

September 29, 2019

The Church Treasury

It is not uncommon for us to hear various statements regarding the “church treasury.” Some have maintained that there is no essential difference between the individual’s treasury and the church’s treasury. Consequently, such persons contend that the funds in the church’s treasury may be used for anything for which the funds from the individual Christian’s treasury may be used. Others have gone to the opposite extreme by denying that the church even has a treasury!

The apostle Paul admonished every brother in the Lord at Corinth to “*lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him...*” (I Cor. 16:1-2). One meaning of “*store*” is “a supply or stock (of something), esp. one for future use” (**The American College Dictionary**, p. 1192). In this case, that which is stored or treasured up is what we call “the church treasury.” Paul received “**wages**” from “*other churches*” while he labored in Corinth (2 Cor. 11:8). Without a reserve of funds called a “treasury,” could the “*other churches*” have sent “wages to Paul? The church at Philippi “*communicated*” with Paul “*as concerning giving and receiving*” (Phil. 4:15). This implies a storehouse of funds laid aside by saints who gave as they were “*prospered*” that the church might be able to communicate as “*concerning giving and receiving.*”

There is a difference between the individual’s treasury and the church’s treasury. This can be seen in the case of Ananias, who with Sapphira his wife, “*sold a possession, and kept back part of the price*” and laid a “*certain part*” at the apostles’ feet (Acts 5:1-3). Their hypocritical purpose was to make a pretense of liberality so as to receive praise for giving all while only giving “*a certain part.*” In Peter’s rebuke, he asked: “*Whiles it remained, was it thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power*” (Acts 5:4)? After it was given, it was no longer their “*own,*” or in their “*own power.*”

When the Saints “*upon the first day of the week*” (I Cor. 16:1-2) lay by “*in store,*” that which they have given ceases to be their “*own*” or in their “*own power.*” It becomes a part of the “church treasury;” it belongs to the Lord, and then is in **His** “*own power,*” and its usage must therefore be in keeping with His directions. Concerning Christ, God “*hath put all things under His feet and gave Him to be head over all things to the church*” (Eph. 1:22). Included in the “*all things*” over which Christ is head “*to the church*” is what we call the “church treasury.”

For what may the “church treasury” be used? It may be used for that which falls within the realm of the church’s **mission**. So what is the mission of the church? (1) The church is to **assemble** for worship; Acts 2:42; 20:7; Heb. 10:25. This assembling involves coming “*together into one place,*” I Cor. 14:33. Inasmuch as every command of the Lord necessarily includes that which is essential to the carrying out of the command, we are thus made aware that the church which must “*come together into one place*” to worship God, may therefore provide from its treasury the proper wherewithal to provide a “*place*” (building of some sort) for worship. (2) The church, being the “*pillar and ground of the truth*” (I Tim. 3:15) is obligated before God to **Preach** the word, and **edify** the saints (Eph. 4:12; I Thess. 1:8; I Cor. 14:26) and (3) provide **benevolence** unto indigent saints (Acts 6; 2 Cor. 8,9; Acts 11:27-30, etc.). These verses set forth the three-fold work of the church. To change, alter, add to, or take from the church’s work (as authorized and overseen by Christ, its “*head*”) is to pervert its mission, and disregard His authority!

This is why it is serious when brethren try to yoke the church to that of subsidizing human institutions and supporting them to do the work God authorized the **church** to do. This is why it is also wrong for the church to engage in activities which the Lord never authorized the church to do, and then financially support such from its treasury. For example, exercise, recreation, entertainment, etc., all have their place, but such are the legitimate function of the home, not that of the local church. These are things for which the individual may provide funds from his own treasury. However, inasmuch as Christ is “*head over all things to the church,*” Eph. 1:22, and this includes “the church treasury,” then “the church treasury” may be used for what He (Christ) has authorized the church to do, and **only** for what He has authorized (Col. 3:17)! Let every brother learn what the Bible teaches regarding “the church treasury,” and exercise his influence to see that its usage always remains in keeping with the Lord’s directions. And let each Christian, according to His or her prosperity, lay by “*in store upon the first day of the week*” (I Cor. 16:1-2), giving both “*bountifully*” and cheerfully (2 Cor. 9:6-7) so as to build up “the church treasury” and thus help enable the local church to carry out its Christ-authorized work.

*** —B. Witherington