

**THE CHRISTIAN MARTYRS; OR,  
THE CONDITIONS OF OBEDIENCE  
TO THE CIVIL GOVERNMENT: A  
DISCOURSE; PP. 1-47**

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The Christian Martyrs; Or, The Conditions of Obedience to the Civil Government: a discourse;  
pp. 1-47 by J. G. Forman

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The Christian Martyrs;

OR,

THE CONDITIONS OF OBEDIENCE TO THE CIVIL GOVERNMENT:

A

DISCOURSE

BY

J. G. FORMAN,

MINISTER OF THE SECONDED CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH (IN EAST LONDON) UNTIL RECENTLY MINISTER  
OF THE FIRST CHURCH AND CONGREGATION IN WEST BRIDGEWATER, MASS.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,

A Friendly Letter to said Church and Congregation

ON

PRO-SLAVERY INFLUENCES THAT OCCASIONED HIS REMOVAL.

BOSTON:

WM. CROSBY AND H. P. NICHOLS,

111, WASHINGTON STREET.

1851.

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## DISCOURSE.

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"THEY WILL DELIVER YOU UP TO THE COUNCILS, AND THEY WILL SCOURGE YOU IN THEIR SYNAGOGUES; AND YE SHALL BE BROUGHT BEFORE GOVERNORS AND KINGS FOR MY SAKE. . . . THEY SHALL DELIVER YOU UP TO BE AFFLICTED, AND SHALL KILL YOU. . . . FEAR NOT THEM THAT KILL THE BODY, BUT ARE NOT ABLE TO KILL THE SOUL." — *Jesus*.

"THEN PETER AND THE OTHER APOSTLES ANSWERED AND SAID, WE OUGHT TO OBEY GOD RATHER THAN MEN." — *Acts of the Apostles*.

It has lately become a question of great importance, whether there is any limit to the obedience we owe to civil governments. Through the influence of distinguished statesmen and the teaching of popular divines, many of our people have been persuaded that they owe an unlimited and indiscriminate obedience to the laws of the land; that they may not refuse obedience to a particular law, however repugnant it is to their moral sense, the Christian religion, or the law of God. The only question they are to ask is, Is it the law of the land? Was it enacted by the regularly constituted authorities? If so, it must be obeyed at all hazards. In determining one's duty, the inquiry is not to be entertained, whether the law conflicts with the principles of justice and humanity, the precepts of our religion, and the divine law. If the government has enacted it, we have only to obey. That such a doctrine should be received and acted upon by the descendants of the English Puritans; that they should have so soon forgotten the dis-

obedience of their fathers, for many long years, to the Act of Uniformity of Charles II., and other penal laws, and the fines, imprisonments, and persecutions they suffered for conscience' sake, is almost incredible. It can only be accounted for by the moral degeneracy of a portion of their children, under the corrupting influences of material prosperity, and the demoralizing tendency of political organizations.\*

The question is not whether an individual may forcibly resist the government, molest its officers, and incite others to civil war and bloodshed. It is not whether we ought not to *submit* to the law. If men can be found who are bad enough to hold an office which makes it their business to

\* "If, by any act of legislation by this confederated government, we are required to restore to them (the slaveholders) that property (their slaves) to which they have a legal right, *however much we may doubt the morality of that claim, or of the law upon which it is founded*, the duty of good citizenship and the claims of true patriotism would demand obedience to the law." — Rev. L. E. LATHROP, of Auburn, N.Y., quoted in the Annual Report of the American and Foreign Anti-slavery Society for 1851.

Similar sentiments have been uttered by a large number of pro-slavery clergymen at the North; and some of the discourses containing them published by Union Safety Committees, and circulated gratuitously, in large numbers, by members of Congress, under the franking privilege. A gentleman writing from Washington, April 11, 1851, says, "You may think some of my reflections upon pro-slavery clergymen too harsh. You would not, had you seen the cart-loads of their arguments in favor of the Fugitive Act, and slavery generally, kept for distribution in this city, and now kept, which I have seen." In this category of clergymen, we may name Rev. Robert Davidson, D.D., of New Brunswick, N.J.; Rev. Ichabod S. Spencer, D.D., of Brooklyn, N.Y.; Rev. Nathan S. S. Beman, D.D., of Troy, N.Y.; Rev. John M. Krebs, D.D., of New York city; Rev. John C. Lord, D.D., of Buffalo, N.Y.; Rev. Moses Stuart, of Andover; Rev. Orville Dewey, D.D.; Rev. William Crowell, of Waterville, Me.; Rev. Dr. Taylor, of New Haven; Rev. Dr. Parker, of Philadelphia; Rev. Bishop Hopkins, of Vermont.

The following is an instance of the same kind of preaching at the South, which is the universal Christianity of that region: — "The New Testament decides, in the plainest terms, that Christians are bound to *acquiesce in and support* those laws and regulations concerning slavery which are enacted by the respective civil governments under which they live. . . . Let him (the clergyman) at all times preach *unconditional* submission to civil laws and institutions." — Rev. THEODORE CLAPP, of New Orleans. Pro-slavery statesmen, jurists, and lawyers, inculcate the same sentiments.

execute a wicked law, and they will execute it, we must and ought to submit, until it can be repealed, or rendered a dead letter, by the force of public sentiment. The right of a peaceful or bloody revolution is not the question, though the latter is sanctioned by the general opinion and practice of mankind. But it is simply whether a conscientious man, in the fear of God, may calmly take the responsibility of disobeying a wicked law, and bear the penalty of his disobedience. To my understanding and moral sense, it is plainly the duty of every Christian to take this stand. It is the course I have sincerely recommended to you in reference to the recent law, requiring us to deliver a certain description of our fellow-men, many of them disciples of our divine Master, into slavery; forbidding us, under pains and penalties, to aid and succor them in their sore distress.\* It is a course that has the sanction of the most eminent examples mentioned in the Bible. It is confirmed by the teachings of Jesus Christ and his apostles, and sealed by their blood, which was shed by the civil authorities, as the penalty of their disobedience. It is commended to us by "the noble army of martyrs," who were cruelly tormented and put to death because of their disobedience to wicked laws. It is enforced by the glorious example of the English Puritans and Dissenters, whose children we are, and rendered illustrious by good men in every age. It is maintained by legal authorities of the greatest eminence and learning, and is only denied in this country by the political, legal, and clerical demagogues that hoodwink and deceive the people.

It is my purpose, in the present discourse, to give an historical sketch of several illustrious martyrdoms under the Roman empire, in confirmation of this doctrine; to adduce some eminent authorities on the subject; and to intersperse

\* Reference is here made to a Discourse on the Fugitive Slave Law, delivered some months before.