

The Pastor's Quarry

First Baptist Church of Granite Falls, MN
April, 2008

Coveting a Costly Conscience

Tax day is fast approaching! As I type this, millions of Americans are scrambling to “get their taxes done,” sifting through a year’s worth of receipts and expenses and forms with official-sounding titles. If you’re like me, you’re one of them. And as we fill out our tax forms and consult the tax code, we have decisions to make.

We have decisions to make because our tax code allows us a fair amount of discretion. For instance, we can claim deductions and write off expenses as long as we do so in accordance with the tax code. If we know the tax code well enough, we can often keep some of the money that we would otherwise give to the government.

This is as it should be; if the tax code allows us to keep a dollar, then we can keep that dollar without a trace of guilt. It is good stewardship of the money God has entrusted to us. But the rest of the money, the money our government demands, we are obligated to pay.

When asked about paying taxes, Jesus said, “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.” (Mat 22:21) And Paul wrote:

Romans 13:1-7 (ESV) Let every person be subject to the governing authorities . . . whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment . . . one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed . . .

This is true for all governments, including ours. It is wrong to evade your taxes. And if you do what is wrong you will have a guilty conscience, if you have not already seared it from past transgressions. For the sake of your conscience, Paul says, pay your taxes!

Keeping a coin that belongs to the government is a trade-off. You keep the coin, but you give up a clear conscience – you exchange conscience for coins! Should we not covet a clear conscience more than coins? Is not a clear conscience worth more than all the money in the world? True, taxes can be costly; a clear conscience at tax time can be very costly, in terms of dollars and cents. But how much better it is to covet a costly conscience than a guilty wealth!

Of course, this principle applies to all of life, not just taxes. For example, if you have a membership to the Science Museum of Minnesota, then you get free admission to the exhibits for every member of your family. But if you go without your family, but bring a friend instead, you are supposed pay the price of admission for your friend. If you covet a clear conscience, then you will pay the money. But if you covet the money instead, then you will walk up to the counter, show your membership card, and ask for two free tickets – and the money you save will burn in your pocket and in your conscience, searing it. How much better it is to covet a costly conscience than a guilty wealth!

In our “information age,” this principle is especially relevant. With a click of the mouse, we can copy or rip copyrighted music CD’s, share copyrighted MP3’s, and scan and distribute copyrighted print. With each click we can “save” money while we gather up these earthly riches. A clear conscience may cost us all of these delights – but how much better it is to covet a costly conscience than a guilty wealth!

Of course, we ought to covet a costly conscience for the right reason. We ought to covet a costly conscience so that we can glorify God, not so that we can feel self-righteous. We ought to covet a costly conscience so that we will “be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” (Php 1:10-11) God has given each of us this conscience, stamping the work of the law on our hearts (Rom 2:15); each of us is a steward of this precious gift that we will present to him one day.

Do you covet a costly conscience?

Mark Your Calendars

On Friday, April 11, at 7:00 PM, all members interested in a thoughtful discussion of poetry and music are invited to meet at the residence of Dale and Mary Streblov. This time, Lord willing, we will learn about Common Meter and Short Meter as we discuss pages 35-43 in *The Anatomy of Hymnody*.

On Saturday, April 19, at 12:30 P.M., come to the Parsonage for our Spring Picnic! Bring something to grill or a covered dish, if you like. Beverages provided.

On Sunday, April 20, at 1:15 P.M., we plan to conduct our first quarter business meeting during our regularly scheduled afternoon assembly.

On Mother’s Day, Sunday, May 11, choir practice is cancelled. Otherwise, we will strive to have choir practice following the afternoon worship service on the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Sundays of each month.

Pastor’s Schedule

Underlined dates are times when I will be in town without my “better half.”

In Granite Apr. 3-6 *
In Granite Apr. 9-13 *
In Granite Apr. 18(noon)-20
In Granite Apr. 25-27
In Granite May 3-4
Grand Forks AFB May 5-8
In Granite May 9?, 10-11
In Granite May 16-18
In Granite May 23-25
In Granite May 31-Jun. 1

* Monica in England.

Two Poems
by **George Herbert**
(1593-1633)

Self-condemnation

Thou who condemnest Jewish hate,
For choosing Barrabas a murderer
Before the Lord of glory;
Look back upon thine own estate,
Call home thine eye (that busy wanderer);
That choice may be thy story.

He that doth love, and love amiss
This world's delights before true Christian joy,
Hath made a Jewish choice:
The world an ancient murderer is;
Thousands of souls it hath and doth destroy
With her enchanting voice.

He that hath made a sorry wedding
Between his soul and gold, and hath preferr'd
False gain before the true,
Hath done what he condemns in reading:
For he hath sold for money his dear Lord,
And is a Judas-Jew.

Trinity Sunday

Lord, who hast form'd me out of mud,
And hast redeem'd me through thy blood,
And sanctifi'd me to do good;

Purge all my sins done heretofore:
For I confess my heavy score,
And I will strive to sin no more.

Enrich my heart, mouth, hands in me,
With faith, with hope, with charity;
That I may run, rise, rest with thee.

My Contact Information

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“Walk-in” office hours

10:00-12:00 A.M. Sat. in the church study,
schedule permitting.

A Bit of History

With one of the highest population of Evangelicals in Europe, Romanian churches struggle daily with a lack of pastors. The average pastor oversees several churches. Existing pastors have typically lacked the training necessary for biblical exposition and application. By the grace of God, Central Baptist Theological Seminary of Minneapolis (hereafter, CBTS) is striving to help these churches with its Romanian Extension located in Arad, Romania.

It all started in 1990, just after the revolution of 1989-1990 that toppled the Communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu. Under his tyranny, Romanian Baptists had been permitted only one school, which was more of a Bible institute than a seminary – and only a couple of students entered it each year. Large numbers of churches were without any regular pastor, and existing pastors sorely needed training; they were poorly equipped for expository preaching, and were thoroughly Arminian and often Amillennial.

Two men from CBTS traveled to Romania, accompanied by a Christian businessman, at the invitation of the Romanian Baptist Union. They found Romania in shambles. “Communism and Ceausescu raped the country. Day-to-day living is a challenge,” Dr. Pickering (then president of CBTS) observed.

In the summer of 1993, CBTS embarked upon a training program toward the Master of Arts in Biblical Counseling. In 1994, the first year in which Master of Divinity classes were offered in the city of Arad, Romania, the Romanian brethren announced the seminary as officially in session.

After the end of the third session that first summer, the Romanian brethren remarked in a letter, “We must say that the program for us is quite tiring, but everybody enjoys it and tries to do his best.” One obstacle they had to overcome was a “language barrier.” Classes taught by CBTS professors who flew to Romania were taught in English. While the students did speak English, it was a second language for them and posed a challenge. Some course requirements were relaxed at first, but the CBTS professors used the same teaching style and grading as they did in America.

Classes have been modified due to the heavy pastoral responsibilities of the Romanian students as well as the unavoidable brevity of visits by American faculty. Intense sessions allow Romanian pastors to attend during the week and to travel to their churches on weekends. Pastors who attend make very little money (about \$100/month), with living expenses almost as high as they are here, so they cannot pay for tuition, fees, or books. The only way they can get this education is by donations from the outside.

Since the fall of communism, the insidious materialism of the West has threatened the country with great worldliness. Dr. Benjamin (Beni) Costea, director of Central Baptist Seminary in Romania, has often said that in some ways spiritual life was easier under communism because of the isolation Romania enjoyed from Western worldliness! More than ever, Romania needs godly, well-equipped pastors to lead the people of God through this minefield.

The ministry of this seminary has succeeded in training between fifteen and twenty percent of all the Baptist pastors in Romania. Cultivation of Romanian leadership promises that the seminary will one day be autonomous. After sifting through many letters and other documents on file at CBTS, I am convinced that this success is due in large part, by God's grace, to the methodical and conscientious labor of serious-minded men of God, and to the generous donations of Christians who fund this important work.