

As Iowa goes . . .

by Ed Fowler

Much wind is expended these days over the effect of the nationwide "Tea Party" timed to coincide with the income-tax filing deadline. Hundreds of thousands, maybe more, turned out across America to register their displeasure over the ever-mounting tax burden and the bailout fever that has Washington in its grip.

A grass-roots movement that will endure and swell or a television network's stunt that will be forgotten by the Fourth of July?

You will find no prophecy here on which will ensue but an observation is in order. All the noise generated by Americans done up in patriotic garb for the cameras has made even louder our silence over this nation's daily abominations carried on in the sight of God.

Even if the tax protest is as broad-based as its principals claim, it bears a distinctly conservative tint. Many political conservatives resent higher taxes and the curtailed liberty they see resulting from ever-bigger government. Are there Christians among them?

Let me pause here to fling a tea bag of my own. I share their pain. But my pain reaches much deeper.

Higher taxes do indeed infringe on the liberty we hold dear and Americans, according to our Constitution, have every right to spill out our dissent. Something positive may come of this and the hope here is that it does.

But God has not prescribed a divine tax rate. He tells us merely to render unto Caesar what is Caesar's. Forty percent? Thirty? Twenty? Hard to say. But on matters of life God makes Himself abundantly clear. In this country His commandments are trampled daily and the assault is building hourly.

When the Iowa Legislature gave its assent to homosexual marriage we heard that it can no longer be regarded as a phenomenon of the coastal

fringes. Middle America now has seen the wisdom of allowing same-sex marriage.

Where is the outrage of God's people? Where are the protest rallies over the abominations paraded before us day after day? Are Christians incensed over economic issues but silent on moral ones? Putting aside for the moment the Old Testament law on homosexuality, God could not have spoken more plainly than he did through his apostle Paul in Romans 1.

And yet Americans, including a sizable number of self-identified Christians, voted for a presidential candidate who brushed aside what he called an "obscure passage" in Romans as irrelevant to the issue and championed homosexual unions. With him in the fore, the culture of death is gaining ground. Are Christians who will turn out for a Tea Party too busy rearranging their portfolios the next day to mount a protest over transgressions against the law of their God?

Catholics gave a majority of their vote to Barack Obama and now appear shocked that he is doing exactly what he proposed as a candidate. Say what you will about the president but he has been forthright all along in his advocacy for homosexual unions and abortions. His approval ratings have fallen sharply among Catholics who seem somehow to be shocked that he is proceeding on abortion and stem-cell research exactly as he had promised. Their case of buyer's remorse is acute.

What about Protestants? Many appear trapped in the delusion that their passports will save them. Our American Church today bears a remarkable resemblance to that of the first-century Jews who believed that their ethnicity afforded them special status with God. Conflating cross and flag, we have convinced ourselves that God smiles down on us because of our virtue. That virtue appears to be derived from acts of piety as we define them and not from obedience to God or a passion for His kingdom and His righteousness.

Israel pursued "a law that would lead to righteousness" but "did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works" (Rom 9:31-32). Their tea parties could not save them. Neither will they save a 21st century nation that cannot muster the same passion to stand against gross violations of the law of God.

The sun never set on the British Empire and missionaries spanned the globe, sailing on naval and merchant ships and advancing the gospel into far-flung corners. England became a massive missions engine and millions came to saving faith as a result of her outreach. Today, she is part of post-Christian Europe with church attendance well under 10 percent. Some of the British who claim some Christian faith say they believe in a "Church-of-England-type-of-God," by which they mean a God who doesn't contradict Charles Darwin or challenge believers too much. The Church of England has sunk so low she cannot even look down on her American offspring, the spiritually bankrupt Episcopal Church.

God preserves those who follow Him by faith, not those who choose the works that will salve their bank balances – or their consciences – and then ascribe their motives to Him. He does not stutter and He does not suffer forever people who ignore the precepts stated so clearly in His word.

So let us have our Tea Party. Our government must hear the voices of conservatives who demand liberty. Our tax dollars should not go to bankroll government-sponsored sin. We should preserve them to pour into the work of the kingdom. All the while, however, we must not be silent on matters on which our Lord speaks with thunder.

Can we be more concerned with damage to our wallets than wounds to God's heart?