

CHRISTIAN MONEY \$ENSE

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Outgiving the Master

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It is estimated that the western church controls nearly 60% of the world's wealth. Even if overstated, this statistic speaks volumes about what Christians really believe since the average church member gives only 2.5% of his income to all Christian causes. Can you imagine a time when your church or favorite para-church organization would return your uncashed check because they received too much money? It has happened, and we all pray for the day when it happens again. Let's review the story.

Exodus 35 opens with Moses gathering the children of Israel together to announce God's plans for the Tabernacle. In a human sense, Moses was attempting to inspire the people to stretch beyond their self-centered desires to become great stewards of God's inheritance. Verse five is a simply stated expectation that the Israelites should make an offering of the riches they controlled. In verses 6-19, Moses provided a long list of what the riches would be used for. Not one item on that list was for their own use. From today's perspective, there was nothing in it for them and no return on their investment. All they could accomplish by their giving was to fulfill God's desire by acting obediently to use the very riches He had entrusted to them.

The remaining verses of Exodus 35 describe the willingness of the people to be obedient and give up their newfound wealth to meet God's desires. The response was overwhelming, instantaneous, and continuous. Then, surprisingly, Moses demanded in Exodus 36:6-7 that the people stop bringing their wealth because they had given much more than was needed to meet God's expectations.

There are several lessons in this story. First, God has expectations of His stewards, but He always allows them the freedom to make their own choices. Second, He receives gifts only from willing givers. If guilt is the motivation, He prefers that you keep your wealth. Third, when God's desires for the people are properly explained and understood, the people will respond. Fourth, people develop greater confidence in giving when they know others are making similar sacrifices. Fifth, and most importantly, their sacrificial giving resulted in greater intimacy with God (Exodus 40:34-38). The evidence

indicates that when God's people are faithful stewards to God-centered causes, the need is completely taken care of (2 Cor. 9:12).

Let's dream for a moment. If every Christian in the western church increased giving from an average of 2.5% to 10%, what could be accomplished? What if your church's revenue quadrupled over the next year without adding one new member? What difference would that make in funding your church's efforts to reach the local community and around the world for Christ? What kind of compassionate care could you give to your needy friends and church family? How might that change your strategy to encourage young people in your church to become the next generation of ministry leaders? Would you give them scholarships to help them pursue a career in ministry? Would you increase your pastor's salary to a level commensurate with his role and expertise? The glorious possibilities are endless!

Every believer has a significant role as a steward of God's resources. Some points to remember are:

- All the world's resources are God's resources (Leviticus 27:30).
- God has simply loaned us His resources and has the right to expect us to invest them wisely in whatever way He deems appropriate (Matt. 25:14-30).
- We have the option to be faithful or unfaithful. God is too loving and gracious to force us against our will.
- How we spend our earthly riches has eternal consequences (Luke 16:10-12).

There is no make-up exam for this test once we leave behind our earthly life (Matt. 16:26). So what should you do? Choose wisely and with an eternal perspective. You will experience joy and contentment in this world and riches and honor beyond your imagination in eternity.

BBC Foundation has been ministering to churches and individuals regarding biblical stewardship since 1992. Send your questions on finances and stewardship to: BBC Foundation, 538 Venard Rd., Clarks Summit, PA 18411. Phone: (800) 451-8668, website: bbcfoundation.org; e-mail: info@bbcfoundation.org