

Pam. 965

Who Owns the Wool?

A UNIQUE DISCUSSION OF A
CHRISTIAN'S RELATION
TO MONEY

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Published by the
Laymen's Missionary Movement
of the Southern Baptist
Convention
Holston National Bank Building
Knoxville, Tennessee

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By Rev. J. B. Gambrell, D.D., LL.D.

Title to the Wool

In law and in reason the wool on sheep belongs to the owner of the sheep. If a man owned sheep, and sold them, he could not afterwards enforce a claim to the wool they might grow. The right in the wool follows the right in the sheep. The wool is an appurtenance growing out of sheep. God's people are God's sheep. They are His by creation, by preservation, by redemption, by their own consent. There never was a better title to any property. This title holds the sheep and the wool. The sheep cannot hold property, because they are property themselves. The wool is theirs only as their skins are theirs and their heads and feet, by way of accommodation. The supreme title is in God, and this title holds against all comers. Our times are in His hands. Whether one of us lives a day is wholly with God. How we shall die, as well as when, is with God. While men live, move and have their being in God, they must allow His right to do what He will with His own.

Ownership Universal

Not only are the sheep the property of the Creator, but the goats are also. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein." That title takes in everything. Rebellion can never overreach the Divine sovereignty over all men and everything. "The commandment is exceedingly broad" because the Divine authority is as limitless as creation. We have made a poor study of the Bible if these simple truths have not lodged themselves in our hearts.

Conversion comes simply as a recognition of the Divine ownership in us. It is an acceptance, on our part, of our proper relation to our Creator and Redeemer.

The Hardshells

During the great Hardshell struggle, the cry which ran up and down the ranks of the disturbed Baptists was one touching rights in the wool. Hardshells are covetous professors of religion who give little or no money to God. They oppose missions and missionaries because of the cost. They would put an end to all Christian missions if they could. They say: "When God wants the heathen converted, He will do it without any help from men!" This is a specimen of their random and unscriptural talk. In the great struggle above referred to, the Hardshells declared that the missionaries were out shearing the sheep. I have myself heard the cry, with a peculiar twang or sneer to give it all the approbrium possible, just as now we hear kindred sneers. In many places the missionaries flinched under the accusation, and thus compromised the deepest and most important principle in revealed religion—God's ownership in the wool which grows on His sheep. In yielding God's rights in the wool, they threw up His rights in the sheep; for there is no conceivable way to separate these rights. If God can hold the sheep, He can hold the wool; if He can hold the wool, the sheep will not go much astray.

A Vital Issue

The greatest question in the world today is: Who owns the wool? Or, to drop the figure, to whom does the property, the gold, the silver, the cattle and all, belong? If that is settled on the right principle, the whole question of Christian living is far advanced toward

a glorious settlement. Until it is settled, nothing is settled right. Or, in other words, if we settle our financial relations to God on the right principle, our lives are bound up with God's in such a way that we can never go far wrong.

Demands Right Settlement

The mightiest controversy of the age is over "rights in wool." It is, or ought to be, a controversy both in the pulpit and among Christians in the pews of every church in Christendom till God's right is admitted and acted on. To flinch on this fundamental doctrine is to trifle with the greatest practical question the world confronts. Let God's right to the wool of His own sheep, to say nothing of the hair of the goats—I say let God's right be settled, and we are at the opening of a new era in the world's history. The triumphant march of God's army is slowed up, waiting for us to settle the wool question. There can be but one adjudication, and that is, that whoever owns the sheep owns the wool also.

Should Be Sheared

Shear the sheep? Yes, frequently and close. The pastors are the shepherds; and it is their business to feed the sheep, care for them and shear them. A shepherd who neglects to shear the sheep ought to be turned off. He is an unfaithful servant of the Great Owner. Pastors need to face this question. They must face it, for the time is at hand when pastors will be judged according to their works, not by their dignity or their pretenses, and one of the works is to shear the sheep.

Good for the Sheep

But the question has two sides: God's side and our side. Is it not hard on the sheep to

shear them? Not at all. It is good for them in every way. If sheep are not sheared, they become unhealthy. How many of God's saints are surfeited with the things of this world! Their spirituality is smothered by a plethora of the things of this life. Many are sick because their lives have no outlet. Their affections are turned after their earthly possessions, and not set on things above. One of the best things a pastor can do for his people is to induce them to give liberally to the cause. He is doing the best thing for his people when he brings them to recognize their obligations to God in financial affairs.

So important is this matter in the churches and in the lives of the people, that it demands special and extremely earnest treatment. Some of the sheep must be cornered and crowded before they will submit to the process clearly taught in God's Word; but they must be sheared.

The question takes on another practical turn. "Where our treasure is there will our hearts be also." This is Christ's word fulfilled in every life. If sheep are not sheared they drop their wool, or the devil picks them. Alas! for the waste of God's money in the service of the world, the flesh and the devil—and this to the hurt of God's people. Sin costs more than religion. Bad habits cost far more than the most liberal giving to God's cause, if we count money, and what is more than money? Robbery of God is a horrible and undoing sin. Giving to God has a wonderful power to bind the life to Him.

Striking Illustration

Two sisters, daughters of a wealthy father, were converted and started out side by side in the divine life. The father died and left each a fortune. One became at once a liberal

giver. The other withheld more than was meet. The first has been these many years successful, useful and happy in her simple life, giving more and more constantly, both of herself and her money. The other is withered. She spent her money for the world. In grazing on the Devil's pasture, the Devil robbed her of money, of health, of happiness, of usefulness, and now her life is not much but a lament. Each is reaping as she sowed. As sure as we live, Christian giving is a long step toward right living.

Effect on Family

One more thought. Money kept back from God becomes a curse to a family, often ruining them both for time and eternity. This is the testimony of Scripture and human experience. Giving liberally on the right principle is the best possible education and safeguard for a family. And the right principle is the principle of God's ownership of the sheep and the wool. Next to redemption the greatest question in the Christian world today is the question of rights in wool. If God's sheep were properly sheared, they would abound in health, and countless missionaries could be sent as torch bearers to every benighted region of the globe. The tears of widows and orphans could be dried, the sick cared for, pastors supported, homes illuminated by the Word of God and the world belted with the light of truth. This wool question is a tremendous issue in the hearts and lives of Christians and churches. If we settle God's right to the wool of His sheep, we settle the world's destiny.