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The Link

NORTH ROAD CHAPEL

BIDEFORD

THE TABERNACLE OF GOD

“And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take My offering. And this is the offering which ye shall take of them; gold, and silver, and brass, And blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen, and goats’ hair, And rams’ skins dyed red, and badgers’ skins, and shittim wood, Oil for the light, spices for anointing oil, and for sweet incense, Onyx stones, and stones to be set in the ephod, and in the breastplate. And let them make Me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it. And they shall make an ark of shittim wood.” (Exodus 25:1-10)

Having introduced the subject of the Tabernacle, and considered its spiritual typology in previous articles, the latter chapters of Exodus will supply the details of its preparation, design and fittings.

“And the Lord spake unto Moses”. It is important to remember the setting in which these instructions were communicated. Moses was in the top of Mount Sinai, enveloped in cloud, alone with God (cf Exodus 24: 1, 15-18). Lower down the mountain was his servant Joshua; then Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy of the Elders of Israel; then at the foot, the vast camp numbering hundreds of thousands of people, who were behind barricades to prevent them approaching too near.

The words of Exodus chapter 25 were spoken uniquely and directly to Moses, who had been summoned into the presence of God for the purpose of receiving them, in order that he might have full and absolute directions for the building and equipping of the Tabernacle. Notice carefully the wording: *“the Lord (Jehovah) spake unto Moses”*.

Moses was not invited to participate in a discussion; nor were his opinions sought, neither was he called upon to make any suggestions or contributions of his own. Moses was not asked, as a representative of the people, to make some proposals for the scheme likely to appeal to the masses; or most likely to obtain common consent and approval. No – the whole scheme originated in Heaven, from God, and was to be carried out exactly and entirely after the manner in which the Almighty had designed it, with no alteration or deviation whatsoever.

Hence the words of Exodus 25:1, “*the Lord spake*”. It was for Moses to attentively listen, and implicitly obey. Here is a lesson for the people of God in every age. The Lord has spoken by His Word, the **Holy Scriptures**. This is His mandate; perfect instructions for life and worship. Yet how many want to add or subtract from that which God has said! Certain aspects of His commandments are considered too stringent, or likely to attract reproach or criticism – so they are omitted. Other things are added, under the pretext that they are ‘quite harmless’, that ‘God would not object’, that they ‘might be helpful in attracting outsiders’. On the question of corporate worship, many Christians conclude that to meet in the simplicity of New Testament Church order is insufficient, or unappealing; services must be more exciting and varied. What a way is this to talk? How dishonouring to God!

Let it be said, with all authority, that **anything**, however small, changed by addition to, or subtraction from that which God has laid down, **He will not accept**. When God speaks, that word is truth; it is authoritative; it is binding upon all. Ever should that verse be remembered: “*Ye shall not add unto the word that I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you*” (Deuteronomy 4:2). Augmenting or diminishing the laws of God is a failure to keep them.

“Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take My offering”. Thus was Moses to speak on his ultimate descent from the mountain. God’s people were to be instructed to give and contribute toward the Tabernacle. It would have been a simple matter for the Almighty to bring that structure into existence by miraculous power; but that was not His design. Although the Tabernacle and all that pertained to it were essentially spiritual, yet were the people required to contribute toward them in a practical way.

They were to bring an offering, but only if it were done willingly and given from the heart. Notice also the wording: *“ye shall take My offering”*. Whilst the Hebrews were to give of themselves, yet was it not reckoned as **their** offering, but **God’s**.

In this lie further lessons to ourselves. Although the life and work of the Church is all spiritual, it must not be taken for granted. Christ is the centre of worship, and He, as the Great Head, is sufficient for all things; nevertheless, the saints are to contribute to the work by **giving**, and that in a willing manner. There is a New Testament counterpart: *“Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver”* (2 Corinthians 9:7).

The New Testament order is for a collection to be taken up on the first day of the week. This is a convenient and discreet means whereby the Lord’s people may contribute to His work: *“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him”* (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). No stipulation is made concerning amounts or value, it is always according to means, ever bearing in mind that it is God’s offering. Appreciation of this fact makes giving a spiritual matter, and not merely a material

one. For this reason, it is appropriate that a collection be taken up as part of a Church service – it is an aspect of worship in which the Lord’s people may participate.

However, notice also that it is an exercise in which only the saints can properly engage. No Philistines, Hivites, Hittites or other of the surrounding nations were drawn in to contribute to the Tabernacle. Similarly today, no Church should seek material support from outside the circle of God’s true people – not from unbelievers, secular organisations, or indeed national government. The Apostle records of the early Christians that, “*they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles*” (3 John 7) – that is, nothing was taken from the world around. All support came from within – from amongst the people of God. John adds that this was done “*for His name’s sake*”; in order that the Lord might be honoured by obedient giving in a spiritual fashion – something which the worldling cannot enter into; nor is their help to be solicited.

This doctrine is wonderfully set out in another Old Testament event, when David and the Israelites assembled vast quantities of material for the future construction of the temple: “*Wherefore David blessed the Lord before all the congregation: and David said, Blessed be Thou, Lord God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is Thine; Thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and Thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come of Thee, and Thou reignest over all; and in Thine hand is power and might; and in Thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all.*”

“*Now therefore, our God, we thank Thee, and praise Thy glorious name. But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee. For we are strangers before Thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers: our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding. O*

Lord our God, all this store that we have prepared to build Thee an house for Thine holy name cometh of Thine hand, and is all Thine own. I know also, my God, that Thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness. As for me, in the uprightness of mine heart I have willingly offered all these things: and now have I seen with joy Thy people, which are present here, to offer willingly unto Thee. O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, our fathers, keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of Thy people, and prepare their heart unto Thee” (1 Chronicles 29:10-18).

Whilst this concerned the giving of material things, the whole matter was regarded as deeply spiritual for the Lord’s people. This is how it should be. The Christian ought not to regard their life as sharply divided into ‘sacred’ and ‘secular’: in the life of a believer, **everything** is spiritual. If God blesses with material prosperity, it is then right to “*Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase*” (Proverbs 3:9). As it is given, it constitutes a returning unto God of that which He has graciously first bestowed: “*for all things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee*”. As the hymnwriter has it:

“In Thy house, great God, we offer
Of Thine own to Thee;
And for Thine acceptance proffer
All unworthily” (Pott)

The matter of **willingness** is stressed in both this incident involving David, and the passage in Exodus chapter 25. Gifts were to be offered freely, deliberately, and of the peoples’ own volition – and this was the **only** acceptable form of giving. Which detail also provides relevant teaching for the present day. The material support of the Lord’s work is not to be achieved by stealth or deceit, such as with fees or charges levied upon the people. Nor does Scripture warrant coercion and persuasion in the securing of funds; to which unbiblical lengths many

high-pressure missionary appeals are prone to go. Neither can any Scriptural precedent be found for fund-raising gimmicks like raffles, prize-draws, coffee mornings, concerts, advertising campaigns, door-to-door collections and similar ungodly enterprises. These are unjustifiable, worldly innovations that have no place in the life of the Church, however great the supposed need.

Consider now the content of Exodus 25:3, “*And this is the offering which ye shall take of them; gold, and silver, and brass*”. At this time in their history, the Hebrews were a primitive people, not yet constituted a nation. They were also living in a wilderness environment, housed in tents. They had no fixed currency, no banks or building societies, no investments, not even permanent property or fixed employment. What they did have was personal treasure. Recall that when they left Egypt on the dreadful night of Passover, their Egyptian neighbours gave unto them “*jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment*”, so desperate were they to be rid of them from the land. Such was the liberality of the fearful Egyptians that the local economy was almost ruined (cf Exodus 12:36).

These were the treasures which the children of Israel still had at the time of the building of the Tabernacle. The remarkable way in which these had been obtained was quite manifestly a work of Divine sovereignty – for they had been nothing more than slaves in Egypt, and yet left laden with goods. It was a God-wrought miracle that caused the Egyptians to lavish such gifts upon them.

The omnipotence of God had provided all that the Israelites owned. His omniscience knew everything that was held by each individual person. Although it was all the Lord’s by right, He did not lay claim to it, or demand it of the people. No – He desired to see a willing heart response from those whom He had delivered out of bondage and so richly blessed. It was an opportunity afforded to them by God to show

their gratitude. The same is true of the Christian's giving in the present day. It is a God-given occasion to make a practical demonstration of heartfelt thanks for His Divine goodness.

There follows in Exodus 25:4-7 a list of all the materials that were required for the construction of the Tabernacle and its furnishings. Each had a specific place and purpose in God's design for that structure. There was a corresponding diversity of goods owned by the Israelites. Some had gold, some silver, some brass. Others had rare cloth in a variety of colours. Still others held skins, or oils and spices. Some had received jewels and precious stones. The value of these items differed greatly, and yet all the Israelites had something which they could give. Whatever they each had to offer, the Almighty would utilize and receive it, when they willingly yielded it up.

Here is a lovely thought which should exercise God's people. Whatsoever He has given, we may offer. Whatsoever we offer, He is able to use. Money is perhaps the most obvious application, but it is only one example amongst many. Do we make our homes available for the Lord's people, in the giving of hospitality or accommodation? A car may be used to provide transport for a fellow-believer on the Lord's Day; our abilities and talents, whether intellectual or manual, can be channelled to the Lord's service. Whatever we may have received in the providence of God is not our own, but should be willingly offered unto Him, that it might find a sanctified use, to His glory; as we confess with the poet:

“My gracious Lord, I own Thy right
To every service I can pay” (Doddridge)

The injunction that the Divinely-given pattern must be followed is repeated in this passage, followed by a primary detail: “*And they shall make an ark of shittim wood*” (Exodus 25:10). It may appear strange that

this instruction comes before any plan of the Tabernacle itself. However, the order here is designed to emphasise the significance of this particular item. Before any information was communicated concerning the actual sanctuary; before any ruling about the priesthood or Levitical order was given, came the **Ark**. It was first in importance.

Without the Ark, the whole use and service of the Tabernacle would have been vain and meaningless and of no value whatsoever. For upon the Ark was the Mercy Seat; the throne where God would deign to dwell in their midst. The Ark was the symbol of the Divine presence among them; proof that covenant blessing rested upon them. It was the most sacred and glorious object in the Tabernacle. The whole structure was built for no other purpose than to accommodate the Ark. It is given priority in the Biblical record, for it essentially typifies **Christ**, who is pre-eminent over all things. Subject to the Lord's will, the next article in the series continues with this theme.

W. H. Molland
(transcribed by R. J. Steward)

The word 'willing' [used here] is elsewhere translated, "*free*" (2 Chronicles 29:31, Psalm 51:12); "*liberal*" (Isaiah 52:5, 8); also "*nobles*" (Numbers 21:18, Psalm 83:11); and "*princes*" (1 Samuel 2:8). Princely liberality was thus for a little moment exhibited by the people... What a truth this tells us, respecting the way in which we should seek to please God! A servile spirit ill befits one who has tasted of His grace. A covetous heart is especially an abomination to Him who has not spared His own Son. Let us only contemplate more deeply, more truly, the vastness of His gift to us. Let us learn a little more of the heart of God as shewn in His wondrous love in the gift of Christ, and we shall acquire a more princely character – more true nobility of spirit; and we shall be more ready to yield ourselves, all we are, and all we have, a willing offering in His service.

H. W. Soltau (1805 – 1875)

THE MAKING OF THE TABERNACLE

How was the Tabernacle made?... It was made of the freewill offerings of the people. “*Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take My offering*” (Exodus 25:2). To this appeal the people responded so that the chosen workmen came to “*Moses, saying, The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work, which the Lord commanded to make. And Moses gave commandment, and they caused it to be proclaimed throughout the camp, saying, Let neither man nor woman make any more work for the offering of the sanctuary. So the people were restrained from bringing. For the stuff they had was sufficient for all the work to make it, and too much*” (Exodus 36:5-7). From whence did the delivered slaves get so much gold, silver, brass, spices, precious stones, etc? We are told that they spoiled the Egyptians. God gave to them that they might give to God, and when the opportunity came they were not a whit behind in responding. Here lies our very first lesson, and a very important one too. Giving is a privilege, giving is a responsibility, giving is part of worship; but it must be given willingly, for the Lord loveth a cheerful giver. We are only stewards for God. If He has given to us, it is for the same purpose that we might give to Him.

It was a giving that left no one out. Gold, silver, spices, precious stones, came from the rich; blue, purple, scarlet, brass, from another class; goats’ hair from the poor. For those who had not substance, there was the giving of skill and labour. This, too, was varied. Woodworkers, metal-workers, weavers and embroiderers, all had a share in the great work. So it is in the work of the Lord today. We can all of us play our part, remembering one thing. When He gave, He gave His best, He gave His all, He held no reserve. Lord, help us to do the same.

Charles W. Slemming, “*Made According to Pattern*” 1938

AN OFFERING UNTO THE LORD

1. Biblical Considerations

The subject of **money** is invariably a vexed one; and never more so than at the present time, when a large part of the world is experiencing economic difficulties and recession. It is a topic which Christians cannot ignore, because whether as private individuals, or as members of a local Church, money has its place. It must be obtained, administered and expended as part of normal life. Upon this universally familiar matter the Scriptures are not silent, but have much instruction to give, in order that material things might be managed in a spiritual way.

This article focuses upon the local Church, and how its financial affairs ought to be conducted in the light of God's Word. The question cannot be avoided, for it is present in all the Biblical examples – whether the collection of materials for the Tabernacle, the Temple of Solomon's time, the Temple built after the Exile, or the New Testament Church described in the Acts of the Apostles – in every case, the ways in which funds were raised and used are recorded. It must therefore be a matter of importance, or else the Holy Spirit would not have inspired these details and included them within Scripture.

Indeed, it could be argued that the very first account of public worship reveals the importance of proper giving. Cain and Abel are seen making offerings; Cain grudgingly bringing of the fruit of the ground, which was easy and convenient for him to give; but of little value and contrary to the God-given pattern. Meanwhile Abel, at great personal cost, willingly yielded up “*the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering, He had not respect*” (Genesis 4:4-5). It is not sufficient

merely to 'give'. It must be done in the right spirit, from a legitimate source, and in accordance with the Word of God. Otherwise the offering is unacceptable to Him.

Money deserves special attention, not only because it is an inescapable aspect of life, but particularly because it is attended with so many opportunities for temptation and sin. "*Give me neither poverty nor riches... Lest I be full, and deny Thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain*" (Proverbs 30:8-9). "*For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows*" (1 Timothy 6:10). Being warned of these snares and pitfalls in advance, greater diligence and discernment should be employed in this area.

The two inseparable principles of Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility have their bearing upon financial matters also. It has been God's pattern since the Fall that man should 'work for his keep', and labour in order to secure the necessities of life. We are also taught in Scripture to be good stewards of our material possessions, in order that they might be secured and increased. Yet still God remains in sovereign control of all these things: "*But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is He that giveth thee power to get wealth*" (Deuteronomy 8:18). The measure of prosperity or poverty experienced by every individual is Divinely appointed by the Lord, who both gives and takes away according to His will (cf Job 1:21). There is then a place for both faith in God, and personal effort where money is concerned. This is depicted in the Parable of the Talents: the Lord calls His own servants and delivers unto them His goods (cf Matthew 25:14) – a Divine impartation; and says unto them: "*Occupy till I come*" (Luke 19:13) – an instruction to responsible and diligent behaviour.

This balance must be maintained where Church finances are concerned, for error lies at either extreme. Some local Churches seem to regard themselves as being business organisations, which happen to supply ‘religion’ as a product or service; and they have no qualms about adopting the world’s ways to balance the books. This debases and secularises the Church, to whom God has said: “*Learn not the way of the heathen*” (Jeremiah 10:2). On the other hand are congregations that emphasise ‘spirituality’ to the extent that their practical affairs are sadly neglected. Pious talk of ‘living by faith’ becomes an excuse for mismanagement and irresponsibility, as no material provisions are made for the Church’s regular expenses. This is equally unscriptural, for the saints are taught to ‘lay up in store’ (cf 1 Corinthians 16:2), and to pay what is due (cf Romans 13:6-7). A good testimony is only given when the Lord’s people display **both** trust in God’s providence, **and** biblical stewardship in their financial affairs.

It is not possible to compare the Church to any sort of human industry or enterprise. Their respective situations are entirely unlike. A typical business begins with nothing. Capital must be raised or borrowed in order to begin trading; and then commences the constant battle to turn a profit. Techniques are employed to maximise revenue and minimise expenditure; success is measured by the amount of money made; good results are noisily publicised; shareholders are enriched; men become wealthy, and hope ultimately to “*take [their] ease, eat, drink and be merry*” (Luke 12:19).

By contrast, the Church begins with God, “*who made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth*” (Acts 17:24), and so begins with everything! All things belong to Him. The local Church’s obtaining of funds is not a mercenary seeking out of income – it is an occasion for the exercise of faith; an arena for prayer and supplication; a recognition of God as the Father of Lights, from Whom cometh every good and perfect gift; an opportunity for individual

members to exercise the virtues of giving, generosity, liberality, obedience and personal sacrifice.

The offerings which a Church receives ought not to be measured by summing them together, and quoting a grand total as is normal business practice. As the incident of the widow's mite proves (cf Mark 12:41-44), the size of a gift is more accurately determined by what is left to the giver after it is made. The five-figure collections of a wealthy 'mega-Church' may be an offering of far less value than the humble amount raised by a few poor saints, whom it cost much more to give. The Church's system of accounting is very different from the world's.

So too are its standards of financial propriety. Whilst a business loudly broadcasts its receipts, the Lord's people must treat their offerings with utmost discretion. Indeed, the degree of secrecy should increase in proportion with the amount that is offered. "*When thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret*" (Matthew 6:3-4). "*He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity*" (Romans 12:8). The most well-intentioned of gifts may be spoiled by pride, or devalued by a spirit of self-aggrandisement.

All the business concerns of earth are united by a common underlying purpose, which is the creation of wealth. Their founders and stakeholders hope to increase their prosperity and improve their lot through the particular trade in which they are engaged. But the situation in the Church is utterly different. The money which it raises and offerings which it brings are yielded unto God who, though all His people were to collectively bring unto Him their entire substance, would not be enriched one iota by it. Man cannot add anything to the Almighty, who has said Himself: "*I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he goats out of thy folds. For every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills... If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is Mine, and the fulness thereof*" (Psalm 50:9-10, 12). David

also realised it, and confessed: “*all this store that we have prepared... cometh of Thine hand, and is all Thine own*” (1 Chronicles 29:16). What then **is** the purpose of the funds which a local Church raises, through the offerings of its members? They are not intended to materially profit man, and cannot benefit God, but they do achieve higher, more spiritual purposes:

They are a **mark of obedience**. Even though no other reasons or explanation were given to us in Scripture, we are instructed by God’s Word to give, and this should be sufficient to move us to obey

They are an **act of worship**. In making offerings to the Lord, we declare our belief that He is worthy of all, and more, than we could ever give. “*Honour the Lord with thy substance*” (Proverbs 3:9).

They are an **expression of gratitude**. As the Jews presented their firstfruits in thankfulness for the whole harvest, so by our relatively small gifts we praise the Lord for the vast benefits He has bestowed upon us.

They are a **demonstration of unworldliness**. Those who are reluctant to part with their worldly goods display an unhealthy attachment thereunto. But the cheerful giver has clearly learned that all he has proceeds from God, and ought not be held too tightly, and must ‘ere long be relinquished (cf 1 Timothy 6:7).

They are a **manifestation of love**. The meanest and humblest of gifts presented by a devoted child to his Father is joyfully received, because it is accepted as a token of true, childlike affection.

They are a **testimony to grace**. Those who most ‘freely give’ evince that they have ‘freely received’ (cf Matthew 10:8). The hymnwriter asks: “Love I much? I’m much forgiven; I’m a miracle of grace.”

2. Practical Applications

Money, then, when in the context of the Church, has an entirely different function than in any earthly institution. The Saviour taught that ‘the Temple sanctifieth the gold, and the altar sanctifieth the gift’ (cf Matthew 23:17, 19) – that is to say, when monetary offerings are brought into the remit of the Church, they become part of a spiritual exercise, not merely a financial one. The earthly means are sanctified by being used for heavenly ends. It is therefore essential that they are always handled in an intensely spiritual way.

Income

In view of the points already made, the local Church should exercise great care in its sources of income. The primary way is by the freewill offerings of its own members: “*And Moses spake unto all **the congregation** of the children of Israel, saying, This is the thing which the Lord commanded, saying, Take ye from among you an offering unto the Lord: whosoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it, an offering of the Lord*” (Exodus 35:4-5); “*And the multitude of **them that believed** were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common... And laid them down at the apostles’ feet: and distribution was made*” (Acts 4:32, 35). The maintenance and provision of the local Church is the duty and privilege of its own members, and ‘the household of faith’ only.

There is biblical precedent for the regular taking up of an offering (cf 1 Corinthians 16:1-2), and the use of collecting boxes in the Lord’s house (cf 2 Chronicles 24:4-14). But there is no warrant whatsoever in Scripture for obtaining monies from unbelievers. To exact a gift from such persons serves only to alienate and offend them, or may inadvertently provide them with a monetary means of salving their conscience, in preference to repentance! ‘Without faith it is impossible

to please God' (cf Hebrews 11:6), and He has not respect unto offerings made in its absence.

There are some rare examples in the Bible of unregenerate persons being moved to support the Lord's work, such as the Egyptians lading the Hebrews with treasures (cf Exodus 12:35-36), or Cyrus and the Persians giving the Jewish returnees funds to restore the Temple (cf Ezra 1:4-11). These instances are to be seen as Divinely motivated and exceptional. Occasionally it pleases the Lord to work in extraordinary ways for His peoples' support, but never should they seek after, expect, or demand such things from the world.

There is another disturbing trend among modern Churches which infringes this basic principle, namely: turning to the offices of secular, national government for additional financial support. Under the guise of 'Gift Aid' and similar grant schemes, there is an attempt to recover from the State the basic rate of tax on the donations of wage-earning givers. From a legal perspective this is a perfectly acceptable system for augmenting charitable giving – but it **cannot** be justified in relation to the Church. It represents an unbiblical attempt to 'render unto God the things that are Caesar's', to use the Lord's own description (cf Luke 20:22-25). The Church does not have a right to claim every tax-break, rebate or concession that the law allows for Charities in general. The Church is not on a mission to extract every last penny it can, regardless of the source. This attitude entirely defeats the object of personal, voluntary offering by the saints. It also risks placing the Lord's people under obligation to the State, subject to its scrutiny and interference, thereby undermining their vital 'separation from the world'. A clear division needs to be made – as much in financial matters as in moral standards.

It ought to go without saying that the local Church must live within its means. God is Sovereign and the Possessor of all things: "*The earth is*

the Lord's, and the fulness thereof” (Psalm 24:1). Therefore, if He denies from an assembly the funds for a particular project, or resources are not available, this is guidance that they should **not** proceed. The Lord's bounty will always supply the means for the work that His will requires. If the means are absent, it is presumptuous and disobedient for a congregation to continue in their own strength, perhaps by securing loans and other sources of credit. There is nothing more pitiable than a local Church, indebted to men or financial institutions, at the mercy of money-lenders, all because they have sought to manage without God, and contradict His will. “*Owe no man any thing*” (Romans 8:13) is the rule for the Church, as well as for individual believers.

Administration

Furthermore, the funds held by a Church **must** be administered in a God-honouring way. Poor management of money is a very bad witness to the world, and in order to prevent this situation from developing, proper measures must be taken. This was soon discovered by the New Testament Church, who selected “*seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom [to] appoint over this business*” (Acts 6:3). These were deacons, who were to have particular responsibility for the practical affairs of the Church; among them Stephen, full of the Spirit and faith, and also a very capable preacher.

It is to be regretted that the office of Treasurer is often neglected or belittled within companies of God's people, is often an afterthought, or a duty handed down to any willing member of the congregation, or in some instances contracted out to third-parties or accountancy firms. This is not in accordance with the pattern of Scripture. Care of the Church's money (which is ultimately the Lord's) requires not only ability and acumen, but also discretion, sound judgment and great spirituality. As the sad case of Judas Iscariot shows, the office of Treasurer is beset by numerous temptations, and as such, should only be given to established Christians who are mature and strong in the

faith. The brother appointed to the work should also function as an officer in the Church, fulfilling the biblical requirements: *“Likewise must the deacons be grave... not greedy of filthy lucre; Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless”* (1 Timothy 3:8-10).

The Treasurer has a difficult and unenviable task – performing a practical duty in a spiritual way on behalf of the whole congregation. The Church’s purpose is not to make a profit, as though it were a business; its money is not to be invested for the highest possible return; yet at the same time, it must not make a loss, and run in to debt. It is not to be parsimonious, seeking to do everything as cheaply and minimally as possible; neither is it to be prodigal, wasting its God-given means on unnecessary expense and luxuries. Between these extremes lies the way which glorifies God and keeps His Word. It is the responsibility of deacons, and particularly a Treasurer, to maintain the Church on such a course. But for all its challenges, this office is a wonderful vantage point from which to see the providence of God at work at first hand, and a great proving-ground for faith and prayer. Little wonder that Scripture says, *“they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus”* (1 Timothy 3:13).

Expenditure

The Church upon earth serves three primary functions, in this order of precedence: firstly to glorify God; secondly, to benefit the saints; thirdly, to testify to the world. The way in which its money is used ought to reflect this Biblical pattern. It has already been described how that God is glorified in the giving of offerings; but He continues to be honoured by the proper use and application of them. Priority in spending must be given to the God-ward aspects of the Church’s work, such as the provision and maintenance of worship services on the Sabbath Day, the preaching of His Word, and the offering of praise.

For example, the purchase of a building suitable for the assembling of the Church together, dedicated to the sole purpose of worship, is highly advantageous. In such places, God has promised to meet with His people; the flock may come to regard it as a ‘spiritual home’; and unbelievers in an area are presented with a permanent, visible witness.

There is a regrettable fashion in the present age for large, established congregations of believers to persist in the use of Community Halls and similar public buildings for their regular services. Such venues are invariably full of ungodly distractions, inappropriate decor, and are effectively camouflaged into the world, being utterly indiscernible as places for worship. Since the time that the Tabernacle was first raised, God’s design has been for His people to have recognisable, sanctified places in which to meet. Where sufficient funds are available, it is reprehensible if a Church does not use them to that end. And where God has granted the blessing of a permanent Chapel building, let it be maintained in good order and repair, as befits an earthly dwelling-place of God.

There are countless demands upon local Churches for gifts and financial support – from unbiblical denominational councils, ecumenical missionary organisations, para-Church societies, charitable concerns with little or no doctrinal basis – very few of which have any warrant or mandate in Scripture. The biblically-ordered, genuinely autonomous local Church, with a concern for purity of doctrine, is far better advised to manage their own God-given funds. There can be no better use for them than the further dissemination of the Truth – the written Word of God, and sound Christian literature – among those in real need of it.

To the remnant of Judah, God said: “*The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine*” (Haggai 2:8), and it remains so, from beginning to end. Then let us trust Him for its provision, and honour Him in its use.

R. J. Steward

EDITORIAL

The Acts of the Apostles gives an insight into the spirit of the early New Testament believers. In relation to their material belongings, it is recorded: “*neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own*” (Acts 4:32). This godly, selfless attitude was no easy thing, since among the Jerusalem Church were those who owned houses and lands (cf Acts 4:34). But when the Church had need, they had no hesitation in selling these assets, in order that their value might be realised, and used to the benefit of all. Notwithstanding the possessions that were at stake, the saints accounted themselves as simply stewards of that which God had lent to them for a season, and had sovereignly committed to their trust.

It is a sound principle that can be extended from material things to spiritual. When the saints view themselves objectively in the light of Scripture, they must arrive at the same conclusion. All that they are – heirs of God, joint-heirs with Jesus Christ, kings and priests – they are **by grace**. All that they have – redemption through blood, forgiveness of sins, eternal salvation, an inheritance with the saints in light – is as the **gift of God**. None would dare to claim that they had these blessings by nature or by right; none could say that ought of the spiritual benefits they possess ‘are their own’.

Pertinent rhetorical questions are posed in First Corinthians: “*For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?*” (1 Corinthians 4:7). It is the grace of God alone that singles out His chosen people for such blessedness. They are vessels afore prepared to glory, upon whom He pours out His mercy (cf Romans 9:23). Everything that they have, spiritually and materially, has been received at the Lord’s bountiful hand.

Yet it is the nature of the flesh to retain something for itself, in order that human pride might be comforted. ‘Surely’, one might protest, ‘my life is in my own hands, and my physical frame is at my disposal?’ No, says the Scripture: “*ye are not your own...for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s*” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). The principle also applies to things physical.

Does this then leave the saints empty-handed, and utterly dispossessed, with nothing to their names? Behold a wonderful paradox – for having been emptied of self, assured that there is nought we can call our own, and that we are purchased by another – the Scripture adds this glorious promise: “*For all things are yours; Whether... the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; And ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s*” (1 Corinthians 3:21-23).

“Jesus, my Saviour! Thou art mine,
The Father’s gift of love divine;
All Thou hast done, and all Thou art,
Are now the portion of my heart.

All that Thou hast, Thou hast for me,
All my fresh springs are hid in Thee;
In Thee I live; while I confess
I nothing am, yet all possess.”

(Deck)

Preliminary Announcement

ANNUAL BIBLE CONVENTION

Saturday 2nd & Lord’s Day 3rd June 2012 D.V.

Preacher : Mr W. J. Seaton
(Inverness)