Samuel Davies grew up in a farming family in Delaware, received a classical education, and became an evangelist Presbyterian minister. He moved to Virginia in 1747. Though he was careful to maintain good relations with the Anglican authorities there, he managed to draw large numbers of Virginians to his evangelical faith and established a thriving network of ministers around him. He was known as a powerful orator, and Patrick Henry claimed to have been influenced by his example. He was an advocate of spreading the Christian faith among the slaves of Virginia. A little over a decade after his arrival in the state, he left to become president of the College of New Jersey (later Princeton), where he launched an aggressive campaign of reform. His labors were cut short by his death less than two years into his term as president.

Davies took the lead in rallying popular support in Virginia behind the British in their war with France. The British did not fare well in the early days of the French and Indian War in the North American colonies (putting the young George Washington into retreat). In the spring of 1758, Davies gave this sermon to the militia in Hanover County, where he had made his home. He urged the assembled men to join the British cause, arguing that they had a religious duty to take up arms in defense of their country.

Jeremiah 48:10 – Cursed be he that doth the work of the Lord deceitfully; and cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood.

Nothing can be more agreeable to the God of Peace than to see universal harmony and benevolence prevail among His creatures; and He has laid them under the strongest obligations to cultivate a pacific temper toward one another, both as individuals and as nations. Follow peace with all men, is one of the principal precepts of our holy religion. And the great Prince of Peace has solemnly pronounced, Blessed are the peacemakers.

But when, in this corrupt, disordered state of things, where the lusts of men are perpetually embroiling the world with wars and fightings and throwing all into confusion; when ambition and avarice would rob us of our property, for which we have toiled and which we subsist; when they would enslave the freeborn mind and compel us meanly to cringe to usurpation and arbitrary power; when they would tear from our eager grasp the most valuable blessing of Heaven, I mean our religion; when they invade our country, formerly the region of tranquility, ravage our frontiers, butcher our fellow subjects, or confine them in a barbarous captivity in the dens of savages; when our earthly all is ready to be seized by rapacious hands, and even our eternal all is in danger by the loss of our religion; when this is the case, what is then the will of God? Must peace then be maintained? Maintained at the expense of property, liberty, life, and everything dear and valuable? Maintained, when it is in our power to vindicate our right and do ourselves justice? Is the work of peace then our only business? No; in such a time even the God of Peace proclaims by His

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1 Excerpt taken from Samuel Davies, *Sermons on Important Subjects*, vol. 3 (New York: Robert Carter, 1845), 84.
providence, “To arms!” Then the sword is, as it were, consecrated to God; and the art of war becomes a part of our religion. Then happy is he that shall reward our enemies, as they have served us. Blessed is the brave soldier; blessed is the defender of his country and the destroyer of its enemies. Blessed are they who offer themselves willingly in this service, and who faithfully discharge it. But, on the other hand, *Cursed is he that doth the work of the Lord deceitfully; and cursed is he that keepeth back his sword from blood.*

... *Cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood.* This denunciation, like the artillery of heaven, is leveled against the mean, sneaking coward who, when God, in the course of His providence, calls him to arms, refuses to obey and consults his own ease and safety more than his duty to God and his country.

*Cursed be he that doth the work of the Lord deceitfully.* This seems leveled against another species of cowards—sly, hypocritical cowards who undertake the work of the Lord, that is, take up arms; but they do the work of the Lord deceitfully, that is, they do not faithfully use their arms for the purposes they were taken. They commence soldiers, not that they may serve their country and do their duty to God but that they may live in ease, idleness, and pleasure, and enrich themselves at the public expense. *Cursed be he that doth the work of the Lord deceitfully,* and serves himself under pretense of serving his country.

... Need I inform you what barbarities and depredations a mongrel race of Indian savages and French Papists have perpetrated upon our frontiers? How many deserted or demolished houses and plantations? How wide an extent of country abandoned? How many poor families obliged to fly in consternation and leave their all behind them? What breaches and separations between the nearest relations? What painful ruptures of heart from heart? What shocking dispersions of those once united by the strongest and most endearing ties? Some lie dead, mangled with savage wounds, consumed to ashes with outrageous flames, or torn and devoured by the beasts of the wilderness, while their bones lie whitening in the sun and serve as tragical memorials of the fatal spot where they fell. Others have been dragged away captives and made the slaves of imperious and cruel savages. Others have made their escape and live to lament their butchered or captivated friends and relations. In short, our frontiers have been drenched with the blood of our fellow subjects, through the length of a thousand miles; and new wounds are still opening. We, in these inland parts of the country, are as yet unmolested, through the unmerited mercy of Heaven. But let us glance a thought to the western extremities of our body politic; and what melancholy scenes open to our view! Now, perhaps, while I am speaking; now, while you are secure and unmolested, our fellow subjects there may be feeling the Calamities I am describing. Now, perhaps, the savage shouts and whoops of Indians, and the screams and groans of some butchered family, may be mingling their horrors and circulating their horrendous echoes through the wilderness of rocks and mountains! Now, perhaps, some tender, delicate creature may be suffering an involuntary prostitution to savage lust; and perhaps debauched and murdered by the same hand! Now, perhaps, some miserable Briton or Virginian may be passing through a tedious process of experiments in the infernal art of torture! Now, some helpless children may be torn from the arms of their murdered parents and dragged away weeping and wringing their hands, to receive their education among barbarians and to be formed upon the model of a ferocious Indian soul!

And will these violences cease without a vigorous and timely resistance from us? Can Indian revenge and thirst for blood be glutted? Or can French ambition and avarice be satisfied? No, we have no method left but to repel force with force, and to give them blood to drink in their turn who have drunk ours. If we sit still and do nothing, or content ourselves, as alas! we have hitherto, with feeble, dilatory efforts, we may expect these barbarities will not only continue but that the Indians, headed by the French, those eternal enemies of peace, liberty, and Britons, will carry their inroads still farther into
the country and reach even to us. By the desertion of our remote settlements, the frontiers are approaching every day nearer and nearer to us; and if we cannot stand our ground now, when we have above 100 miles of a thick-settled country between us and the enemy, much less shall we be able when our strength is weakened by so vast a loss of men, arms, and riches, and we lie exposed to their immediate incursions. Some cry, “Let the enemy come down to us, and then we will fight them.” But this is the trifling excuse of cowardice or security, and not the language of prudence and fortitude. Those who make this plea, if the enemy should take them at their word and make them so near a visit, would be as forward in flight as they are now backward to take up arms.

Such, my brethren, such, alas! is the present state of our country. It bleeds in a thousand veins; and, without a timely remedy, the wound will prove mortal. And, in such circumstances, is it not our duty, in the sight of God, is it not a work to which the Lord loudly calls us, to take up arms for the defense of our country? Certainly it is: and cursed is he who, having no ties sufficiently strong to confine him at home, keepeth his sword from blood. The man that can desert the cause of his country in such an exigency; his country, in the blessings of which he shared while in peace and prosperity; and which is therefore entitled to his sympathy and assistance in the day of its distress; that cowardly, ungrateful man sins against God and his country, and deserves the curse of both. Such a conduct in such a conjuncture, is a moral evil, a gross wickedness; and exposes the wretch to the heavy curse of God both in this and the eternal world.

. . . Our countrymen, in general, have acted as if beings of their importance and merit might certainly rest in the quiet, unmolested possession of their liberty and property without anyone daring to disturb them, and without their doing anything for their own defense; or as if neither God nor man could strip them of their enjoyments. What vain, self-confident presumption, what intolerable insolence is this, in a sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, who have forfeited every blessing, even the ground they tread upon and the air they breathe in, and who live merely by the unmerited grace and bounty of God! Is not cowardice and security, or an unwillingness to engage with all our might in the defense of our country, in such a situation an enormous wickedness in the sight of God and worthy of His curse, as well as a scandalous, dastardly meanness in the sight of men, and worthy of public shame and indignation! Is it not fit that those who so contemptuously depreciate the rich and undeserved bounties of Heaven, and who swell so insolently with a vain conceit of their own importance and worth, should be punished with the loss of these blessings! . . .

. . . Ye young and hardy men, whose very faces seem to speak that God and nature formed you for soldiers, who are free from the encumbrance of families depending upon you for subsistence, and who are perhaps but of little service to society while at home, may I not speak for you and declare as your mouth, “Here we are, all ready to a bandon our ease and rush into the glorious dangers of the field, in defense of our country”? Ye that love your country, enlist; for honor will follow you in life or death in such a cause. You that love your religion, enlist; for your religion is in danger. Can Protestant Christianity expect quarters from heathen savages and French Papists? Sure in such an alliance, the power of hell make a third party. Ye that love your friends and relations, enlist; lest ye see them enslaved or butchered before your eyes. Ye that would catch at money, here is a proper bait for you: ten pounds for a few months’ service, besides the usual pay of soldiers. I seriously make the proposal to you, not only as a subject of the best of kings and a friend to your country but as a servant of the most high God; for I am fully persuaded what I am recommending is His will; and disobedience to it may expose you to His curse.

This proposal is not liable to the objections that have been urged against former measure for raising men. You can no longer object “that you are dragged away like slaves against your wills, while others are without reason exempted”; for now it is left to your own honor, and you may act as free men. Nor can you object “that you are arbitrarily thrust under the command of foreign, unknown, or disagreeable officers”; for the gentleman that has the immediate command of this company and his
subordinate officers are of yourselves, your neighbors' children, and, perhaps, your old companions. And I hope, I may add, you need not object that you shall be badly used, for, Gentlemen Officers, may I not promise for you that no one man in your company shall be treated with cruelty or injustice as far as your authority or influence can prevent? May I not be your security that none but the guilty shall be punished, and they only according to the nature of the offense? Perhaps some may object that should they enter the army their morals would be in danger of infection, and their virtue would be perpetually shocked with horrid scenes of vice. This may also be a discouragement to parents to consent to their children's engaging in so good a cause. I am glad to hear this objection, when it is sincere and not an empty excuse. And I wish I could remove it by giving you a universal assurance that the army is a school of religion and that soldiers, as they are more exposed to death than other men, are proportionably better prepared for it than others. But alas! the reverse of this is too true; and the contagion of vice and irreligion is perhaps nowhere stronger than in the army; where, one would think, the Supreme Tribunal should be always in view, and it should be their chief care to prepare for eternity, on the slippery brink of which they stand every moment. But, Gentlemen Officers, I must again appeal to you that, as for this company, you will not willingly allow any form of vice to be practiced in it with impunity, but will always endeavor to recommend and enforce religion and good morals by your example and authority and to suppress the contrary. May I not give the public the satisfaction of such an assurance concerning you, that, whatever others do, as for you and your company you will serve the Lord? Do you not own yourselves bound to this in honor and duty? Such a conduct, I can assure you, will render you popular among the wise and good; though perhaps it may expose you to the senseless contempt of fools who make a mock of sin, and who esteem it bravery to insult that God in whose hand their breath is and whose are all their ways. Such a conduct will afford you pleasure in the review, when the terrors of the bloody field are spread round you and death starts up before you in a thousand shocking forms. Such a conduct will be a source of true courage and render you nobly indifferent about life or death in a good cause. And let me honestly warn you that, if you do not maintain such a conduct, you will bitterly repent it, either in time or eternity.

Here I thought to have concluded; but I must take up a few minutes more to ask this crowd—Is there nothing to be done by us who stay at home toward the defense of our country and to promote the success of the expedition now in hand? Shall we sin on still impenitent and incorrigible? Shall we live as if we and our country were self-dependent and had nothing to do with the Supreme Ruler of the universe? Can an army of saints or of heroes defend an obnoxious people, ripe for destruction, from the righteous judgment of God? The cause in which these brave men, and our army in general, are engaged is not so much their own as ours. Divine Providence considers them not so much in their private, personal character as in their public character as the representatives and guardians of their country; and, therefore, they will stand or fall, not so much according to their own personal character as according to the public character of the people whose cause they have undertaken. Be it known to you, then, their success depends upon us even more than upon themselves. Therefore let us all turn every one from his evil ways. Let the wicked forsake his way, etc. Let us humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, which is lifted up over our guilty heads, that we may be exalted in due time. I could venture the reputation of my judgment and veracity, that it will never be well with our country till there be more of the fear and love of God in it, and till the name of Jesus be of more importance among us. Ye that complain of the burden of our public taxes; ye that wish to see peace restored once more; ye that would be happy beyond the grave, and live forever, attend to my proposal: it is this, a thorough national reformation. This will do what millions of money and thousands of men, with guns and swords, and all the dreadful artillery of death, could not do; it will procure us peace again; a lasting, well-established peace. . .
It is a natural inference from what has been said, that if the defense of our country, in which we can stay but a few years at most, and from which we must ere long take our flight, be so important a duty, then how much more are we obliged to seek a better country, i.e., a “heavenly”; and to carry on a vigorous war against our spiritual enemies, that would rob us of our heavenly inheritance! Therefore, in the name of Jesus, the captain of our salvation, I invite you all to enlist in the spiritual warfare. Now proclaim eternal war against all sin. . . .