

First Things – part two, a stewardship message

11/13/2016 Andy Figueroa

Jesus said, “*THOU shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.*” (Book of Common Prayer, quoting Deuteronomy 6:5)

When the Pharisees asked Jesus, “*Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?*,” (Matthew 22:36) He replied with the first and greatest commandment. These are **First Things**. Under the law, all Israelites in their total being are to love God this way, and so are we.

When I reflect on my own state, this is where I most fall short. In the face of all of the cares and demands of daily life, how can I possibly love God with **all** of my heart, soul, and mind? I cannot. No one can. Saint Paul writes about such shortcomings in a very personal way: *For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.* (Romans 7:18)

Thanks be to God that we are not bound by the law in the legalistic sense that applied the Israelites. We do not have to seek righteousness by keeping the law. The law is good for one thing. It convicts us of our sin. (Romans 7:7) And, thanks be to God that the righteous requirements of the law for us are fulfilled in Christ. (Romans 8:3)

We do try to keep the law in our daily life, because the law is good. In doing so, we are not striving for our own righteousness as if our life depends upon it, but out of thankfulness and love of God, without fear and condemnation. Instead, as Saint Paul puts it, working out our own salvation (Philippians 2-12) nurturing our relationship with God, growing in maturity in both faith and practice.

The law relates to Christian stewardship and giving by helping us to identify and defeat those things that impede us from **First Things** and cultivating those things that help us to love God with all heart, soul, and mind. What are those things? For one, Jesus and his apostles had had a lot to say about money.

Jesus said, “*No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.*” (Matthew 6:24) And, St. Paul wrote, *the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.* (1 Timothy 6:10) Clearly, our relationship with money can be a precarious thing. Our relationship with money can fuel many evils such as greed and covetousness, but it can also help fuel and grow the kingdom of God.

Jesus also said, “*Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*” (Matthew 6:19-21)

As you consider giving us an estimate of your next year's giving, you might consider how your giving contributes to the kingdom of God while it helps you grow in **First Things**.

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