

Honouring the Father's Name

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- [0 : 0 0] And we're going to turn now to our Bible reading this morning. You'll find that in Deuteronomy and chapter 14, and that is page 158 if you have one of our church Bibles.
- And we're going to read together the whole chapter. So, Moses speaks to the people of God, and on behalf of the Lord, he says to them, You are the sons of the Lord your God.
- You shall not cut yourselves or make any baldness on your foreheads for the dead, for you are a people holy to the Lord your God. And the Lord has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.
- You shall not eat any abomination. These are the animals you may eat, the ox, the sheep, the goat, the deer, the gazelle, the roebuck, the wild goat, the ibex, the antelope, and the mountain sheep.
- Every animal that parts the hoof and has a cloven hoof in two and chews the cud among the animals you may eat. Yet of those that chew the cud or have the hoof cloven, you shall not eat these.
- [1 : 1 5] The camel, the hare, the rock badger, because they chew the cud but do not part the hoof, are unclean for you. And the pig, because it parts the hoof but doesn't chew the cud, is unclean for you.
- Their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch. Of all that are in the waters, you may eat these. Whatever has fins and scales, you may eat. Whatever does not have fins and scales, you shall not eat.
- It is unclean for you. You may eat all clean birds, but these are the ones you shall not eat. The eagle, the bearded vulture, the black vulture, the kite, the falcon of any kind, every raven of every kind, the ostrich, the nighthawk, the seagull, the hawk of any kind, the little owl and the short-eared owl, the barn owl and the tawny owl, the carrion vulture and the cormorant, the stork and heron of any kind, the hoopoe and the bat.
- And all winged insects are unclean for you. They shall not be eaten. All cleaned winged things you may eat. You shall not eat anything that has died naturally.
- You may give it to the sojourner who is in your towns that he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner. For you are a people holy to the Lord your God.
- [2 : 3 0] You shall not boil a goat in its mother's milk. And you shall tithe all the yield of your seed that comes from the field year by year. And before the Lord your God and the place that he will choose to make his name dwell there, you shall eat the tithe of your grain, of your wine and of your oil, and the firstborn of your herd and flock, that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always.
- If the way is too long for you so that you are not able to carry the tithe, and the Lord your God blesses you because the place is too far from you, which the Lord your God chooses to set his name there, then you shall turn it into money and bind up the money in your hand and go to the place that the Lord your God chooses.
- And spend the money for whatever you desire, oxen or sheep or wine or strong drink, whatever your appetite craves. And you shall eat there before the Lord your God and rejoice, you and your household.

And you shall not neglect the Levite who is within your towns, for he has no portion or inheritance with you. At the end of every three years, you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in the same year and lay it up within your towns.

And the Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance with you, and the sojourner, the fatherless, the widow who are within your towns, they shall come and eat and be filled. But the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands that you do.

[4 : 01] Amen. And may God bless to us this his word. Amen. Well, do take up your Bibles, page 158, if you have a church Bible, Deuteronomy chapter 14.

We're going to look through this chapter. First of all, we're going to look at the first thing. Then we'll break and sing. And then we'll look at the rest of the chapter together. And it's a chapter all about honoring the Father's name.

So let me ask a question to begin with. Why does God want us to keep his commandments? Why does God want us to keep his commandments? Well, of course, it has nothing to do with earning God's favor by impressing him.

No, it's very simple. Look at the very first line of chapter 14 here. It is because we are sons of the Lord our God. Now, back in Exodus chapter 4, God calls Israel, the whole nation, his firstborn son.

But notice here, it's each one of us individually who is a son of God. Each one of God's people bears his name. The holy name, the highest name in heaven and earth, the name of God.

[5 : 17] And so, of course, as Christians today, the New Testament tells us that we, too, are part of God's one true holy people. The Israel of God, as Paul calls them.

The true circumcision. Physical circumcision is neither here nor there anymore. Because both Jew and Gentile have been made one people through Jesus Christ.

And so Paul is very clear. He says it three times. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything but new creation, he says to the Galatians. What matters is faith working through love.

In other words, what matters is, he says, the Corinthian church. It's not your background. It's not a Jewish or Gentile background. But it's your life now in real obedience to God, your Father, in Christ.

So in 1 Corinthians 7, he says, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything but keeping the commands of God.

[6 : 19] In other words, living so as to honor and not dishonor the one who gives us our name, the one who gives us our true identity, our Father in heaven. And Jesus himself echoes Moses here in the Sermon on the Mount, as we read at the beginning of the service.

You, he says, love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you so that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.

That's why we pray. Hallowed be your name. We hallow, we honor our Father's name by bearing his name honorably, not dishonorably to the world.

And that's what the third commandment of the Decalogue is really all about. But you shall not take the name of your Lord in vain. We often trivialize that to just mean that you shouldn't use God's name as a swear word.

And of course, that's included. But it's far, far more than that. To take a name is to take that name as your own. It's to bear that name. When a child is adopted into a family, it takes the family name.

[7 : 29] It inherits everything that goes with that name. And that name becomes their name. When the wife of the heir to the throne marries into the royal family, she takes the royal name.

And she has to bear that name, not in vain, not dishonorably, but with great honor and respect. And we, says the Bible, we have taken the name of the Lord our God.

His name we bear through Christ our Savior. We, to Jesus, bow the knee that his name may hallowed be, may be honored in this world by us.

And not dishonored. As the Apostle James puts it, blaspheming the honorable name by which we are called. Well, I take it that we want to honor the Father's name, don't we?

So how do we do that? How do we show that we are a people set apart to be holy, special for the Lord our God? Well, the Bible teaches that our whole life will show the world the kind of family that we belong to.

[8 : 31] It will show the world the meaning, the dignity of the name of our family head, God in heaven. And this chapter, you see, which, as the Apostle Paul says, like all the Old Testament scriptures, this chapter, which is here to make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ, to teach us and to train us for righteousness.

This chapter is a chapter that gives us insight into how we are to keep that third commandment, how we are to bear the Lord's name honorably and not dishonorably in all areas of our life.

It's not exhaustive, of course, but like all Moses' instruction in the Old Testament law, it sets us in the right direction. It gives us some examples in everyday life, some key areas where it will be obvious that we belong to our Father in heaven and that we put his name above all other names so that it makes a difference, a visible difference, all through our life.

And Moses says here that we will honor the Father's name or dishonor it by the way that we grieve, by the way that we eat, and indeed by the way that we spend.

You see, he deals with these three simple areas of life to show us how God's people, verse 2, you see, are a people set apart, that is, holy to the Lord our God, are people chosen to be his treasured possession.

[9 : 55] Out of all the peoples of the earth. He shows us how that amazing calling will permeate all of our life, all these areas of our life, and indeed, of course, all other areas of our life, just the same.

So let's look at each in turn. The first thing really is there right in verse 1, the second half of it. And the issue here is family sadness. The way God's people grieve will be different from the world round about because we grieve to the Lord, not as pagans do in a hopeless, frenzied kind of despair.

You, he says, shall not cut yourselves or make any baldness on your forehead for the dead. For the dead is the important phrase there.

It's like Leviticus 19, verse 28, where he says, you shall not make any cuts on your body for the dead, or tattoo yourselves, for I am the Lord. Because that's what the pagans did in their rituals of grief and death and so on.

You can find all sorts of references to that through the prophets. Talk of cutting, of shaving heads, of tattoos and so on. All sorts of places. Isaiah 3, verse 24.

[11 : 10] Isaiah 15, verse 2. Just two examples. So this is not just about prohibiting certain hairstyles. So those of you with rapidly receding hairlines, you don't need to feel got at.

Which is just as well, actually, when I look around, because there's quite a few. Nor is that verse in Leviticus about tattooing. Nor is that just about banning all body art.

A clear focus there is on pagan rituals of mourning. Not about fashion accessories. So if you were to ask me, can I be a Christian and have a great big tattoo? I'd have to say, well, yes, you can.

As long as you don't mind being a Christian idiot and making yourself look really silly. Yes, you can. All right? I was reading in the paper the other day.

I can hardly believe this. But Judi Dench and David Dimbleby, even, in their 70s, have been getting themselves tattoos. What are they thinking? I do not know. At least they weren't visible.

[12 : 14] Actually, there is a serious point here to be made. And I'm going to make it. I think it perhaps is significant that the great increase in the popularity of tattooing today.

And it's not just, you know, anchors on the forearm like sailors used to have or soldiers and so on. It's people covering their bodies and their faces, their necks, everywhere. Sometimes with very hideous images.

It's dark images. And also the kind of popularity of multiple body piercings all over people's faces and so on. Isn't it significant, I think, that this is coinciding with the descent of our society from its Christian underpinnings, its Christian foundations, back into the paganism from which it came?

I think it is. It's actually a cardinal feature of our society today, isn't it? That we are more and more seeking to deny the whole notion of our human bodies being made bodily in the image of God.

And expressing something of that image of God. But today we seem to be intent increasingly on defacing that image. We see it in the huge push that there is in our society to deny and to destroy the complementary nature of the sexes.

[13 : 31] First of all, in proper sexual expression. But now more and more in trying to obliterate even the gender distinctions that God has made us, male and female. I expect that the next distinction that our society will try and obliterate is the distinction between man and beast, between humans and the animals.

So I think as Christians we do have to think about these things. We must ask ourselves, mustn't we, if what we're doing to our bodies honors our bodies as temples of God's Holy Spirit. As images of God himself in which we're made.

Or whether, in fact, what we're doing serves to deface and dishonor the Lord whose name we bear. So do think about that before you go to the tattoo parlor. But this command in verse 1, and all the others similar to it in the Bible, they are particularly tied up with God's people setting themselves apart from the pagans in their whole approach to death.

In their whole approach to grieving. Because these actions, cutting and shaving and tattooing and so on, it was all to express wild, passionate outbursts of mourning, wailing.

And that was all to do with fear about this whole dark world of death and the spirits and the unknown and so on. C.S. Lewis speaks about this and says that much of the whole point of it was to protect the mourners from the fear of death and from that fearful world of death and the spirits and so on.

[15 : 02] To keep away and to keep them out by all that noise and drama. But you see, God's people know differently. We have a hope. And God's people were the people of the true God, the giver of life.

And so to die in him, to sleep with your fathers, as the expression so often put it, it was to give your future into the hands of the God of life. When God spoke to Moses at the bush, remember, as Jesus tells us, he said he was the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

I'm the God of the living, not the dead. And God's people knew that his promises for them were not merely for this earth, because they were looking for a better country, a heavenly country, an everlasting inheritance in the presence of the God who is life.

So in the face of death, they couldn't act like the pagans, as though death and the grave were victors in this world. That would utterly dishonor. That would blaspheme the great name of their God, the Father of life.

Well, friends, if that was so for God's people under Moses, how much more so is it true for us who live this side of the bodily resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ? We must surely, as Paul says to the Thessalonians, not grieve as others who have no hope.

[16 : 25] For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep when he returns. And together with them, we will always be with the Lord.

So encourage one another with these words, he says. That's to be our attitude to death, our attitude to grief. Not, of course, to be trite and heartless, to deny the sadness and the grief that we face when we have a bereavement or loss.

Of course not. We're not to try and banish tears and have only smiley faces at funerals. No, no, no. Of course not. The Lord Jesus himself shed tears at the graveside.

Because bodily death is still a blot on God's creation. It's a mark of the curse. It's a reminder of sin. Death is not natural. People sometimes say today, oh, death is just a natural part of life.

No, no, no. Death is the last enemy of humankind, says the Apostle Paul. But for those who are in Christ, it is an enemy whose sting has been drawn, and the grave will never have the last victory over us.

[17 : 36] And so the way that we deal with death, the way that we grieve as Christians, is one very powerful way that we can bear witness to the great name to whom we belong. There's such a contrast between a Christian funeral and a pagan one.

I'm sure perhaps like me, you've witnessed sometimes loud and frenzied grief, passionate grief, suffused with horror and fear. I remember once in a crematorium in Aberdeen, taking a funeral where the girl whose father had died was so beside herself and trying to deny the whole thing that when the coffin was moving back into the crematorium, she leapt forward and grabbed it and tried to pull it back out.

How different is the quiet dignity, the real sadness and pain? Yes, but suffused with joy and real hope of a Christian funeral when the gospel of Christ is informing everything that's done.

It's a triumphant witness to the God who is life and to the name of our Heavenly Father. And we're to be people, says Moses, and says the Lord Jesus and Paul, who are to grieve unto the Lord, not as the pagan world that has no hope.

We're not to hide from the reality of death. We're not to try and just pretend it away, but we can face it truly as Christian people. Now, there's a real challenge there, of course, for people coming to Christ in different cultures, perhaps especially in some of the Eastern cultures in Asia today.

[19 : 14] I remember when a girl from Asia went home from here, become a Christian here, and very quickly was faced with a family funeral and had to think very hard about the things that she could be involved with in terms of respecting her father and her family and the things that she just couldn't be part of because it would dishonor her Heavenly Father.

There was something of that recently with Matthew Ferguson's father's funeral in Japan. David Ferguson, the leader of the OMF team there. And wherever possible, they tried very hard to give respect to the Japanese customs, but nevertheless, in the midst of all of that, it was a real and triumphant different funeral full of the hope of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So, friends, we all need to think, don't we, how we can encourage one another to have a truly gospel-informed attitude to death and to grieving and indeed to our own approaching death when it comes.

We need to help each other to face death with a steady eye so that we are distinct, so that we are a witness to our Father's name. Not a fear of death, not like those who have no answer to death other than to deny it or to be driven into despair by it, but to be those who face death because we know the life-giving Father who promises us resurrection bodies and eternal life.

We're going to break and sing a hymn that will crystallize our minds and our hearts. I trust on this hope that we have burning within our hearts that makes all the difference in the face of death and decay and even the grave.

[20 : 58] There is a hope that burns within our hearts. and that pin along with our hearts. Amen. Amen. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. And we'll continue. Family sadness. It's part of keeping the third commandment.

[24 : 16] It's part of honoring our father's name. As is, secondly, our attitude to family sustenance. The message of verses 3 to 21 is that the way God's people eat will also be different from the world around.

We are to eat as unto the Lord. And not just as we might prefer as the world around about us does. Verse 3. You shall not eat any abomination.

For, verse 21, for you are a people holy, a people set apart to the Lord your God. You'll find similar things in Leviticus chapter 11.

And like there and here, these clean and unclean distinctions seem to be rather arbitrary. Why should the cloven hoof or the chewing of the cud be the deciding factor?

Why should fins and scales have anything to do with it? Well, it's certainly not about food hygiene. Verse 21 makes that clear. You can give a dead animal to somebody else.

[25 : 17] Somebody who's not an Israelite, but not to yourself. So it's perfectly edible. Now, the issue is not health. Nor is the issue, of course, some kind of moral distinction between good animals and bad ones.

Nice ones and nasty ones. No, no. It's simply that God wants his people to remember every time they think about food, that their food comes from him. And they're to eat his food his way.

They're to acknowledge him even in the basics of life, even in things like eating and drinking. And so certain foods were declared unclean for you. Notice that repetition. Verse 7, again all the way through.

Verse 8, verse 10, and so on. Not unclean per se, but unclean for you. It's fine for other people, but not for you. Andrew Boner is right, I think, when he says God is providing finger posts, signposts in Israel's life to remind them of God's instruction, to remind them of God himself in everything, all the time, every day.

He gave them life. And he sustained their lives and provided for them. By the way, notice the first thing is not a prohibition. It's a provision, verse 4.

[26 : 30] These are the animals you may eat. And verse 9, these are the fish you may eat. And verse 11, these are the birds you may eat. There's nothing about vegetarians, of course, vegetables. God's not really interested in that.

Kathy Morrison will smack me after the service probably. But it's just like in Eden, isn't it? God said exactly that. All these trees you may eat, but not that one for you.

God's food, God's way. And that particular command changed and moved on. And these commands were given. And of course, now for us, since the Lord Jesus came, and he ushered in his glorious kingdom for all the peoples of the earth, that Jew and Gentile distinction between Israel and the nations in that way has been obliterated.

And along with that, so has this particular distinction of these food laws. In Mark chapter 7, Jesus clearly declared all foods were clean. And remember the vision that Peter had in Acts chapter 10.

Three times he's told to kill and eat, because all of these foods are now clean for all of God's people, no matter who you are. So then, does that mean that we no longer have to give any thought to our eating or drinking as a matter of living to the Lord, as a matter of honoring him or dishonoring him, dishonoring God's family name and reputation?

[27 : 51] Well, actually, not so. God is still very concerned with what we eat and when we eat and where we eat and with whom we eat or with whom we refuse to eat.

Because, you see, behind all of these particular laws that we come across in the Old Testament, behind all of them lies the great commandment of love to the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and strength and love to our neighbor as ourselves.

And all of the different laws that Moses gave them were simply different ways to express that fundamental underlying reality. So Paul, the apostle, writes to the church in Rome with all sorts of instructions about what God's people will and won't be eating if they're going to be walking in love to God and to their brothers and sisters.

In a mixed Jewish and Gentile church, there were people with all sorts of baggage from the past and some of them still had scruples about eating that others didn't. And Paul was very clear.

Nothing, he said, is unclean in itself. Not even for Jewish believers. But, he said, some people struggle and still have scruples. So he says, if you insist on eating what causes him grief, then you are no longer walking in love.

[29 : 08] By what you eat, don't destroy the one for whom Christ died. That's quite important, isn't it? Because, he says, and this is the key thing, the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

This thing is much more important than food. And in 1 Corinthians 8, he speaks to a largely Gentile church. This time, not so much about what's on the menu, but about what is the venue of their eating.

Places associated with idolatry. You know, he says to them, that idols are nothing, and that meat dedicated to idols can't be tainted. It's just meat. So, yes, of course, you can eat there with your friends if you like.

But, he says, be very careful, because a sensitive soul might see you and might find that difficult. And by seeing you do that, they might be drawn to really put one foot back into that pagan world from which they escaped through the grace of Christ.

And that would be a terrible thing to do. You might cause your brother to stumble, and that's a sin against him and against Christ. And so, you see, what we decide to eat and where we decide to eat is still quite important for the Lord's people.

[30 : 22] It would be terrible, wouldn't it, if you were to lead a brother or sister into sin, because inadvertently, you were just doing as you please. And, in fact, a matter of food or drink or whatever it is could be a matter of stumbling for them.

We need to be careful, don't we, because some Christians, some of our brothers and sisters, have been saved out of a life of addiction to drugs and alcohol. It would be terribly dishonoring to God. It would be terribly unloving to them if you insisted on doing things that actually could cause them to drift back into that kind of life and damage them, just because you insist on your Christian liberty to eat and drink as you please, all the time, in every place.

And we need to be thinking about old people, don't we? We need to think also about outsiders. Paul says to the Corinthians, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God, to honor his name, not to dishonor his name.

Give no offense, he says, to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.

He's not telling Christians to compromise just to please the world. Of course not. But what he is saying is that Christians are to be always ready to sacrifice, to say no to something which might be unclean for them to do in that particular time or with those particular people, to eat this thing or drink that thing or be in that place.

[32 : 00] I'll gladly forgo that for his name's sake and for love to my brother. Just one example, when we go to India for the Delhi Bible Institute to minister's conferences, it's always vegetarian curry that's always served to everybody because food is a hot issue in India among Hindus, those of a Hindu background and also among Muslims.

And many of the Christians there are recent converts from these backgrounds. And so it's right, it's sensitive to cause no offense, to do no harm to the cause of the gospel.

But in Isaac Shaw's home with those whom he knows will not have any offense of that, we get to eat the best chicken tikka on the other side of heaven. It really is absolutely terrific. That's not hypocrisy.

It's consciously seeking to honor and not dishonor the name of God in what's eaten publicly in that place. And God is concerned with that.

And of course, he's very concerned about with whom we'll eat. The New Testament is very robust on that question. Remember, Paul had to rebuke Peter harshly right to his face because he slipped back and under the influence of Jewish Christians telling him that the Gentiles weren't quite the same as them, he stopped eating with genuine Christian brothers.

[33 : 19] And so he separated himself from them over food. And that was to deny the whole truth of the gospel of Christ, said Paul. And we have to be very careful about that too.

The apostle James speaks also very clearly who we eat with, who we associate with, who we drink with. Who do we do that with? Who comes into our homes?

Who gets to eat at our tables? Is it only the attractive people? Only the smartly dressed people? Only the desirable people? Only the people who are just like me? James talks in that chapter, doesn't he, specifically about blaspheming the honorable name by which we are called when we behave to one another over simple matters like who we eat with in a dishonoring way.

So we need to be careful. The way God's people eat and drink and show hospitality and entertain, it will be different from the world around if we're going to honor our Father's name. So next time you sit down to eat, in fact, every time we sit down to eat, let's ask God to be helping us to eat and drink to his glory, to show love to him and to show love to our brothers and sisters in Christ and to do it more and more and more.

Wouldn't that be a good thing for us as a congregation to be teaching and admonishing one another with all wisdom as a church family to be thinking about how we eat and drink and show hospitality to honor our Father and so as to be not just like the world that only honors its own.

[34 : 57] Family sustenance still matters. As does, finally, family substance for those who bear the Lord's name. That's verses 22 to the end of the chapter.

You see, we're told here that the way God's family spends its money will also be very, very different from the world around about. Verse 22, you shall tithe, you shall give a tenth of all the yield of your seed year by year, all your annual income.

God's people, he is saying, will spend their money not just for themselves but above all for the Lord and for the Lord's people. Again, it's to be a tangible reminder that everything that they have comes from God and they're giving back to him gladly the first part to help them to keep trusting, to keep acknowledging God's goodness.

And verse 23 there, you see, speaks about the destination of all of that giving and it's the sanctuary of God. It's the place that God chooses to dwell. And we know from the other instructions on these matters in Numbers 18 and Leviticus 27 that the chief purpose of all of these tithes was to provide for the whole apparatus of the sanctuary, the priests, the Levites, those who taught the word of God.

In other words, it was for the health and well-being of God's church. And again, the emphasis there was always that the first and the very best was to be what God's people gave back to him.

[36 : 23] Now, that is totally at odds with the world around about. The first and the best of what I have is for my enjoyment and for my blessing. That's the world's way, isn't it?

And sadly, you know, too often the church is deeply impacted by that. So often in the church, what is actually given to God is just the leftovers, the fag ends.

You sometimes used to hear people saying things, oh, we're throwing out some stuff from our house now, we're getting rid of it, so we'll take it to the charity shop. Oh no, wait a minute, maybe the church can use it. Perhaps God wants all the old junk that I don't want in my own house anymore and he'd like to have it in his house.

That's an extraordinary thing to think. That's what so often you hear in so many churches. But notice here, what Deuteronomy specifically adds to all the Bible's teaching about giving is this great note of joy.

We've seen that before in chapter 12. But giving to the Lord is such a joyful thing, you organize an enormous party right in the middle of it. Verse 26 is a very great celebration.

[37 : 30] By the way, it doesn't mean that they spend absolutely all their annual tithe on this party. Obviously not. The other passages make that clear. But some of it was set aside for the corporate rejoicing of God's people together.

And notice the purpose, verse 23, the purpose of all this giving. It's for the benefit of all and it's to teach people real spiritual growth so that they will learn to fear the Lord their God always as they give and as they rejoice in their giving.

Don't miss that emphasis there on reverence, on fear of the Lord which is growing and rejoicing in the Lord. Giving to God as God directs us leads us to both growth and gladness at the same time.

And that's true for individuals, that's true for the whole congregation. Notice again in verse 26 that corporate emphasis. All God's household together, none of them being neglected.

So the priority he is saying for God's people is to devote their money gladly to a real sharing in God's presence and a real sharing and caring for God's people.

[38 : 50] And that latter emphasis is what's especially emphasized there in verse 28 with this extra tithe called the triennial tithe sometimes. Every third year it seems that this was an extra tithe which instead of being taken centrally was used locally especially to provide for the Levites, the clergy if you like and for those who needed the support of the community.

And it's as though giving to God was such a great principle that instead of trying to get around it and diminish it, what you actually did was look for extra tithes, extra free will offerings, extra contributions wherever you could.

Imagine employing an accountant and saying now I'd like you to look over my finances and I'd like you to find a whole lot of ways that I can pay extra tax to the government. I guess you wouldn't be in business probably very long if that was your specialty in accountancy.

But you see when you're giving to the Lord our God not to the treasury how very, very different it is. Look at verse 29. It is the way of blessing and fruitfulness in life.

You give gladly and generously and repeatedly so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the works of your hands that you do. The opportunity to spend differently from the world around and honor our Father's name is actually a gift of God's grace to us that rebounds on our heads in great blessing.

[40 : 14] That's what that verse tells us. And that's not just an Old Testament concept. Listen to Jesus. Give and it will be given to you. Good measure pressed down running over will be put into your lap for with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.

Do good. Lend expecting nothing in return and your reward will be great and you will be sons of the Most High. Look it up later.

Luke chapter 6. Well listen to Paul in 2 Corinthians 9. Whoever sows sparingly will reap sparingly. Whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he's made up his own mind not reluctantly or under compulsion for God loves a cheerful giver.

And God is able to make all grace abound to you so that having all contentment in all things at all times you may abound in every good work.

He will multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You see God is no man's debtor. Those who honor me I will honor.

[41 : 23] That's what God says always. Now be clear please this is not at all some kind of prosperity gospel. That's when you give in order to receive material gains the things that ultimately will just perish.

That's not giving to God is it? That's giving to me. That's using God as a machine to somehow bless me. No, no, no that's not this at all. But what Jesus is saying and Paul is saying and Moses is saying is this is about investing in real and lasting heavenly treasure.

This is about giving which will never perish because it's giving to God and it's giving for God's kingdom and God's people. It's giving that sows in order to reap growth in the knowledge of God among his people and among those who are yet to become God's people.

Friends, look around at the world and listen to the world and it will tell you that nothing could be more foolish than to spend your hard-earned cash seriously and liberally for something as stupid as supporting the Christian church and its mission in the world.

A few tens of pounds here and there maybe, all right. But to give a tenth of your income is a starting point for some invisible idea of God's kingdom. Are you nuts?

[42 : 48] Come off it. Come off it. And sadly, it seems many Christians sometimes seem to think the same way. They'd rather spend on things that they can see, things that they can feel, things that they want, things that they think they need.

But remember Paul's words. Listen. The things that are seen are transient. But the unseen things, the work of the kingdom of God, they are eternal.

So let me just mention three specific implications as we draw to our close. First, we are sons of God. We are co-heirs of the Lord Jesus Christ. He's given us everlasting treasures, abundant riches in Christ.

So don't let's deprive ourselves of the gift of giving of our earthly substance for his glory. If so, we're not only dishonoring the Father's name, taking it in vain, but according to the Bible, we're depriving ourselves of both the growth and the knowledge of God and the fear of God and the gladness in the presence of God and with his people.

Let me tell you this. Generous Christians are growing Christians and glad Christians. So second, as we think of tithing as here in the Old Testament, yes, it's true.

[44 : 12] We live in a different age. There were many Old Testament tithes, many additional ones, many other offerings, many other contributions. And it was all bound up with what we might call the state social security system.

Israel was a nation state. We're not in the Christian church today. We're part of a state. We pay taxes to the state for many of these things. But the basic fact does remain that the principal tithe was for the mission of the church.

It was for the preservation of the faith. It was for the proclaiming of the word of God all through the land. And friends, that task today is far, far, far larger than ever it was in ancient Israel.

It's a worldwide mission today that needs to be funded by God's people. And the riches of Christ are ours. So let's ask ourselves this question.

Do you think our gratitude and our sense of responsibility should be less today than it was for the Old Testament people of God under Moses? That surely couldn't be still, could it?

[45 : 18] It's unimaginable. That's why Paul says to the Christian church, see that you also excel in this gift of grace, the grace of giving. Because you're giving to God and to his kingdom and to that which is everlasting.

So if you're a young Christian, you're at school or you're a student, you just don't have much money, well listen, don't wait. Learn to give first to the Lord as a priority when you don't have much.

Because let me tell you, if you don't learn now, it will be very, very much harder for you to do later on. Don't grow up into somebody who just gives the fag ends, the leftovers to the everlasting kingdom of God.

And all of us in the church, we also need to know, don't we, that the first call, the first requirement of our giving is for the corporate life and ministry of the church.

That's the emphasis in the Old Testament, that's the emphasis in the New Testament. I'm sure all of us will have all sorts of organizations, parachurch things, missions, all sorts of things that we want to support. And that's wonderful.

[46 : 22] And there's no limit to our giving. That's the great thing about the Bible. There's no limit to our giving. God doesn't say, no, no, you can't give any more than that. But the church and our own Christian church clearly is to be where the bulk of our giving is directed.

And real partnership in the gospel is a tangible thing. It's about deeds as well as words. And thirdly, the Bible does tell us that we will all give an account of our giving.

Or the lack of our giving to the work of his kingdom. Paul says very plainly in 1 Corinthians 3 that whether we've been building for the kingdom with gold and silver and precious stones or just with wood and stubble and straw, just with fag ends and leftovers, that will be revealed by fire on the last day.

And if all we've done in our Christian lives is really invest mainly in what is earthly, what is transient, then friends, that is not going to survive. And Paul says you'll suffer loss.

So listen to Jesus. Don't lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal. Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth or rust destroy and there are no thieves to break in or steal for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

[47 : 45] So you see, the way God's people spend will be very, very different from the world around. If that is, our hearts are truly in heaven and honoring our Father in heaven and not just our felt needs and our earthly desires here on earth.

And the way we eat with whom and when and what will be very different because our God is not just our stomach and our God is not just asserting our rights but our goal is honoring the Father's name and loving the Father's people in Jesus.

And even in our grief, we won't be merely grieving for ourselves following in our own sadness and our own loss but our grief as His people will be suffused with a hope that comes only from Him because He has promised us not only that at last will we see His face but think of this that His name, His name will be upon our foreheads forever and ever and ever because through our great Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, we are sons of the Lord our God.

So let's help one another never to bear that name in vain but to live so as to honor our gracious Heavenly Father. Let's pray. Our Father, we do come before You with joy and gladness and great thanksgiving at all that You have given us, all that You have done for us in making us Yours, in giving us Your name through Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Help us, we pray, and help us to help one another teaching, encouraging one another with all wisdom to live for our Father, to be known as His, seen as His, heard as His in all that we think or say or do.

[49 : 46] For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.