
THE BOOK OF HOMILIES

From An Exhortation Concerning Good Order and Obedience to Rulers and Magistrates

Almighty God hath created and appointed all things, in heaven, earth, and waters, in a most excellent and perfect order. In heaven he hath appointed distinct orders and states of archangels and angels. In earth he hath assigned kings, princes, and other governors under them, all in good and necessary order. The water above is kept and raineth down in due time and season. The sun, moon, stars, rainbow, thunder, lightning, clouds, and all birds of the air do keep their order. The earth, trees, seeds, plants, herbs, corn, grass, and all manner of beasts keep them in their order. All parts of the whole year, as winter, summer, months, nights, and days, continue in their order. All kinds of fishes in the sea, rivers, and waters, with all fountains, springs, yea, the seas themselves, keep their comely course and order. And man himself also, hath all his parts, both within and without, as soul, heart, mind, memory, understanding, reason, speech withal, and singular corporal members of his body in a profitable, necessary, and pleasant order. Every degree of people in their vocation, calling, and office hath appointed to them their duty and order. Some are in high degree, some in low, some kings and princes, some inferiors and subjects, priests and laymen, masters and servants, fathers and children, husbands and wives, rich and poor, and everyone have need of other; so that in all things is to be lauded and praised the goodly order of God, without the which no house, no city, no commonwealth can continue and endure. For where there is no right order, there reigneth all abuse, carnal liberty, enormity, sin, and Babylonical confusion. Take away kings, princes, rulers, magistrates, judges, and such states of God's order, no man shall ride or go by the highway unrobbed, no man shall sleep in his own house or bed unkilld, no man shall keep his wife, children, and possessions in quietness; all things shall be common, and there must needs follow all mischief and utter destruction, both of souls, bodies, goods, and commonwealths. But blessed be God, that we in this realm of England feel not the horrible calamities, miseries, and wretchedness which all they undoubtedly feel and suffer that lack this goodly order. And praised be God that we know the great excellent benefit of God showed towards us in this behalf. God hath sent us his high gift, our most dear sovereign lord King Edward the Sixth, with godly, wise and, honorable council, with other superiors and inferiors in a beautiful order. Wherefore, let us subjects do our bounden duties, giving hearty thanks to God and praying for the preservation of this godly order. Let us all obey even from the bottom of our hearts all their godly proceedings, laws, statutes, proclamations, and injunctions, with all other godly orders. Let us consider the scriptures of the Holy Ghost which persuade and command us all obediently to be subject, first and chiefly, to the King's majesty, supreme head over all, and next, to his honorable council, and to all other noblemen, magistrates, and officers which by God's goodness be placed and ordered; for Almighty God is the only author and provider of this forenamed state and order, as it is written of God in the book

of Proverbs: "Through me, kings do reign; through me councilors make just laws; through me do princes bear rule and all judges of the earth execute judgment. I am loving to them that love me."¹ * * *

The wicked judge Pilate said to Christ, "Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee and have power also to loose thee?" Jesus answered, "Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above."² Whereby Christ taught us plainly that even the wicked rulers have their power and authority from God. And therefore it is not lawful for their subjects by force to resist them, although they abuse their power; much less then is it lawful for subjects to resist their godly and Christian princes which do not abuse their authority but use the same to God's glory and to the profit and commodity of God's people. The holy apostle St. Peter commandeth servants to be obedient to their masters, not only if they be good and gentle but also if they be evil and froward, affirming that the vocation and calling of God's people is to be patient, and of the suffering side. And there he bringeth in the patience of our saviour Christ to persuade obedience to governors, yea, although they be wicked and wrongdoers.* * *

Let us all therefore fear the most detestable vice of rebellion, ever knowing and remembering that he that resisteth common authority, resisteth God and his ordinance, as it may be proved by many other mo³ places of holy scripture. And here let us take heed that we understand not these or such other like places, which so straitly command obedience to superiors and so straitly punish rebellion, and disobedience to the same, to be meant in any condition of the pretended power of the Bishop of Rome. For truly the scripture of God alloweth no such usurped power, full of enormities, abusions, and blasphemies. But the true meaning of these and such places be to extol and set forth God's true ordinance and the authority of God's anointed kings and of their officers appointed under them.* * *

1. Proverbs 8.15–17.
2. John 20.10–11.

3. More.