

It's Only Money

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

I was getting gas in the car yesterday, like so many of us do, and I overshot the round figure of \$13.00 by one cent. So I went into the service station and I put down my \$13.00 check and I took out my one cent and put it on the check and the girl said, "Oh we don't need the one cent and she put down a dime and said, "There is a dime discount and there's a card that you can win a car with as a prize." So I'll go back there!

It makes all the difference in the world -- something inside you rises to it and says, "Oh, that's a great place." And something inside you kind of shrivels up when they say to you, "That's thirteen dollars and one cent" and you have to get your one cent out. It's interesting, there's something inside our own spirits that rises to a spirit of generosity like that. Even though we know they're not losing on the deal -- and we know that. Even though the financial facts don't actually justify the gladness that we feel in our hearts, yet we do rise to that when we find a spirit of generosity, or magnanimity, or big-heartedness, in somebody -- even if it's in a gas station. We kind of feel, "Yeah, that's right, that's what life is about."

That's the kind of spirit that showered us with so much of everything in this world; the Creator seems to give us loads of snow, loads of rain, and loads of sunshine. He seems to give us loads of daffodils and thousands of singing birds and thousands of fish. It seems that the whole earth has a spirit of generosity and magnanimity in its heart, and when somebody else shows us that there's something inside us that rises to it.

Now, what is that? It's our conscience. Our conscience actually doesn't so much testify to right and wrong and good and evil -- it's our educated minds that do that. But our conscience attests to that spirit of generosity and magnanimity and big-heartedness that fills the earth. That spirit that we sense coming from the Creator who does not deal with us according to our sins, and does not requite us according to our iniquities, but removes our transgressions as far as the east is from the west. That fills this world with teaming life and seems to continue to give and give and give to us -- whatever our attitude is to him.

Our conscience attests to that, and our conscience lets you know when that kind of spirit is filling your heart. Your conscience is what let's you know when the other petty, miserly, mean, legalistic, cent-counting spirit is filling your heart. Your conscience let's you know that.

Now, which spirit fills your heart attitude on the 15th of April -- [Tax Day in the U.S.] because that's the real reason for paying your taxes? The deepest reason of all for paying your taxes is so that your heart would be filled with that faith attitude; that faith attitude that is filled with the generous spirit of God, rather than that fear attitude that is filled with anxiety, and pettiness, and smallness.

You'll see that if you look at the verse that we're studying today. It's Romans 13:6. "For the same reason you also pay taxes." Now, what reason? Romans 13:5, "Therefore one must be subject, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience" for that reason. That's why you should pay your taxes; for the sake of your conscience which testifies, not first and foremost to "this is good, this is bad, this is right, this is wrong, this is good, this is evil" but which does a far more sensitive job than that.

Your conscience testifies to when you are letting that petty, shriveled, mean, miserly, fearful spirit take hold and get a grip of your heart, or when you are letting that magnificent, magnanimous, generous, faith believing, trusting attitude of God's provision to fill your heart. Your conscience let's you know that, and actually that's why we should pay our taxes. Not simply because it's legal, not just because the bible enjoins it, but because it's a faith action that allows the spirit of God's generosity and full provision to fill your heart.

What do you feel when you come to your deductions for interest, for medical care, for charitable contributions, for travel and entertainment? What spirit fills your heart at that moment? Is it a spirit of fear and anxiety and resentment or is it a spirit of gratitude and generosity and confidence and faith in the Father?

That's what's wrong with giving yourself the benefit of the doubt on the travel expenses or the medical expenses. It's not the actual lies, strangely enough, that you tell when your pen makes that figure on the paper. It's not the actual lie; it's the whole miserable spirit of anxiety and fear and worry and smallness and miserliness that gets hold of your heart -- that's what's wrong with it loved ones.

When you do that around the 15th of April, you're letting a whole spirit of smallness and pettiness take hold of you, that whole spirit of Satan that offends you when a service station attendant says \$13.01. You're letting that spirit take hold of your heart at that very moment when you're doing that; when you're writing that figure that you know gives you slightly the benefit of the doubt but you know fine well nobody is ever going to find out about it.

When you write that figure, Jesus is standing at your right hand saying, "My child, 'do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith?'[Matthew 6:25-30] Now, put the right figure down; step out in faith. Believe my Father, trust me."

And at that moment loved ones, you either do it or you say, "No, I have my own methods of working out my problems; I figure that if I can manipulate this thing, I'll just make it by the end of this year -- I'll just manage it. So okay, that stuff is all right, Lord, for theory, but in practice I have to manipulate my own way by my own clever strategies."

Loved ones that's the tragedy of not paying the taxes; that's the tragedy of Gordon Kahl. He was the gentleman from North Dakota who belonged to that group of militant, anti-tax people, and he refused to pay his taxes. He killed two federal marshals and a sheriff who tried to serve a warrant on him for not filing an income tax return, and the tragedy is not even the death, though that's tragic enough, the tragedy is not even the defiance of law, though that's tragic enough, the tragedy is that the dear guy allowed that spirit to flood in upon him and utterly preoccupy him and take over his whole being, so that that spirit of pettiness, and miserliness, and legalism, and fear, and anxiety, and "manage it by your own strategy or your own power" took over his heart completely.

I think one of the attorneys said, "What on earth was in a man's mind to create that kind of havoc because he didn't want to pay his taxes?" And it does come home to you, doesn't it? It makes you feel whether the guy had some reason for doing it or not, it's ridiculous that he went to that length. You remember how the article reads? "The other officers managed to drag Matthews out, the house went up in flames after a smoke bomb was thrown down the vent and then they went in and there was a figure, a burnt to death figure, leaning over a lamp."

Your heart breaks and you think this is tale told by an idiot; there's no sense in this; this dear man carried it to that extremity in order to make a point? No; that's not just man, that's devilish; that's satanic. Some spirit got hold of that guy that drove him beyond the point of reason.

Now, I understand that all of us who lie on the income tax form are not at that point, but you see what I am saying; it's only luck that we're not. It's just luck -- we're actually touching the same spirit. We're touching the same spirit of fear, the same spirit of anxiety, and the same spirit of feeling that unless we manipulate these taxes according to our own cleverness we're lost financially.

Loved ones, this man Gordon Kahl's whole attitude contrasts absolutely and utterly with that of a poor preacher who had nothing like the resources that Gordon Kahl had; he had no house or roof over his own head. He had not the kind of government, even, that Gordon Kahl has. He had a government that was much crueller and much more unsympathetic. But this preacher had an utterly different attitude towards paying taxes. I'll show you his own words in Matthew 17:24, "When they came to Capernaum, the collectors of the half-shekel tax went up to Peter and said, "Does not your teacher pay the tax? He said, 'Yes.' And when he came home, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, 'What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tribute -- from their sons or from others?' And when he said, 'From others,' Jesus said to him, 'Then the sons are free.'" So Jesus was saying if this half-shekel tax is a civil tax then I am a son of David's line and so I really ought not to pay the tax. If it's a religious tax for the temple, you know I am the Son of the Creator for whom this tax is collected, so I have no real reason and no right to be asked to pay this tax. So Jesus was saying, "Really, I am justified in refusing to pay the tax, you know that Simon." But then verse 27 says "However, not to give offense to them," in other words, not to put anybody else off who is seeking God, "However, not to give offense to them, go to the sea and cast a hook, and take the first fish that comes up and when you open it's mouth you will find a shekelle; take that and give it to them for me and for yourself."

In other words, Jesus says to each one of us in regard to the taxes, "It's only money. It's only money. Pay it. And if you doubt that my Father can cover that as well as you're other expenses; if you doubt that my Father can provide for your taxes as well as for all your other needs, then let me do it the hard way." And thereupon, he outgunned all the most sophisticated, electronic fish-finders that we have invented. He didn't just find any old fish -- and it is amazing isn't it; Jesus, the Savior of the world who made every fish in the sea knew where the fish was -- not that have swallowed a shekelle -- but the fish that had a shekelle stuck in its throat. Then he guided that fish over to Peter's hook, and he did it in such a complex way so that all we skeptics here this morning would be in no doubt that if Jesus can supply the taxes that way, our Father can surely supply all our needs. And of course he can loved ones, of course he can.

When you and I fiddle on the taxes, we're just allowing that spirit of miserliness, that spirit of meanness, that spirit of fear and anxiety and worry to grip our hearts. That's why we have

headaches, that's why we have all that strain and can't sleep around tax time; because we allow that spirit of miserliness and fear and anxiety to grip our hearts and we turn away from our mighty God who is shining the sun on us day-by-day and who is giving us the rain and who has given us all that we have, the one who keeps us alive, and we turn away from him and we pretend for that moment that he cannot supply all our needs and loved ones, that's the tragedy.

Go out -- step out -- it's a faith action. Pay the tax, pay more, give them more -- give them whatever they want; the Father will supply our needs. It's a glory to him and a delight to the angels in heaven when they look down and see one of us who really trusts our God. God will not leave you without the wherewithal to obey him, he won't. He won't tell you to pay your taxes and then leave you without the money to do it; he'll use everything that you come up against in that regard to bring you closer to him, but he will not leave you alone. He will supply what you need and he wants us to tackle our taxes in that way.

Now why do you do it? Why does the Holy Spirit attest to that as an exercise of faith? You can see it if you look back to Romans 13:6b. This is why the Holy Spirit attests to that as a faith action and therefore fills us with the Spirit of God's generosity and power. Romans 13:6b, "For the same reason you also pay taxes", Why? "for the authorities are ministers of God." They're ministers of God. It's interesting, the word there is 'liturgoi' and it's the same word that's used of Jesus in Hebrews where Jesus is called the minister of God.

Now admittedly these are secular servants of God, but the reason is that the people who run the civil government are actually God's secular servants, and despite or through the smoke filled rooms, despite or through the political caucuses, despite or through the men -- dishonest and honest-- and the political deals -- done and undone that take place, God somehow gets people into government that he is able to use as his servants. They're appointed for a very specific task. You can see it at the end of this verse, "For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing."

Now what very thing? Often we think collecting the taxes but no; go back to Romans 13:3, "For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of him who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain; he is the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrong-doer." That's what they do.

I agree with you; they don't encourage faith in God. They don't even encourage the spirit of grace and generosity that flows from that faith, but they do encourage honesty, they do encourage integrity, they do encourage good behavior. They don't discourage fear; they don't discourage unbelief in God. Admittedly, they don't discourage, even, the miserliness and the anxiety that flows from that, but they do discourage murder, they do discourage rape, they do discourage vice and crime.

In other words, these people maybe don't encourage faith in God or discourage unbelief in God, but they do encourage the actions and good behavior that flows from faith in God, and they do discourage the bad behavior that flows from unbelief in God and God's way of supplying them with money is our taxes.

God knew that in some way he had to protect us from the people who don't trust him; from the people who would murder us and slaughter us if they got the chance, so he appointed certain people in the

world; policemen, attorneys, government officials, to hold back that anarchic murder and chaos while we got to know him. He has arranged for taxes to support those people and that's why the conscience within us attests to the rightness of paying our taxes because it enables God's whole economy and system to work together. It enables the whole thing to operate together, so in a way when you don't do that, you actually oppose God, who has arranged for this so that it will operate that way.

That's why we pay our taxes. You may say, "Then is it wrong to withhold taxes in order to force the government to do something that we think it ought to do; for instance in abortion? Is it wrong to withhold our money and to refuse to pay our taxes? Is it wrong to take the attitude that Gordon Kahl took, which he took presumably not simply because he hadn't the money, but because he was making a point, is it wrong to do that?"

Some of us, I know, believe it's not wrong. I know a brother who is part of this body who runs a newspaper in a town in South Dakota that is based primarily on not paying taxes -- the whole community. And he is doing that because he believes that, so I know that many of us think that. But it's my responsibility to tell you, to the best of my understanding of God's word, what he is saying and loved ones; it seems to me it is wrong; it seems to me it's wrong to refuse to pay your taxes in order to force the government to do what you think it should do.

First of all it's wrong because it's illegal and therefore it's disobedience to God. I'll show you the verse, its Romans 13:2, "Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment." So yes the Bible seems to imply that we should pay our taxes and if we don't pay our taxes we're not only disobeying God's word, but we're disobeying the law and we're disobeying God himself.

The second reason is it destroys the freedom of will that voting, writing to your representatives and running for public office preserves. Do you see that? It destroys that freedom of will. It's the little guy who owns the only baseball bat in the street -- the other guy pitches to the guy that owns the bat and he is now has three strikes. So you strike him out and he says, "Okay, if you strike me out, I am taking the bat home." That's it -- it's the same spirit, isn't it; "If you don't do what I want you to do with my money, I am not going to give it to you." It's that spirit and it destroys freedom -- what can you do [about the owner of the bat] -- you have to let the guy stay in all day. Nobody else gets a turn to bat because you want the game to continue. So it destroys the free will that everybody else has.

So loved ones it does seem wrong to do. But the most serious reason of all for not withholding your taxes in order to make the government do what you think is; it allows a whole spirit of fear and anxiety and self-management to come into your heart and to fill it, instead of that spirit of generosity and faith in God's ability to overrule whatever lay there, that's it.

It brings in that whole dependence on the flesh; that whole dependence on your ability to turn things round that is absolutely opposed to faith in God's ability to overrule if you will concentrate on obeying him and it eventually is what brings you into a great sense of insecurity. You know that that is what brings insecurity; you either go out in faith in God's ability to bring things around, or you sink into your faith in your own ability to change it. And you can't change it -- you're not God. So you try to play God in your life, and then you discover you're not God. That's why you're insecure.

Have you ever thought that that's actually why people go insane? Do you know that?

C.K. Chesterton is a famous English writer who said, "Many people think insane people are illogical people and that's their problem." He says, "No. The problem with insane people is they're absolutely logical; they have no room for anything else but their own thinking and their own method of doing the thing, and that utterly preoccupies, and then obsesses their mind, and that's why they're insane. They live inside their own plans and their own ideas and they don't allow the reality of the rest of the world to break in."

So loved ones, no, don't get involved in that. Not because even the Bible says you're not to, not even because it's illegal, but because your conscience testifies to the fact that you're allowing a spirit of Satan and selfishness and smallness to come into your life, versus one other big reason for it. I'll show you what it is and it applies to a lot of these political issues that we've been discussing; Second Timothy 2:4, "No soldier on service gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to satisfy the one who enlisted him." For us that's a civilian pursuit. Any of us who are soldiers of the Cross are committed to one way to change society; we change human hearts. We allow that spirit of God's generosity and faith to fill our hearts, we introduce other people's hearts to it and their hearts are filled with it too, and then they vote as they want. That's how we soldiers of the Cross change society -- we do not get involved in civilian pursuits. For us a civilian pursuit is the kind of thing that can so often end up in the tragedy of Gordon Kahl's death.

So loved ones, it's a glorious calling that God has given us; to move in complete faith that our Father will supply all our needs, even our income taxes. That's a good feeling.

Let us pray.

Dear Father, we thank you for those dear words that Jesus spoke on that occasion. We know that he was looking over the disciple's heads, down through the centuries, and looking straight at us this morning and saying, "Do not be anxious about your life; what you shall eat or what you shall drink nor about your body, what you shall put on. Consider the lilies of the field, they neither toil nor spin and yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If your Father, so clothes the grass of the field which today is and tomorrow is cast into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, oh you of little faith."

Father thank you that we have every reason for believing that you will and that we can afford to pay our taxes and to pay them generously, because the more we give, the more you will give to us. And the more we put our faith in you, the greater a spirit of magnanimity and generosity will fill our own lives and hearts.

Lord we thank you for that; to give ourselves today in our relationships with each other; to rejecting that spirit of legalism and that spirit of counting the cents and the pennies, and we receive gladly that spirit of generosity and magnanimity which has filled this world with so much beauty.

Father we thank you for the Holy Spirit. And dear Holy Spirit, we allow you to fill us with yourself, and to pour out through us to others.

Now the grace of our Lord Jesus, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us, now and evermore. Amen.

