

Our Obligations to God and Men.

by Edward Payson

We are bound to render to God and men the things that are theirs, and to use our souls, bodies, time, knowledge, possessions, and influence for their service and glory.

Scripture: Psalm 24:1, Proverbs 3:27, Mark 12:17, Romans 13:1, 1 Corinthians 6:19, Galatians 6:10, Ephesians 5:15, Ephesians 6:1

Topics: "Stewardship", "Christian Ethics"

Description

Edward Payson preaches on the importance of rendering unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God, the things that are God's, emphasizing the sacredness of respecting the rights of all beings and giving them what is rightfully theirs. He delves into what is due to God, highlighting that all things are God's property, including our souls, bodies, time, knowledge, possessions, and influence. Payson also explores what is due to men, stressing the obligation to love, do good, show kindness, and fulfill duties towards our fellow human beings, superiors, inferiors, and family members.

Transcript

"Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God, the things that are God's."

Mark 12:17.

the period of our Saviour's residence on earth, the Jews were greatly divided in opinion, respecting the lawfulness of paying tribute to the Roman emperors, under whose government they were. The Pharisees, prompted by ambition, and a wish to obtain popularity, earnestly contended that, as the Jewish nation were the peculiar people of God, they ought not to submit or pay tribute to a heathen power. The Herodians, as is generally supposed, maintained that, in their present circumstances, it was not only necessary but lawful.

In this dispute, the common people sided with the Pharisees, while all who wished to secure the favor of the Roman government, took part with the Herodians. In these circumstances, the enemies of our Lord flattered themselves that by proposing to him this much disputed question, they should infallibly draw him into a snare. Should he decide in favor of the lawfulness of paying tribute, they could represent him to the people as an enemy to their liberties, and thus excite against him their indignation.

Should be on the other hand, assert that to pay tribute was unlawful, they could accuse him to the Roman Governor, as a mover of sedition. The plot was artfully laid; and its execution artfully conducted; but in vain did human craftiness attempt to circumvent divine wisdom. Instead of directly replying to their question, our Saviour called for a piece of money, and asked, whose image and superscription it bore. They said Caesar's. Render then, said he, to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God, the things that are God's.

The spirit of this passage requires us to regard the rights of all beings as sacred, and to give them all what is theirs; or, as it is elsewhere expressed, to render to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, and honor to whom honor is due. This important practical truth, we now propose to consider. I do not conceive that it requires any proof. You will, I doubt not, readily acknowledge, that we are bound to render to every being, what is his just due.

All that is necessary, then, is to show what is due to the several beings with whom we are connected. In attempting to do this, I shall show. I. What is due to God, and II. What is due to men from each of us. I. What is due to God; or, what are the things, the property of God, which our Saviour here requires us to render him. The question may be answered very briefly; in one word; and that word is, all; for it is very easy to show that all things are in the most perfect sense the property of God.

No right of property can be more perfect than that which results from creation, and surely no one present will deny that all things were created by him. Agreeably he claims them all. The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof; the world and all that dwell therein, for he founded and established it. The silver, he says, is mine; and the gold is mine; mine is every beast of the forest, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. Of course, we, and all that we possess are God's property, more strictly so than anything which we call our own is our property, and he claims it all.

But general remarks do not affect us. It is therefore necessary to descend to particulars, and mention separately the things that are God's and which he requires us to render to him. 1. Our souls with all their faculties, are the property of God. He is the Father of our spirits. Glorify God, says the voice of inspiration, in your spirits which are his. If any of you hesitate to acknowledge the justice of his claim to your souls, look at them for a moment. Contemplate their immortality, their wonderful faculties, the understanding, the will, the imagination, the memory, and then say, whose image and superscription do they bear?

Who gave you these faculties? Who endowed them with immortality? Must it not be the king immortal, the only wise God, to whom it is owing that there is a spirit in man; who has given us more understanding than the beasts of the field, and made us wiser than the fowls of heaven? Our souls then, with all their faculties, are his, and to him they ought to be given. Is it asked, what is implied in giving our souls to God? I answer, we give them to him when we employ all their faculties in his service; in performing the work which he has assigned us.

We give them to him when our understandings are diligently employed in discovering his will; when our memories retain it, our hearts love it, our wills submit to it, and the whole inner man obeys it. This is what is implied in the first and great command, thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength. 2. Our bodies are the property of God. As he is the Father of our spirits, so also is he the former of our bodies.

Thine eyes, says the psalmist, did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, when as yet there were none of them. Thy hands, says Job, have made me and fashioned

me round about; thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh and fenced me with bones and sinews. The same work God has performed for each of us. Hence the Apostle exhorts us to glorify God with our bodies which are his, and to present them as living sacrifice to God, holy and acceptable in his sight, which is our reasonable service.

Rendering to God his own, implies then the giving of our bodies to him. This is done when we employ our members as instruments of righteousness unto holiness. It is neglected when we use them as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin. 3. Our time is God's property. This is indeed implied in the remarks which have already been made. Our time is that part of duration which is measured by our existence. But during every moment of our existence, we are the property of God. To his service, therefore, every moment of our time ought to be consecrated.

If, at any moment, we are not serving him, we, during that moment, withhold from him ourselves. 4. All our knowledge and literary acquisitions are God's property. They were acquired by us in the use of that time, and of those faculties which are his; and, of course, he may justly claim them as his own. And we find, that he does claim them. He compares our faculties and his other gifts to a sum of money, entrusted by a master to his servants, to be employed and increased for his benefit.

And by the punishment which that master inflicted on a slothful, unfaithful servant, who neglected to improve his talents, he shows us what will be the doom of those who do not cultivate their faculties, or who do not consecrate to him, the fruits of that cultivation. Indeed, it is difficult to conceive how we can justify ourselves in acquiring knowledge, unless with a view to serve him more effectually. If it be not sought with this view, it must be sought merely for the purpose of gratifying, enriching, or aggrandizing ourselves; a motive to action, of which God does not approve, and which is in direct opposition to the letter and spirit of our text. 5.

Our temporal possessions are God's property. They are all, either the gifts of his providence, or, as was remarked respecting our literary acquisitions, were obtained by the use of time and faculties which belong to him. They are his also by the right of creation, a right, as has been observed, of all rights the most perfect. Agreeably, we find that men are frequently represented in the Scriptures, not as the owners of their possessions, but merely as stewards, to whose care the Lord of all things has entrusted a portion of his property, to be employed agreeably to his directions.

These directions allow us to employ such a portion of the property thus entrusted to us, in supplying our own wants, as is really necessary to our support and happiness, or as is consistent with the rules of temperance and the demands of benevolence. But, if any part of it be spent in gratifying what St. John calls the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, or the pride of life, it is devoted to a purpose for which our master never designed it, and he will consider and treat us as unfaithful stewards.

Lastly; our influence is God's property. This follows as a necessary consequence from the preceding remarks. All our influence over others results either from our natural faculties, our knowledge, or our wealth; all of which have been shown to be the property of God. Of course, the influence which we derive from any of these circumstances, is his also, and ought ever to be exerted in promoting his honor and interest in the world. It appears, then, that rendering to God the things that are God's, implies consecrating to his service, our souls, our bodies, our time, our knowledge, our possessions and our influence.

He who withholds from God any of these things, or any part of them, does not comply with the precept in our text. II. I proceed, as was proposed, to show what things are due from us to men. At first view it may

seem as if nothing were due; or, at least, that we have nothing which we can render to them; for if, as has been shown, we, and all that we possess are the property of God, what remains for men? I answer, if God had not required us to render something to men, nothing would be due to them, nor should we have the smallest right to bestow anything upon them.

But as God is the sole and sovereign proprietor of everything that exists, he has a perfect right to say how it shall be disposed of. He has a right to appoint such receivers as he pleases, and he has in part appointed our fellow-creatures to be receivers of a large portion of what we owe him. To this portion, they have, therefore, a just claim. And when we regard this claim, when we give anything to men, in compliance with the will of God, he considers it as given to him. The question, what is due from us to our fellow creatures, is then equivalent to the inquiry, what are those things which God requires us to give to men, and to which they have therefore a right; a right, founded in his revealed will.

This question I now propose to answer. 1. All men, without exception, have a right to our love; a right to expect that we should love them as we love ourselves; and that as we have opportunity, we should do to them, as we should wish them, in a change of situation, to do to us. This, as I need not inform you, God expressly requires. Love thy neighbor as thyself. Whatsoever things ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them. Nor are our enemies to be excepted; for, says our Saviour, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you.

All men then, so far as they are known by us, have a right to our love, and to all the kind offices which love would prompt us to perform. Every man, who dies without having done all the world, all the good which it was in his power to do, dies in debt to the world, or to the world's Creator. Withhold not good, says the voice of inspiration, from him to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thy hand to do it. Do good to all men, as ye have opportunity. To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

Much more then have our fellow creatures a right to expect that we should do them no injury. They have a right to our good opinion, till they forfeit it by misconduct. They have a right to expect that we refrain from speaking evil of them, except when duty requires it; to expect that persons, reputation and property, should be in our hands as safe as in their own. It is scarcely necessary to add, that all with whom we transact any business, have a right to be treated with the most perfect fairness and honesty.

Love will, of course, lead to this. Justice requires it. God commands it. Let no man, he says, overreach or defraud his brother in any matter; for the Lord is the avenger of all such. Now the man who knowingly takes or retains the smallest portion of another's property, is dishonest, unjust, and exposes himself to this threatening. Nor will it avail anything for him to plead that he takes no more than the law gives him; for human laws are necessarily imperfect; and their application must, in many cases, be still more so.

They often allow men to take, or to retain that, to which, by the law of God, they have no right. And remember, that we are to be tried, not by the laws of men, but by the law of God. He then, who, in any case, takes more than the law of God, the law of love allows, or retains what that law forbids him to retain, is condemned by it. The rust of his unlawful gain, says an apostle, shall witness against him, and eat his flesh, as it were fire. Among such unlawful gains, must be included all that is acquired by defrauding the public revenues.

The only difference between defrauding the public and defrauding an individual, is, that in the former case, we cheat many, and in the latter, only one. The sum which each man pays the public, is paid for a valuable

consideration. It is paid for the secure enjoyment of life, reputation, liberty and property. If one man pays less than he ought for this purpose, others must pay more, and then they are defrauded. 2. To all whom God has made our superiors, we owe obedience, submission and respect.

As subjects, we are bound to obey, honor and pray for our rulers. Let every soul of you be subject to the higher powers. Submit to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake. Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people. Pray for all that are in authority. As children we are required to honor and obey our parents. But as this duty has been recently under consideration, it is needless to enlarge. Servants are required to be obedient to their masters with all reverence, not answering again, and to account their masters worthy of all honor; and they, adds the apostle, who have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren, but rather do them service because they are faithful.

We may add that the aged, considered merely as such, have a claim to respect. Thou shalt rise up, says Jehovah, before the hoary head and honor the face of the old man. 3. To our inferiors we owe kindness, gentleness and condescension. They have a right to expect that their feelings should not be needlessly wounded, and that regard should be paid to their comfort and convenience. Parents provoke not your children to wrath. Masters forbear threatening. Let all condescend to men of low estate.

The poor and afflicted have special claims. The afflicted have a right to our sympathy; the industrious poor to pecuniary relief. With respect to this duty, many indulge erroneous opinions. They allow that we ought to be just and honest, to pay our debts, but with respect to liberality to the poor, they seem to imagine that we are left at liberty to do as we please. But if the law of God be adopted as our rule we shall find that it requires charity no less than justice. We shall find that we owe a debt to the industrious poor, which, though they cannot, strictly speaking, demand, God requires us to pay.

In his sight, the man who is not charitable to the poor, is dishonest and unjust. But with respect to the indolent poor, the decision of Scripture is, that if any man will not work, neither shall he eat. 4. Those of us who are members of Christ's visible church, owe to each other the performance of all the duties, which result from our connection. We are bound to watch over our professing brethren, to admonish them when needful, and to seek in all things the peace and welfare of the church.

We are also under special obligations to promote their temporal interest; for while the Scriptures command us to do good to all men, they add, specially to those who are of the household of faith. Lastly; there are some things which we owe our families and connections. As husbands and wives, we owe each other the strict and faithful performance of the promises which we made, when we were united. As parents, we owe our children the best education for this world and the next, which it is in our power to give them.

As heads of families, we are bound to provide for their wants, to the utmost of our power, for he who neglects to do this, has denied the faith and is worse than an infidel. Thus, my hearers, have I stated the principal things which we owe to God, and to men, and the payment of which is implied in rendering to both the things which are theirs. The justice of this statement, I think no one can deny, who does not deny the authority of the Scriptures. On this ground I am prepared to meet any man, and defend the truth of every position which has been advanced.

It only remains to improve the subject. 1. In view of this subject, how great, how incalculable is the debt which we have contracted, both to God and to men. All the things which have been enumerated justly belong to them, and ought to have been paid them, from the first moment of our moral existence. But

surely I need not attempt to prove that we have not paid them. We have not even rendered to men, the things that are men's; much less have we rendered to God the things that are his.

Every day, every hour of our waking existence, we have withheld something both from God and from men, which was due to them. Every day and hour, therefore, our debt to him is increasing. Well then may our Saviour represent us as owing a debt of ten thousand talents. Well may God accuse us of robbing and defrauding him. Will a man, says he, rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. How vain, how false then, are the pretences of those who assert that they have injured no one, that they pay every one his own; and how presumptuous are the hopes which they build upon this assertion!

They make all religion to consist in paying their pecuniary debts, and in avoiding any instance of dishonesty, which is forbidden by human laws. They deny or forget that God has any rights; they think it neither unjust nor dishonest to withhold from him his property. But, my hearers, though we forget God's rights, he will not; nor will he stiffer them to be disregarded with impunity. He knows how to claim and to receive what is his. He has death ready to arrest us. He has ail eternal prison from which there is no escape, in which multitudes of unfaithful stewards are now confined, and in which he will confine us, till the uttermost farthing be paid; unless we can find a surety, able and willing to take our debts upon himself.

Hence, 2. We may learn our need of an interest in the Saviour, and the impossibility of being saved without him. We evidently cannot discharge our past debts. Should we, from this moment become perfect, and render both to God and men all that is theirs, it would not prevent our debt from increasing. It could make no satisfaction for the past. It could cancel no part of the debt which we have already contracted, and for that we should still be answerable, and must still be condemned.

In this view the situation of every sinner is desperate. He is loaded with a debt which he is unable to pay, which is constantly increasing, and which he must discharge or perish. But though we have thus destroyed ourselves, in Christ there is help. He becomes surety for all that believe in him; takes upon himself the debt, which they can never discharge, and thus sets their souls at liberty. By the assistance of his grace, and through him as their mediator, they are enabled to present themselves to God, living, holy and acceptable sacrifices.

This is the way and the only way of salvation. And now, my hearers, what shall we say to these things? I make no appeal to your passions. I appeal to your understandings and consciences, and ask, is it not just that God should require us to render to him and to men, what is due to each respectively? Is it not just that he should punish those who neglect to do this? Have we not all, even the best of its, neglected to do this? Was it not infinitely good and merciful in God to provide a surety to discharge debts, which we might most justly have been called on to pay!

Are we not under infinite obligations to him, who consented to become our surety, and who to save our forfeited lives, laid down his own? And do not reason, conscience, and a regard to our own happiness, combine with Scripture in urging us, to accept the offers of this divine Benefactor; and constrained by his love, to live henceforth to him and not to ourselves! To these questions, my friends, there can be but one true, reasonable, scriptural answer. Practically give them that answer, and your souls shall live.

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