

HOW DO YOU CONTRIBUTE? Exodus 35:4-9; 35:30-36:1; 40:12-15

How many times have you said “*Every time you turn around, there is someone requesting money!*”? When you answer the telephone and someone says, “Could I speak to Mr. or Mrs. Smith?” you probably cringe and wait either for an invitation to switch long-distance carriers or contribute to some “great organization that is helping so-o-o many people.” Many of the requests seem as if they are deserving and really do need help. Additionally, we may belong to a local service club and they have projects to which you are expected to contribute. Our churches are involved in *many worthwhile endeavors* that need financial or material support as well as our time. Add to all of this the rising cost of living, unexpected expenses, and the need to prepare for the future (education of children, taking care of aging parents, retirement, etc.) and before long the demands and choices become overwhelming.

In any situation, when we are faced with *increasing demands and limited resources*, we **will** prioritize the demands and how we respond to them. As Christians, we also know that we **will** give an accounting of all we do (how we prioritize) and how we use the blessings God has entrusted to us. Therefore, we need to better understand (from a Biblical basis) our *motives* and *goals* of giving for the variety of opportunities with which we are faced.

In addition to examining our motives which is intertwined with our willingness to contribute, the next question to address is how can we most effectively contribute? If you look at an example of a need that comes up regularly is “helping people recover after a natural disaster such as a flood, an earthquake, a hurricane, etc.” The question of how to help comes up almost every time. Do you go to the area and clean up and rebuild, do you send money or supplies, do you pray for those who are grieving? Various people can help in a number of different ways depending on their resources.

When it comes to contributions that we make to the work of the Kingdom of God, some will naturally think of tithing. Tithing is not all there is to giving. There are times when free-will offerings are appropriate. Many times we see special campaigns for such things as building expansions being handled with special drives. Many people say that such expenses ought to be handled out of the regular budget which should be supported from tithes. Is that thinking in line with Scripture? Let's go back to the building of the first place of worship for the Children of Israel. You recall that they were in the wilderness and Moses had been up on the mountain receiving instruction on how to build the Tabernacle. When Moses came down to the people again, he shared what God had given him. This brings us to one of the sub-questions that come under the general heading of How Do You Contribute?

Are You Willing to Contribute? (35:4-9)

⁴ Moses spoke to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, saying, “This is the thing which the LORD has commanded, saying, ⁵ ‘Take from among you a contribution to the LORD; whoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it as the LORD’S contribution: gold, silver, and bronze, ⁶ and blue, purple and scarlet *material*, fine linen, goats’ *hair*, ⁷ and rams’ skins dyed red, and porpoise skins, and acacia wood, ⁸ and oil for lighting, and spices for the anointing oil, and for the fragrant incense, ⁹ and onyx stones and setting stones for the ephod and for the breastpiece. Exodus 35:4-9 (NASB95)

There are several things we can learn from this passage with regard to giving or making a contribution. The first thing we see is that the opportunity to contribute was open to all. Moses shared what God had told him from one of the earlier encounters on the mountain that was recorded in Exodus 25. With all that had been going on since those initial trips up the mountain,

this was apparently the first chance Moses had to get everyone together and tell them what God had commanded him to do regarding the Tabernacle. If the opportunity is open to everyone to contribute something, then that would imply that everyone has something to give.

In the case of the Israelites, why was possible that everyone had something to contribute? (Before they left Egypt, each woman borrowed things from the Egyptians and took these borrowed items with them when they left.) Why were the Egyptians willing to lend such items to the Israelites? (The Lord gave the Israelites “favor” in the sight of the Egyptians.) The bottom line is the Lord had used the situation in which they found themselves to provide what was needed for His purposes.

Let’s update this same question to our situation today. Is it possible that today everyone has something to contribute? (Most of us would agree that unless we are in some sort of vegetative condition, we have something to contribute.) Why is this possible that each has something to contribute? The fact is that we have nothing to give other than that which we have received. None of us has the ability to generate (create) something from nothing.

The next thing we see that contributions are to be made willingly. I guess we could make the argument that everything we “give” is done willingly. Why do you think it was appropriate that whatever they gave was freely contributed? (There is a very good reason for making such an undertaking voluntary: when people freely contribute, then they feel that a part of them has gone into the project and they have a sense of ownership or partnership with all the others who helped.)

What would be the alternative to a free-will offering? The alternative would be paying a debt that was owed or paying to receive something in return. A true gift is one that is contributed without an expectation that you are paying a debt or buying something. Closely associated with “giving freely” is the issue of our motive for giving.

We can give or contribute for a variety of motives or reasons - some good (positive) and some not so good (negative) reasons. What would you think would be the worst possible motive for giving? (Pride or to be seen by others would be close to (if not) the worst reason to give. Still on the negative side, what other motives might one have to give? (Some will give based on feelings of guilt which may be motivated by the fact that they have a lot of material possessions or maybe that they are trying to make amends for some sin or doing penance.) If there is any “neutral” reason for giving what do you think that would be? (Feeling obligated to give because it is required or expected.) What would be a positive motive for giving? (Compassion or because you care would describe a lot of giving that people do. This probably comes close to the idea of being a good steward.) What would be the highest motivation for giving? (This should be easy for anyone who is familiar with John 3:16. Love would have to be at the top of the list as a positive motivation for giving. Such a motive would grow out of complete devotion to the recipient of the gift.)

As we examine the rest of these verses, we see that specific items were to be contributed for the purpose of building a place where God would meet with the people. The items to be contributed were to be useful in the construction of the Tabernacle. God had given Moses the needed information as to what was to be constructed and he was able to pass on to the people the “raw materials” that would be needed.

What is the lesson for us? Could we say that there are appropriate contributions and some contributions that would be of little or no use? Where does the responsibility lie in having the contributions line up with the needs? In general, we could easily argue that the recipient of the contribution has some obligation to define what is needed or at least the overall objective of

what is to be accomplished. In the case of the Tabernacle, a list of specific items was provided. The responsibility then became that of the people to bring things that met the stated criteria.

Getting all the pieces and parts together is a very important element in carrying out what God had instructed them to do. The skins, the goat hair, bronze, gold, etc. were the building blocks for the Tabernacle. Other needs were skillful workers to put it all together.

Notice in verse 10 that skills and crafts were acceptable gifts to the building program. In every case here, as with the contributions to the tent of meeting, the responsibility for response rested with the people. How did the nomadic Israelites, shepherds in Egypt for more than four centuries, suddenly develop skills in design, building and craftsmanship? I guess that it did not happen suddenly. We generally think that all they did was making bricks for the Egyptian. It is very likely that they were used to do other labor intensive job in that culture. Consequently, they developed skills and crafts and the knowledge of how to do a variety of jobs. Once again, we see how the Lord had prepared the people for the work that needed to be carried out for His purposes.

Do You Have the Skills to Use? (35:30-36:1)

³⁰ Then Moses said to the sons of Israel, "See, the LORD has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. ³¹ "And He has filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding and in knowledge and in all craftsmanship; ³² to make designs for working in gold and in silver and in bronze, ³³ and in the cutting of stones for settings and in the carving of wood, so as to perform in every inventive work. ³⁴ "He also has put in his heart to teach, both he and Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. ³⁵ "He has filled them with skill to perform every work of an engraver and of a designer and of an embroiderer, in blue and in purple *and* in scarlet *material*, and in fine linen, and of a weaver, as performers of every work and makers of designs. ¹ "Now Bezalel and Oholiab, and every skillful person in whom the LORD has put skill and understanding to know how to perform all the work in the construction of the sanctuary, shall perform in accordance with all that the LORD has commanded." Exodus 35:30-36:1 (NASB95)

In verse 10, there was a general call for those with skills to come and work on the construction of the Tabernacle. We would probably use a term such as "talented" to describe what the KJV calls "wise hearted." My understanding of this term would describe a person with natural ability and/or years of training. Starting in verse 30 we find that a specific call was issued to Bazalel and Oholiab. These two men were to be the designers and teachers for those came to help with their skills. In this passage we see the need for a coordinated effort in doing what God has called us to do. It was not enough to have skilled craftsmen, there needed to be someone to provide direction and guidance. It would appear that what Bazalel (and probably Oholiab) had was a Spiritual gift that went beyond natural talent and training. We see the same things happening in the church. God has gifted many with skills and talents that can be useful in the work of the Kingdom of God. He has also set some in leadership roles that can bring the total effort together in a coordinated fashion.

Is the Lord Calling You to Serve? (40:12-15)

¹² "Then you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the doorway of the tent of meeting and wash them with water. ¹³ "You shall put the holy garments on Aaron and anoint him and consecrate him, that he may minister as a priest to Me. ¹⁴ "You shall bring his sons and put tunics on them; ¹⁵ and you shall anoint them even as you have anointed their father, that they may minister as priests to Me; and their anointing will qualify them for a perpetual priesthood throughout their generations." Exodus 40:12-15 (NASB95)

Once the materials had been gathered and the craftsmen had done their job of putting it all together, the next step was to consecrate those who would be serving in this holy place. Let's look at the process that was followed to determine if we can learn from what was done and how this might apply to what we should be doing today.

The process started in the doorway of the tent of meeting. If you recall, God had told Moses earlier that He would meet the people in the doorway of this place. So, the ritual that took place happened at the specifically designated meeting place. The significance of this may simply be that when we enter into the Lord's house (temple or tabernacle) the first place we encounter Him is at the door. If we go on in, then we will still be in His presence. The doorway is the entrance to the dwelling place of God and we know that Jesus described Himself as the "door" and as the "way" that leads to God. Therefore, it is appropriate for us to conclude that Jesus is "where" we encounter God. Therefore, we could conclude that a prerequisite for serving would be to have experienced the new birth through an encounter with Jesus who is the "doorway" leading to God.

The first order of business for those being set apart for the work in the Lord's house was that they were to be washed. In this case the washing was with water. This washing was for removal of the contamination of having encountered the world around them before going into the sanctuary. If this washing was not done, then they would carry in elements of the world which would contaminate the sanctuary. This should not be thought of as a washing for transformation as in the New Testament terminology of being "washed in the blood." In the New Testament we see a reference of "washing of water" and we find that this is accomplished "by the word." We see in Ephesians 5:25-26: *"Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word."* We could conclude that service also requires that we keep ourselves uncontaminated by the world by staying in the word of God.

The next thing we find is that Aaron and his sons were to put on holy garments. They were not to minister as priests unless they had on the special garments. If we are trying to learn the application for us today, then we need to discover what would be the equivalent of a holy garment in the New Testament. The concept that immediately comes to mind is that we have been clothed with the righteousness of Christ. And we see in Gal 3:27 "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Similarly, we find in Eph 4:24 "And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." As we minister or serve we must do so as representatives of Christ and those to whom we minister should be able to see the character of Christ rather than the person who doing the ministering.

The final step was the anointing of Aaron and his son with oil. This would be representative of a person having the Holy Spirit come upon him for power and service. No one would argue that Jesus did not have the Holy Spirit in His life even before He was baptized by John. At that time, John saw the Holy Spirit descend upon Jesus like a dove and it was at this point that Jesus' public ministry started.