

Of Barns and Brims Proverbs 3:9-10

Well, I have to tell you that I started therapy this week, physical therapy. They have been taking me to the grindstone and really working me over. I have started core strength exercises and stretches and during the week I have hit upon my own therapy strategy that is a sure winner – at least for me. Some of you might not approve. It's a family plan, so Robyn and David can also benefit from it. They don't have me doing crunches yet, but I found one that will work. It's an exercise I'll do once a day at breakfast. I'm calling it "the Captain Crunches" therapy plan. I think it's a winner.

Now if you were here last week, you may have noticed that I did not have time to get in to verses 7 and 8 of the text we were considering.

Verse 7 is about living correctly through God.

Verse 8 is about living cheerfully by God.

“Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones.”

I think I can illustrate this important concept through a little story.

“One day a farmer had had enough of the flock of pesky crows that were in his fields and pens so he went in and grabbed his shotgun. Unfortunately, he didn't notice that the family's very sociable parrot had joined the crows. After firing a few shots, he walked over to the fallen birds and was surprised to find the pet parrot badly ruffled with a broken wing. When the farmer's children saw the injured bird they asked their Dad what happened. All the farmer could say was “bad company.”

What Solomon said was true as illustrated by the story. If you keep company with bad people, something bad is bound to happen to you as well. Paul says in **I Corinthians 15:33** that “**bad**

company corrupts good character.” Verse 8 then attests to the fact that avoiding evil results in a healthy life and we can add that it's not only physical health; it is spiritual health as well.

Remember again that the theme of Proverbs and the core strength of the Christian life is found in vs. 5-6 by our trusting the Lord in all things, not leaning on our own understanding, but acknowledging Him in all our ways, He will then make our paths straight.

Solomon moves on to another area in which we need to totally trust God, yet it is an area that for many is the most difficult.

Vs. 5-6 – trust the Lord with all your heart in everything, every area of your life, nothing is to be kept from trusting Him. If we lean on our own understanding or in our own ability in even just one thing then we doubt God's ability and we aren't fully trusting Him with our whole heart.

Vs. 7-8 – trust the Lord with your conduct.

Vs. 9-10 – trust the Lord with your wealth. Yes, this message is about money, possessions, but don't feel like you need to sit on your wallet.

Today I want to consider just two points:

A practice to obey

A promise to be kept

I. A PRACTICE TO OBEY – v. 9

Let's face the facts – the economy has changed the way we live. We have especially felt it at the pump. Gas alone has increased 95% in just three years when the previous three years saw only a 12% increase. Survey results from the Barna group in April of 2011 showed that 70% of those surveyed indicated they were somewhat to significantly affected because of the economy. Consequently their research showed that giving to charitable organizations was down as well. The outlook for the economy improving is also pessimistic. Nearly

75% of Americans believe it will take anywhere from 2-4 years or more for the economy to recover.

Among those whose church giving has declined, 24% have stopped all giving to churches; 17% have decreased their giving by 20% or less; 7% have lessened their donations by 20% to 45%; 17% have reduced their giving by half; 12% have decreased their giving by more than half. In comparison with just 15 months prior, church donors were nearly one-quarter more likely to have reduced their church giving by 59% or more.

These titles alone from other surveys by the Barna group tell the stark story.

Churches Lose Financial Ground in 2000 June 2001
Tithing Down 62% in the Past Year May 2003
Americans Donate Billions to Charity, But Giving to Churches Has Declined April 2005
Donors Proceed with Caution, Tithing Declines May 2011

Whether or not you want to jump on board the theological band wagon and debate along with the theologians whether the Biblical principle of tithing in the church age is relevant, the practice of American church goers seems to have settled the issue at least from a practical perspective. Behavior reveals beliefs.

As I said when we began this chapter, there are 6 commands followed by 6 benefits and verse 9 gives a command related to wealth. If we follow this command the benefit is seen in verse 10.

Here is the command: **“Honor the Lord with your substance and with the firstfruits of all your increase.”**

This verse gives us a practice to obey. It’s not a suggestion to consider or an option to choose from, this is a command. We either obey or don’t obey. Now we understand a command as being a direct order given by someone in authority. **I’m not even**

sure what we were discussing at the time but David responded to something I had asked him to do by saying to me “you’re not the boss of this house.” I quickly told him that in fact I was to which he added, well, you’re not the boss of the money.

I think that’s how we often treat with God. We argue a little with Him about stuff He wants us to do. We’re testing the water so to speak. In effect we’re saying “God, I’m not sure I really want you over every area of my life,” so we challenge Him. He shows us that yes, in fact, He really is the boss. So we think we get the last word by trying to control our finances.

It’s a straightforward command though, that is given: **“Honor the Lord.”** Here we see the person of our obedience.

A. The Person of Our Obedience

“Honor the Lord.” To honor someone is to hold them in high regard, to show them great respect. It is generally because of some position they hold and so are given a place of regard. Often times, whether right or wrong we honor someone because of their wealth, but consider reputation as a greater quality for someone to receive honor.

Proverbs 21:21 “He who pursues righteousness and love finds life, prosperity and honor.”

Proverbs 24:4 “Humility and the fear of the Lord bring wealth and honor and life.”

In our passage we are told the object of our honor is the Lord. The basic meaning of the word honor is to be heavy or weighty. Over time the word changed to include a person who was weighty in society, someone who had a lot of influence. Its use was figurative and did not refer to someone who was physically heavy but rather referred to someone who had a lot of influence in society because of his position or status. We might say that someone

“throws their weight around” or “that person carries the weight of the company.”

We speak of those people in a way generally as deserving of respect. *My Dad serves as bailiff for Oscoda County. When the judge enters the room and he tells everyone to rise, it is a way of honoring the position of the judge. To keep a sense of decorum in the court, he enforces things like requiring men to remove their hat in the court room or turning off cell phones and keeping order for the judge who is to be honored for his position.*

*We honor our flag by standing when we say the pledge or sing *The Star Spangled Banner*.*

The Lord is the one we are to honor or respect.
There are many ways that we are to honor the Lord.
We honor Him by our conduct when we obey Him.
We honor Him through our service.
We honor Him with our praise.
We honor Him when we gather together for a worship service.
We honor Him when we read His Word or when we stand as Scripture is read.

Because of who the Lord is, because of His holiness and omnipotence He deserves that we give Him honor, and that honor is given to Him in every area of our life, including our giving.

This verse is specific to the way in which we honor the Lord. It not only shows us the person of our obedience, it shows us the plan of our obedience.

B. The Plan of Our Obedience

The instruction in this passage is that we are to give the firstfruits of their crops.

The firstfruits were the very first crops of their harvest. It came from the principle of the tithe. Tithe literally means 10 and in the case of honoring the Lord, the principle is that 10% is given to the

Lord from the very first crop that was harvested. That is what was required whether 10% of fields or flocks and regardless of how big or small your fields and flocks were. This tithe was on the honor system. It was between you and the Lord.

Exodus 22:29-30

Exodus 23:19a (34:26)

Deuteronomy 26:1ff (notice the honor in vs. 10)

These verses reveal that the firstfruits are the choicest, the best, the first that were given to the Lord and they honored Him in the giving.

What Solomon is speaking to his son about is that because the Lord is worthy of our honor, we should bring the very best of the first things we receive, not just because He commands it, but because He deserves it. We give it from hearts of gratitude.

God doesn't want the left overs, He wants the best. **When it comes to how God has blessed us, do we honor Him with the first and the best?** By honoring the Lord with our best Solomon is declaring that we fully trust that God will continue to provide.

Understand that the principle of the tithe is a principle rooted deeper than the Law. In Genesis 14 battle lines were drawn up. There were four kings who fought against and defeated five kings. Among the spoils of the victor was Abraham's nephew, Lot. Taking 300 of his servants he chased after and routed the four victorious kings rescuing both the goods and those taken as prisoners among whom was Lot. At a victory party, Abraham met Melchizedek, the king of Salem who blessed him. Abraham gave him a 10th of everything taken. This was a way of showing honor to Melchizedek for his superior spiritual state. He gave to Melchizedek the best of the goods that were recovered.

Paul also gives us advice in the New Testament about our giving. It reveals a plan for us to follow.

I Corinthians 16:2 “Now about the collection for God’s people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.”

The principle outlined here is similar to what Solomon was teaching: set aside your offering on the first day of the week. It too was to be the first of what you received. It was to be proportional to his income. Solomon taught that it was to be the firstfruits and in keeping with the practice and the law it was to be 10%. A proportional amount in New Testament teaching was still the idea of giving the best of what you received. By bringing it to the service, it became an act of worship in honor to the Lord and of the Lord for His blessings in the previous week. This was not only an act of worship, it was also a way to demonstrate faith. By giving at the beginning of the week, the person was going to trust God for everything he would need in the week to come. Hence, it follows that even in our giving we are to trust the Lord with all our heart that He will provide. **Is that the kind of faith in the Lord we exhibit or are we more prone to wait and see before we give?** Paul and Solomon both agree that giving should be proportional and the plan is to give of the firstfruits.

From I Corinthians the plan is clear.

The time of our giving is to be at the beginning of the week.

The regularity of our giving is to be each week.

All believers are to give.

The basis of our giving is as the Lord has blessed.

The manner of our giving is to set it aside and give as an act of worship.

As in the principle of tithing, Paul is also indicating that the giving of some would be proportionally more than others based on how God “prospered.” They could give a greater portion than those whose

resources were smaller and limited, but again notice that the principle was for all – young and old, rich and poor, male and female.

II Corinthians 9:6-7; 8:1-9

In this passage we see that the *principle of sowing* is applied to the *practice of giving*. Every farmer knows that if you sow a little, you’ll only receive a little in return, but if you sow a lot you’ll receive a lot more. Now Paul is not suggesting that the Lord blesses proportionally so that those who give a lot, get a lot in return. And neither is he suggesting that if we give God is obligated to respond in kind. **We don’t give to God so that He will bless, we give because He has blessed.**

What Paul is teaching in this passage is more than just about what a person gives, but rather how he gives. Whatever we are able to give it must be a conscious decision stemming from a heart of joy for all God has done for him. While it is to be proportional the principle is that it should be both generous and joyful. Reading through both chapters 8 and 9 Paul is calling to mind the many blessings of God especially His most generous and gracious gift of salvation. When we consider the act of His grace we in turn should respond by being generous and joyful in our giving. In the same way that God extended His grace to us in His giving, we in turn are also to give generously out of grace as well. We are told in this verse that our giving should be decided beforehand, but that does not rule out spontaneity. It is to be a matter of prayer that comes with God’s prompting and peace. We are not to give reluctantly/grudgingly and neither are we to give because we have been forced to give. The heart and hand that gives reluctantly is not a heart that either trusts God or is worshipping God in the giving. **“We give generously because God loves generosity. God prizes not the size of the gift but the sincerity, spontaneity, and joyful willingness”** of the giver. **Can I get a witness?** Our giving really comes down to a matter of trusting the Lord.

We are commanded to give to the Lord from the firstfruits. In this way we both honor Him for who He is and trust Him that He will faithfully provide.

There is the person of our obedience and the plan of our obedience now we see in the verse the product of our obedience.

C. The Product of Our Obedience

We read in the KJV that it is the “**substance**” of what we have. Substance in the dictionary means the real or substantial part of anything, the physical matter of something. It also refers to material possessions and resources.

As Solomon used the word he was referring to our “**wealth**” as used in the NIV. It depicts all the possessions we have. Now you may hear that word and then conclude that he’s not talking about you because you’re not wealthy. There’s a lot of talk these days about who makes up the “1%” in our country. They ought to pay more taxes because they’re wealthier than the 99% or the rest of us. They’re saying that the rich ought to take care of all the rest. Let’s move that to giving as it relates to our passage. Nowhere in Scripture is it stated that the poor don’t have to give. Both in the Old and New Testaments we see that tithing was the responsibility of all based proportionally on what the person had coming in.

According to the law every three years, the tithe that came in was to go toward assisting the Levites for their service to the Lord, to the widow, the orphan and the stranger. It was considered a sacred portion. In so giving you were honoring the Lord by being obedient.

Deuteronomy 26:12

By giving of what we have been blessed with we not only honor the Lord and trust Him for what we need to live, it is also recognizing that everything

we have not only comes from the Lord but belongs to the Lord. We are His stewards.

God makes the yield possible.

Leviticus 25:3ff, 19-23

I Kings 17:7-16

Everything we have is the Lords. As we honor Him with our gifts, it is an affirmation of His blessings in the harvest and an opportunity for praising Him.

Verse 9 shows us a practice to obey. As we obey the command to give from the things we receive first, we honor the Lord. It also helps us keep mind that it belongs to the Lord. Now in verse 10 we see a promise to be kept. Remember that each command is followed by a benefit.

II. A PROMISE TO BE KEPT – v. 10

Overflowing barns and overflowing brims.

This passage is not suggesting that in some way we are investing in God, that if we give to Him because He is good, He will do good to us in return. One author suggests that giving is heart preparation for what God wants to do for us. It is an act of worship.

Malachi 3:10

This passage along with **Proverbs 3:9-10** shows the principle of obedience and blessing. Through Israel’s history God told them that if they obeyed Him, He would abundantly bless them. The opposite then was also true, if they disobeyed Him, they would receive a curse. (**Deuteronomy 28:15-68**)

The storehouse refers to a special room or series of rooms in the Temple designated to store the grain offerings brought in to provide for the priests according to the Law. You may remember that after Nehemiah helped get the wall rebuilt around Jerusalem, one of his reforms was to clean out the Temple. He found that a Gentile had been given a

room in the Temple for living quarters. This room was formerly used to store grain. He went in and literally cleaned house, throwing everything out of the room, purifying it in order it to be used for its intended purpose. Some of you may have done that with your teens or wish you could today.

Malachi is a reminder that God was faithful to His covenant people challenging them to trust Him. It's a reminder for us to fully trust Him when it comes to giving. The New Testament reminds us of blessings received when we give generously to the needs of His people. **Proverbs 3:9-10** encourages us to trust the Lord for His provisions and so to receive His blessings, to put Him first. The same thought of putting Him first with the view of receiving His provision is clear in **Matthew 6:33** **“But seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you.”**

The story is told of a man who owned a small automobile business in Wales. He bought, fixed and sold cars. He was a generous and consistent giver to the Lord's work. Christian workers and missionaries in that part of the country had all received some tangible evidence of his generosity through free engine tune-ups, meals and a full tank of gas.

His business survived the hard times of the depression, but was faced with bankruptcy when WWII broke out. Food and gas were heavily rationed. The government commandeered all private cars allowing only those with official war business the opportunity to own one. No more cars were made for civilian use as factories were turned over to produce tanks and guns. He eventually had to lay off his employees. Pacing the floor of the workshop he faced ruin. As he paced the floor he heard footsteps behind him. Turning around he recognized the manager of a large dealership. They discussed how business was going and the man explained how he thought he was going to have to

close for good as well. The other dealership owner also faced a similar situation, however he had several hundred rental cars in a fleet that he still owned. His problem was keeping these vehicles running during the war. Additionally all his mechanics had been sent to fight.

He asked if an engine and necessary parts were sent over, could he rebore and rebuilt it. The man said he would work on the engine. When the engine and parts arrived the next day the man began to work on it immediately. Two days later he returned the fixed engine to the dealer. A week passed and the man was again visited by the other dealer. He said that he had some good news. He told the man how the engine was a test. When the engine was returned it was stripped down and checked out. He spoke about the black market available for new parts, and wanted to check out the quality and honesty of his work. Then he asked how many engines he could rebuild in a week. Both engines and parts would be provided through the end of the war. God honored the man by providing for him because he was first willing to honor and obey God.

When we honor God by giving to Him what He deserves, acknowledging that it is His, He will bless us. **Do we trust Him with our wealth? Will we let the economy dictate our actions or will we trust the Lord?**

He'll keep His promise if we plan to obey.