th, for the pedobaptist ministers rate; and that in both of these places, the civil charges of the town, and the ministers salary are all blended in one tax (contrary as I am informed to the law of our province) so that our brethren who would readily pay their civil tax, yet cannot do it, without paying the ministers also. Now the grand pretence that is made for the use of the secular arm to support ministers is, that thereby *equality* is established among the people; but what religion, equality or equity can there be in the above proceedings!

THE END