

# **ILLINOIS LUTHERAN CONFERENCE**

## **Topical Bulletin, May 2018**

Throughout America there are many local churches which claim they are Christian congregations, and it's a popular practice for most of those congregations to involve themselves with all sorts of fund-raising practices, such as: bake sales and bazaars, raffles and roulette wheels, dinners and dancing, concerts and circuses, and many other money-making ventures. It also remains a common practice to collect monetary offerings during weekly worship services at local churches. Therefore, in this month's Topical Bulletin the question to be addressed is: ***What does the Holy Bible teach concerning fund-gathering by Christian congregations?***

**First, let us consider the basic principals the Holy Scriptures supply us in regards to fund-gathering among local Christian congregations.**

"Give unto the LORD the glory *due unto* his name: bring an offering, and come into his courts. O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth." (Psalm 96:8-9 KJV)

*Comment: The terms "give" "bring" "come" "worship" and "fear" as translated into English are ALL imperatives in the original Hebrew. Therefore, offerings are commanded by God's Word no less than fearing the Lord and treating Him in a holy manner while glorifying Him. Accordingly, giving an offering is an act of worship that is not to be omitted.*

The Apostle Paul addressed the Christians at Corinth with the following words given by inspiration of God: "as touching the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you: For I know the forwardness of your mind, for which I boast of you to them of Macedonia, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal hath provoked very many. Yet have I sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this behalf; that, as I said, ye may be ready: Lest haply if they of Macedonia come with me, and find you unprepared, we (that we say not, ye) should be ashamed in this same confident boasting. Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren, that they would go before unto you, and make up beforehand your bounty, whereof ye had notice before, that the same might be ready, as *a matter of* bounty, and not as *of* covetousness. But this *I say*, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver." (2 Corinthians 9:1-7 KJV)

*Comment: Observe that Christians are to give generously, willingly, and cheerfully, NOT because they feel pressured to contribute or have funds extorted from them. Accordingly, FREE WILL CONTRIBUTIONS are the rule, NOT SALES OR GAMBLING EVENTS AND THE LIKE. God's Word is clear: GIVE IS HIS COMMAND!*

"For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And *that* he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." (2 Corinthians 5:14-15 KJV)

*Comment: Note that the Christians' motivation for giving monetary offerings to their local church is the LOVE OF CHRIST since He gave so very much for us undeserving sinners— Jesus shed His holy and precious blood while nailed to cross of Calvary in order to deliver us from damnation, "For God so loved the world,*

that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, *I say*, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (John 3:16; Romans 3:23-26; 6:23 KJV) *Hence, our offerings are but one way to show gratefulness to God for the grace and mercy that He has shown us in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior.*

“Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.” (Malachi 3:8 KJV)

*Comment: Those who fail to give offerings to their Christian congregation are robbing God of an act of worship due Him.*

“Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things. Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” (Galatians 6:6-7 KJV) The English word “communicate” is a translation of the Greek root word κοινωνεω {koy-no-neh'-o} meaning (in this context): “as giving so that others can share— *contribute, share, give a part*” [Friberg’s Analytical Greek Lexicon]. “Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live *of the things* of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.” (1 Corinthians 9:13-14 KJV) The English word “ordained” is a translation of the Greek root word διατασσω {dee-at-as'-so} meaning: “*order, direct, command*” [Friberg’s Analytical Greek Lexicon].

*Comment: The above Scripture passages make it clear that local congregations are to use funds they collect for the support of their pastor (or pastors, plural, as the case may be) in order that God’s Word – especially the Gospel of Christ – can be regularly preached and taught to the congregation. Indeed, Christian congregations in this world are to see to it they are fed the proper spiritual food, sound Scriptural doctrine from the Holy Bible; and, that the Word of God also goes out to other folks since Jesus has commanded His followers: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” (Matthew 28:19-20 KJV) The great commission was not only for the early disciples, but for all Jesus’ followers unto the end of the world.*

**Now we shall take a closer look at fund-raising schemes in the light of the Holy Bible, for ALL Christians are to follow the dictates of God’s Word rather than their own thoughts, opinions and ideas, for “All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17 KJV)**

“And the Jews’ passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers’ money, and overthrew the tables; And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father’s house an house of merchandise.” (John 2:13-16 KJV)

*Comment: It was early in Jesus' public ministry during His visible sojourn on earth that He cleansed the temple of those who had made God's house a merchandise-mart. Consider the fact that most churches today sell cards, candy, cookies, clothing, etcetera at church or in the name of the church, and yet Jesus' WORD remains clear: "Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise." The words "take" and "make" are imperatives— COMMANDS OF CHRIST! Thus, selling things in the church or in the name of the church is sinful and greatly displeases the Lord Jesus Christ.*

"And they come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves; And would not suffer that any man should carry *any* vessel through the temple. And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves." (Mark 11:15-17 KJV)

*Comment: The aforementioned incident recorded in St. Mark's Gospel is also found in St. Matthew's Gospel (chapter 21, verses 12 & 13) and happened toward the end of Jesus' public ministry during His visible sojourn on earth. Despite the first temple-cleansing by Christ, the people had not repented and ceased from their sinful fund-raising schemes but had rather continued in them, as is sadly the case to this very day in most so-called "Christian churches" which refuse to obey God's Word. And what does such wilful disrespect of the Lord and disobedience to His Word indicate? Jesus answers: "He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear *them* not, because ye are not of God." (John 8:47 KJV) Oh, if people are part of such a congregation, they need to repent of their sins, turn to Christ, and amend their lives in accord with His Holy Word, which urges: "repent ye, and believe the gospel. Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." (Mark 1:15; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 KJV)*

**Since it is clearly evident from the Holy Scriptures quoted above that fund-raising schemes such as sales events, raffles, concerts, sports games, dinners, and dancing are sinful means for fund-gathering by Christian congregations, it behooves us to take a closer look at free-will offerings because such is the method the Lord would have us use to gather funds for our local Christian churches.**

Some churches insist that their members pledge to tithe, that is, that the people contribute 10% of their income to the church. Nevertheless, tithing was an Old Testament practice among the Jews that is NOT commanded by God to be observed by New Testament Christians. The truth is that even in Old Testament times the Lord God desired and commanded the best from willing hearts and hands of His believing people in proportion to what they had, for we read, "Every man *shall give* as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD thy God which he hath given thee. Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine." (Deuteronomy 16:17; Proverbs 3:9-10 KJV)

*Comment: Offerings were and are a way to show gratefulness to God for all the spiritual and temporal gifts with which He has blessed us; and, we are to give in proportion to how we've been blessed.*

“Upon the first *day* of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as *God* hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come. For if there be first a willing mind, *it is* accepted according to that a man hath, *and* not according to that he hath not. Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.” (1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 8:12; Luke 6:38 KJV)

*Comment: As the Apostle Paul instructed the early Christians at Corinth, so it remains a good practice for the Christian with a willing mind to put aside an offering for the Lord's work each week, giving in proportion to one's income which God has provided. Observe also that the Lord blesses generous giving.*

“And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called *unto him* his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all *they* did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, *even* all her living.” (Mark 12:41-44 KJV)

*Comment: The poor widow gave in proportion to what she had, yea, beyond what she could reasonably afford. The widow's generosity did not go unnoticed by the Lord Jesus, for He looks at the heart. Note well that Jesus observed what and how ALL the people contributed to the temple treasury. We can be sure that the Lord Jesus Christ still observes what and how people give to the treasury in the local Christian congregations to which they belong.*

Therefore, in view of all the Scripture passages we've considered, take it to heart that the Lord desires free-will offerings and He detests fund-raising schemes despite the fact that the perpetrators of such money-making ventures may sometimes have good intentions, as did the people in King Saul's day when they disobeyed the Lord in order to gather some sacrificial animals, for Samuel the prophet said to King Saul, “...the LORD sent thee on a journey, and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed. Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the LORD, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the LORD? And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and have gone the way which the LORD sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God in Gilgal. And Samuel said, Hath the LORD *as great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey *is* better than sacrifice, *and* to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion *is as* the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness *is as* iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from *being* king.” (1 Samuel 15:18-23 KJV)

*Comment: The Lord desires that we Christians obey Him in all things, which certainly includes how we are to gather funds in Christian congregations. Accordingly, FREE WILL CONTRIBUTIONS are the rule, NOT SALES OR GAMBLING EVENTS AND THE LIKE. God's Word is clear: GIVE IS HIS COMMAND!*

Hence, let us strive to follow what our Lord would have us do by heeding His Holy Word.

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