



FIRST PRESS

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FRIDAY, APRIL 3, 2015

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Apr. 5, 8 a.m.

Deacons' Breakfast

Apr. 5, 9 a.m.

Morning Worship,

Luke 24.44-49,

"Resurrection and

Response"; The

Lord's Table will be

observed during the

Worship service

Please note:

Sunday Night Bible

Study and Midweek

Bible Study are can-

celed for this week.

From the Pastor's Pen...

Recently, we have had a couple pieces encouraging our readers to consider increasing their giving to support the rebuilding of the dome. As we did that, we never really looked at what the Bible teaches about giving particularly. So we'll do that briefly here.

The Bible clearly teaches that all things belong to God, since God made all things (Ps. 24). All that we have is a gracious grant from God for us to steward. We recognize God's ownership of all things by giving back to God's Church a "worthy portion" of what we have.

Under the Old Covenant in the Mosaic Law, God commanded His people to tithe, which meant giving 10% of their produce to maintain the Levites and the apparatus of the temple. God's Law stipulated that all tithes in the church went to the Levites (Num. 18.21).

Tithing to God existed prior to Moses giving the Law, but was always voluntary then. With

the establishment of a formalized priestly institution under the Mosaic Law, giving and the amount of giving were no longer voluntary, but mandatory. This practice of tithing expired with the Old Covenant.

Historically, Presbyterians have universally rejected the practice of tithing. In fact the General Assembly has stated: "***It is presumption for any man to say to another, or for a church court to say to the members under its care, 'you must give such and such a proportion.'***" Presbyterians, along the historic Christian church, have embraced the New Covenant along with its freedom and implications toward one's giving.

The New Covenant, and with it the passing away of the tithe, ***does not decrease a person's obligation to give, but rather strengthens it.*** If the Old Covenant Jew, who knew of Christ only in the Law, (cont'd pg. 2)

Westminster Shorter Catechism Meditation

We continue looking at the Fourth Commandment, the Sabbath day. We've seen already that God has set the day apart and that we are to keep it holy, but how?

Q60. How is the sabbath to be sanctified?

A60. The sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days; and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God's worship, except so much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy.

Here is where many in the church turn a "stubborn shoulder" (cf. Neh. 9.29) to God's commands. People like the idea about forgiveness of sins and grace, they are pleased to have Christ as their Saviour, but they aren't too keen on having Christ make a claim to their time or issue commands about how they structure their week; they don't want Christ

as their Lord. But the truth of the matter is: if you do not have Christ as your Lord, you cannot have Christ as your Saviour.

This command of God tells us of God's claim on one day in seven. He has given us rest on the Sabbath from our work and - if we are Christians - rest in Christ from the consequence of sin. God provided this day for us to remember that salvation, that is why Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath.

An unbelieving heart focuses on all that he or she "can't" or "may not do," but rather we should consider all that we are freed to do by the Sabbath. ***The Sabbath Day gives us an opportunity to have a small foretaste of what we will be doing in heaven: resting in God and worshipping God together with His people.*** As such, we can give this warning: if you don't delight in the Sabbath day, as Jesus instituted it, you won't enjoy heaven very much either.

Giving the work of the Church and Kingdom

(cont'd from pg. 1) types, and shadows gave 10% of his produce to the Old Covenant Church, how much more incentive (and reason) have we under the New Covenant to give of our income to the Church!

This is the position the Apostles take on giving in such places as I Cor. 16, "**On the first day every week, each of you is put something aside and store it as he may prosper...**" The apostles recognized that for those who have great wealth, they ought to be giving a **greater portion** of their income to the church than those with little.

Recently, a talk show host boasted that even after *paying cash* for a multi-million dollar mansion, he still "gives 10%" to the church. His statement is problematic, biblically speaking, on a number of fronts. First of all because he is boasting about his own giving, which Jesus clearly condemns (cf. Matt. 6).

Secondly, a Christian who has been given abundant wealth by God, ought not stop at a merely giving 10% and treating the 90% as if it were his to do with as he pleases. If God has blessed you such that you "prosper" and have your needs met (and more!), you ought to be giving returning a greater portion of your money back to God for the use of His Kingdom, His Church.

Thirdly, such boasting suggests an attitude of legalism and treating giving to the church like a tax (does anyone mail extra money to the IRS this month?). Giving to God's Kingdom should be done *in response* to what God has given us. Paul in II Cor. 8 writes to this effect: "**For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that**

though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."

The Bible teaches that those of greater means who understand God's grace ought to be giving a **greater portion** of their income to the church than a poor widow. Ten percent is a good baseline to start, but the "10% mark" may be unreasonable for some who have been blessed with relative abundance OR those who have very little. But everyone, under the New Covenant, is commanded to give a *worthy portion* "as he may prosper."

The New Testament does not spell out what portion of income we ought to give, but leaves it open to the influence of the Holy Spirit and Christian prudence. So consider your own life and spending habits. How much do you spend a year on luxuries, home improvements, vacations, premium cable channels, etc. in comparison to what you are giving to the church? That is a good gauge of whether you *ought* to consider increasing your giving. Don't be like an unbelieving legalist who says "I gave my 10%, I'm good," but search your heart and your checkbook to see if you can respond with greater generosity to Him who has entrusted you with everything you have.

This is **not** saying we should have no luxuries or enjoyment at all. But Christ in His Word teaches us that we must support His church not with what we can spare or with leftovers, but generously and sacrificially. Remember, our giving is motivated by Christ's grace to us on the cross. Only by grace can we part with what is "ours" to give it away to the service of Christ's Kingdom.

Sermon Snapshot: "Conspiracy Against the King"

We reached the climax in the opening conflict section last Lord's day in Mark 3.1-6. Jesus has been teaching and preaching a message of calling people to repentance and faith in God because the Kingdom of God has come near in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Over the past couple of weeks we considered Jesus fighting against the traditions the Pharisees had added to what God had commanded in His Law particularly related to the Sabbath Day. Sometimes the traditions allowed people to violate God's moral laws with impunity from human courts and other times their traditions went beyond what God had commanded or forbidden. In the Sabbath, the Pharisees had taken a day intended by God for His people's delight as they rest and worship Him and made it a drudgery, burden, and a prison.

Jesus corrected that, much to the ire and displeasure of the Pharisees before Him as He heals a man with a crippled hand. Jesus explains that, just as doing works of *necessity*, works of mercy in no way diminish the sanctity of God's holy day. The Pharisees, in response to Jesus' correction get up, walk out of the worship service, and conspire together with their political adversaries to kill Jesus

because his teachings disagree with what they believed and have done for many years.

That raises an important question of application for each of us: **how do you respond when things you've been doing for years, your own practices or traditions are challenged by God's word?**

I heard of a woman - now long deceased - who disagreed with her pastor's suggestion to change a church tradition for *safety's* sake, so she took to calling the church members insisting it was time for him to "move on." She engaged in a conspiracy to be rid of the man who challenged congregation's tradition.

People respond in various ways when their traditions and ways of doing things are shown to be out of step with God's Word and Law. Some will seek to be rid of or silence the messenger as the Pharisees did, others will simply ignore the messenger and go on doing what they've been doing, and still others will try to make excuses for why God's Word doesn't actually say what it says. But none of those are "Christian" responses.

The Christian, when confronted by God's word, responds with repentance and new obedience in faith.