

EVANGEL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (PCA)

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Sunday Worship 8:30 AM and 11:00 AM

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Living On a Balanced Budget

The state of our national economy is dominating the news and most of us are wondering how it will effect our personal finances. Our budget is a legitimate concern. Jesus assures us that our heavenly Father knows that we have needs. (Matthew 6:31-32) But He goes on to say, "Seek first God's Kingdom." (Matthew 6:33)

We have a spiritual budget as well as a financial one and we need to keep it balanced. Jesus was speaking of our day when He said, "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." (Matthew 24:12) This doesn't happen suddenly. This is a subtle process that takes place in the life of believers whereby their spiritual budget gets out of balance and they find themselves living in red ink. Their spiritual expenses exceed their spiritual income and finally their deficits catch up with them and they forget who they are and the vows that they have made.

In Judges 11:35 Jephthah says these words, "I have given my word to the Lord and I cannot take it back." He had rashly promised God that if He would give military victory to Israel, he would sacrifice to God that which first met him when he returned from battle. His daughter met him. There is much debate about whether she was actually put to death. Our point here is, that while we may criticize Jephthah for his rashness, we must respect him for taking seriously any promise made to God. The psalmist teaches us that the one who "vows to his own hurt and does not change" is blessed of the Lord. (Psalm 15)

Too many marriage vows made before God in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are too soon forgotten. Church membership vows to attend the services of the Church, to work for its purity and its prosperity are quickly forgotten. Promises made to train one's children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, to instruct them in the principles of our Christian faith as taught in the Word of God are also too soon forgotten.

Why is it that people give their word to the Lord and then take it back? It is a matter of gradual deterioration—often imperceptible to others. Year in and year out, deficit follows deficit, and for a time we seem to get away with it. Then suddenly there is catastrophe! Reproach to the name of Christ. Indifference to the things of God. Abandoning the worship of the Most High. The name of the Lord is discredited by one who made a solemn vow to God to be faithful to Him and His Church.

How do we maintain a balanced budget? The Apostle Paul gives us instruction in this by way of an illustration or example. He mentions Demas three times. He calls him, "My fellow-laborer;" (Colossians 4:14) and he says, "Demas greets you." (Philemon 24) Some years later he writes the sad words, "Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world." (II Timothy 4:10) What happened between these references? Demas' spiritual budget got out of balance; the outgo exceeded the income. He began living in the red and the world he thought had lost its hold on him began to attract him again and overcame him. He turned his back on Christ, on Paul and on God's work. He was overcome by the world. James tells us that, "Each of us is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed." (James 1:14)

This has been a concern of Christian Pastors from the beginning. The writer to the Hebrews is concerned with the lack of care given to maintaining one's spiritual life. After a stern warning about falling away he writes, "Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed." (Hebrews 6:7-8)

Now he gives words of encouragement. He lists some of the fruit that he knew had been produced in their lives, (Hebrews 6:10): because of their love, they had worked and labored for the Lord; they had ministered to other saints; and they were still ministering. (I Thessalonians 1:3-10; Revelation 2:2) These are some of the things that accompany salvation; he then goes on to encourage diligent effort: "We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised." (Hebrews 9:12)