

Epistle 319

by George Fox

George Fox emphasizes the importance of watching, submission to authorities, and living a godly life in accordance with God's will.

Scripture: Romans 13:3, 1 Corinthians 15:34, Galatians 6:8, Ephesians 2:1, Ephesians 4:16, 1 Timothy 5:17, 1 Peter 1:23, 1 Peter 2:13, Revelation 19:8

Topics: "Civil Obedience", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

George Fox preaches about the importance of submitting to earthly authorities and watching against sin and evil in our hearts. He emphasizes the need to obey magistrates for the punishment of evil doers and to live a godly and peaceable life. Fox encourages believers to be vigilant in their faith, to resist unrighteousness, and to demonstrate their testimony against evil. He also urges them to preach Christ's kingdom and truth to all, showing forth His light, life, and righteousness in their lives.

Transcript

Dear friends,--To you all in Nevis, and the Carribee Islands thereabouts, I have seen a letter from some of you, wherein I understand that there has been some scruple concerning watching, or sending forth watchmen in your own way. . . .

And now as for watching in itself: Do not you watch your plantations against thieves in the night? And are not common watches set to discover thieves in the towns, or house-breakers, or such as might wickedly fire houses? Such civil things we were subject to, and do submit ourselves, for conscience' sake, unto every such ordinance of man, which are for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well [1 Pet 2:13f].

Now those evil doers that may rob your plantations, or houses, you complain to the magistrates, for the punishment of them, though you cannot swear against them; or if the Indians come to rob your plantations, or houses, you complain to the magistrates for the punishment of such evil doers, to stop them, which magistrates are for the praise of them that do well. So this watching is for the preventing thieves and murderers, and stopping burning of houses. So we do submit to every such ordinance of men for the Lord's sake; for the apostle exhorted to submission, whether it be to the king, as supreme, or governors, as unto them that are sent by him, for the punishing of the evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well; for so it is the will of God, that with well doing you might put to silence the ignorance of foolish men, as free, not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as servants of God [1 Pet 2:15f]; so that

justice, and truth, and righteousness may be set upon the unrighteousness, and unjust, not using this liberty for a cloak of unrighteousness to any one, but as servants in the righteousness of the righteous God, as you may see in 1 Peter ii. 13. and in Titus iii. 1.

'Put them in mind to obey magistrates, and to be ready to every good work [Tit 3:1].' Mark, 'every good work,' that is against the evil, as drunkenness, murder, whoredom, these and all manner of uncleanness; so far we can obey them, in the Lord's power and truth, as they act against the evil, and that which dishonours God [Rom 2:23]; and if they act against the good, or if they would compel us to those things, which are matter of conscience in us towards God [1 Pet 3:21], we resist not [Rom 13:2], but suffer under them.

For rulers are not to be a terror to the good workers, but to the evil; and wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same [Rom 13:3]; for he is a minister of God to thee for good, for he should keep down the evil. But if thou dost that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain; for he is a minister of God to revenge and execute wrath upon him that doth evil [Rom 13:4]. So he is the revenger and executioner of the wrath upon the evil doer, as God hath placed him, upon the adulterer, and him that steals or kills, and bears false witness, &c.

But when the magistrate turns his sword backward upon the just and righteous [Isa 59:14?], then he abuses his power, and therein the just suffer under him. And therefore such have been warned by the just, as you may see through the scriptures. So you are not to be the revengers, but he is the revenger; and to that power that executes the revenge, and brings the sword upon the adulterer, murderer, thief, false witness [Exo 20:13-16, Rom 13:9]], and other evil doers, we must be subject to that power, and own that power, not only for wrath, but for conscience' sake [Rom 13:5]; which is for the punishment of the evil doers, and the praise of them that do well.

And for this cause we pay tribute to them, and give Caesar his due, that we may live a godly and peaceable life under them, as they are God's ministers attending upon this very thing, to wit, the punishing of the evil doers, and the praise of them that do well; for the law was not made for the righteous, but for the sinner and disobedient [1 Tim 1:9], which is good in its place. Now if they do not do their duty, we are clear in giving them their tribute or customs; I say, if they do not do their duty to keep down evil doers, and be for the praise of them that do well, God Almighty will turn against them. But if the magistrate would have all, both God's due, and Caesar's too, that we cannot give; for God must have his worship, his praise, his honour, and his due; and Caesar must have his due, his earthly custom and tribute; and so herein, we render unto God the things which are God's, and unto Caesar the things which are his [Mat 22:21]. And whereas some may say, that the apostle would not eat flesh, lest he should offend his brother [1 Cor 8:13], that was upon a religious account; and not to give offence to the magistrate, who is set for the punishing of the evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well.

And whereas the apostle saith, Col. ii. 'Wherefore if you be dead with Christ, from the rudiments of the world; why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, touch not, taste not, handle not, which all are to perish with the using, after the commandments and doctrines of men? [Col 2:20f]' Now these ordinances, these doctrines, these commandments, were concerning religion and worship; and that was another thing, where the apostle saith, 'Be subject to every ordinance of man, for the Lord's sake; for the punishment of evil doers.' 1 Pet. ii. 13. For this was for the Lord's sake, which was for the praise of them that do well, and for the punishment of the evil doer. So he makes a distinction here.

And you know that masters of ships, and Friends, have their watches all night long, and they watch to preserve the ship, and to prevent any enemy, or hurts that might come to the ship, by passengers, or otherwise.

And Christ came in the fourth watch of the night, walking on the sea, &c. And Peter was in the ship, and his disciples [Mat 14:25-32], as you may see in Matt. xiv. and in Mark vi. 48.

And Simon Peter had part of the ship, as you may see in Luke v. And so it was that James and John, sons of Zebedee, were partners with Simon [Luke 5:10].

And Christ saith, (Luke xii. 38, 39.) speaking of his coming, and exhorting to watch, 'If he, (to wit, the master,) should come in the second or third watch, and find them watching, blessed are those servants [Luke 12:38].' So this watching was for Christ, and against sin and evil in their own hearts. And then he brings a comparison. 'And this know, that if the good man of the house,' said he, 'had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not suffered his house to be broken up [Luke 12:39],' &c. . .

And so if the foreign Indians should come to steal your goods, or to kill; for you to be left to your freedom to watch in your own way, and to discover to the magistrate such as would destroy your lives or plantations, or steal, let them come from at home, or come from abroad, such evil doers the magistrate is to punish, who is for the praise of them that do well. So that you may live and lead a godly and peaceable life under them. And you that are righteous, you watching, discovering and declaring against such evil doers, and things, you clear yourselves, and demonstrate that your testimony is against such things. And if the magistrates should be evilly inclined, and God should bring the evil doers as a rod upon them; yet you are clear in your testimony, that knows truth, and are in your duty, and in your obedience. And for this cause he has his tribute, and his custom, and his due, and double honour, if he rules well [1 Tim 5:17]; and God has his praise, and his honour; and in that power and truth of God, which is against untruth, and the power of darkness; and in the light which is against evil; and in the life, which is against death, you discover the bad to him, for him to punish them upon true evidence; and if he does not do it, it will lie upon him.

And if he be a praise to the evil, and a discouragement to the good, then the Lord will deal with him; and though to such, for conscience, and for the Lord's sake, we cannot be subject to the evil, but rather suffer thereby, and are subject to that which punishes and keeps down the evil, and are glad of it. And we desire that justice were uppermost in all magistrates, that they would hear Friends at their yea or nay [Mat 5:37], that do come to them, and discover to them the evil, and that they might see what they should do, and what they should not do. So Friends may discover all that which is evil, which comes to devour and destroy [Jer 15:3], both within and without, both within the island and without, to them that should keep it down.

And so, in the Lord's everlasting power, in which freedom is and dominion, the Lord God Almighty keep you in his power and life, in the gospel, which brings life and immortality to light [2 Tim 1:10] in you, that you may see over the devil that had darkened you, and kept you in a separation from God [Isa 59:2]: so that by his gospel, the power of God, which was before the devil was, and will be when he is gone, who was the author of strife; that in that power you may all freely approach to God, and in it feel nothing betwixt you and the Lord of hindering your passage unto him. So that in this gospel, the power of God, in which life and immortality are brought to light, you may keep and feel your everlasting fellowship and order of the

gospel; which is not of man, nor by man [Gal 1:12].

So my love to all Friends in all those parts, as though I named them: and be at peace one with another; neither judge one another about such things, but live in love, which doth edify [Eph 4:16]. And in the power of God, that your hearts, and souls, and minds, may unite together in it; and all to walk as becomes the gospel [Phil 1:27]: and let your lives and conversations preach, that with a measure of the spirit of God you may reach to that of God in all; so that his name may be glorified, and he honoured, in your bringing forth much heavenly spiritual fruit [John 15:8], from the heavenly seed, that Christ the heavenly seeds-man [Mark 4:14] hath sown in your hearts [Mat 13:19]; that so a hundred fold [Mat 13:8,23] of holiness, righteousness, godliness, virtue, and piety, from this heavenly seed, you may bring forth and increase in this life-time, and in the world to come reap life everlasting [Gal 6:8].

And give no occasion to your adversaries [1 Tim 5:14], neither in your lives nor words; but that you may all serve God in the new life [Rom 6:4/7:6], showing forth that you are new men, and that you are renewed in the image of God [Col 3:10], and that you are born again of the immortal heavenly seed, by the eternal everlasting word, that lives, and abides, and endures for ever [1 Pet 1:23]. And that you do feed upon the heavenly milk [1 Pet 2:2] and bread from above [John 6:34-57], and that your conversation is in heaven [Phil 3:20], and that you are clothed with the fine heavenly linen, which is the righteousness of saints [Rev 19:8], which is Christ's (the heavenly and spiritual man's [1 Cor 15:47]) livery; by which his servants are known by his badge of righteousness, and distinguished from all the servants of old Adam, Egypt, Sodom, and Babylon, with their badge of unrighteousness.

And so be valiant for God's truth upon the earth [Jer 9:3], and spread it abroad; preach Christ and his kingdom, his light, his grace, his truth to men; that all should walk in it; and his dreadful day upon all the talkers of God, Christ, his prophets, and apostles' words, that do not walk in the same power, spirit and life, grace and truth, as they walked in.

I say, preach this to the magistrates, and amongst the heathen men, and show yourselves to be quickened (by Christ) who have been dead in sins and trespasses [Eph 2:1]; but that you are now made alive [1 Cor 15:22] by him; and so show forth his light, life, and truth, and that you are awakened to righteousness [1 Cor 15:34]; and therefore show it forth to them that are asleep in the unrighteousness: so that the Lord's glory, and righteous power, truth, light, and life, may flow over all, to his glory over all, for ever. Amen.

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