

of loyalty and obedience to the civil magistrate. See especially what Paul says in Romans, chap. xiii. 1—7. ; in Titus, chap. iii. 1. ; and what Peter says in his first epistle, chap. ii. 13. 14. Of course it is implied in such injunctions that civil rulers know their own province and confine themselves to it. They have to do with matters purely secular, which do not interfere with our obedience to the law of God. Here their authority is supreme. So long as they confine themselves to their proper sphere, and issue commands as to matters respecting which they have the power to command, religion requires of us that we respect their authority, and obey their laws. These laws may be stringent, but they must be obeyed. We may feel their taxes a grievance, but they must be paid. The money so enacted may be devoted to purposes of which we entirely disapprove. That matters not, we are freed altogether from the responsibility of what is done with the money subsequently to its leaving us. The responsibility must rest entirely with those who have the disposal of it. Cæsar for example might employ the tribute money of the Jews in a very improper manner according to their views of things, in erecting heathen temples or licentious theatres we may suppose. No Jew could approve of such things, but was he therefore exempted from paying the tax? assuredly not, Render to Cæsar the things which be Cæsar's, was still the law.

III. Cæsar must not interfere with God's rights. We have already seen that God has rights, and Cæsar has rights. The civil magistrate is entitled to honour, obedience and tribute. God is entitled to honour, obedience, worship and tribute. The province of the civil magistrate includes all secular things not contrary to the law of God. God's province, as distinct from that of the civil magistrate, is conscience. So long as the former keeps himself within his appropriate sphere, he is entitled to receive, and he shall receive, honour and obedience. We have just seen that God does not interfere with his rights, and that so far from this, obedience to the civil ruler is a part of the duty which every Christian owes to God. But should the civil magistrate overstep his boundary line and encroach on what is properly God's right, he must be resisted. And when is he guilty of such trespassing? Whenever he would seek to interfere with conscience, to control faith, worship or discipline, to prescribe what we shall believe and what we shall not, to enjoin particular times, places or modes of worship, to appoint pastors over churches and regulate the admission of candidates to baptism, and the Lord's Supper; in these cases he is stepping beyond his legitimate sphere, and taking upon him an authority to which he has no right. If he should thus assume the rights which belong exclusively to God, he must be disobeyed and resisted. When Peter and John were summoned before the Jerusalem Council and charged to speak no more in the name of the Lord Jesus, they replied, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God judge ye." Acts iv. 13. And we vindicate their conduct in resisting on this occasion. So we vindicate the conduct of the three young men at Babylon, who refused to worship the golden image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. These youths were ready to obey the Babylonian monarch in every thing else. No fault whatever could be found with them as subjects; but here they felt that the king was encroaching on their Maker's rights, making demands of them which he had no right to make, and so they thought it better to obey God rather than man. We vindicate too the principle on which the Puritans and Covenanters resisted the civil power in their day. Their oppressors sought to bridle conscience, and thus afforded them a pretext for rising up in rebellion against them.

It had been well for the world at this time, if Cæsar had known to keep his place. His sphere is large enough for him, and to the full extent of that sphere, has he liberty of action; but the moment he goes beyond he errs. And alas! for humanity that the trespass has been so often committed. We make bold to say that more oppression has resulted from state interference with religion, than from all other sources together. Oh, the sad histories that could be recited, of the cruel wrongs endured by those who have suffered for conscience sake.