

7 Funding Structures

There is currently a lot of debate surrounding how funds should be raised and apportioned for Kingdom work. Advocates of this or that method sometimes accuse others of being compromised, unbiblical or unethical. I have found seven main financial structures in the Bible each with a different application to a different part of God's work .

1. Grants to support large capital projects e.g. building the tabernacle. (Exodus 25:1-8)

Project funding is found through Scripture (Exodus 25:1-8, 1 Chronicles 22:14-19, 2 Kings 12:2-16, Haggai 1:3-8) and even includes government grants such as the support of Ataxerxes for rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:8) and Cyrus (Ezra 1:1-11) and later Darius (Ezra 6:1-12) for the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Project funding is always used to fund large capital works with a definite starting point and ending point. In many cases there are multiple donors such as the people bringing their silver and gold. In some cases there is a large single donor such as King David or Cyrus.

Project funding is appropriate for the building of churches, school and hospitals and for development work that has a definite closure to it.

2. Regular proportional or grace giving to support those who faithfully teach the Word of God

The principle is that the laborer is worthy of his hire (Matthew 10:10, Luke 10:7, 1 Timothy 5:18), and of reaping reward (1 Corinthians 9:11, 2 Timothy 2:6) those who receive spiritual things should return the favor with material things (Romans 15:27, 1 Corinthians 9:11) and that those who preach the gospel should earn their living from the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:3-14). The Levites were supported by the tithe (Numbers 18:21-32, Hebrews 7:5) and the elders and teachers of the early church were to be supported by their congregations. (Galatians 6:6, 1 Corinthians 9:3-14, 1 Timothy 5:17,18)

Pastors and teachers should receive a salary from those they regularly minister to and are worthy of "double honor" in this regard. This should be the normal means of supporting Christian workers.

3. Church and individual based team support ("missionary support") for missionary work "to the Gentiles"

Paul did not burden his new Gentile congregations with the requirement of paying him a salary in order that the gospel not be hindered (1 Thessalonians 2:9, 2 Corinthians 11:7-9, 12:13-16) and apparently this became the practice for those going into new Gentile areas so local churches were required to support such men (3 John 1:5-8, 2 Corinthians 11:7-9, Philippians 4:15-19). Even Jesus was supported by some wealthy believers in His itinerant ministry (Luke 8:1-3).

Team support is appropriate when the ministry is itinerant in nature such as Jesus and His disciples or Paul's ministry amidst the Gentiles. Or if it is in a new "unreached" area that does not have a tradition of giving and where asking for funds would be a stumbling block or a burden, and the gospel must be offered without charge. 3 John makes it clear that such workers were worthy of hospitality and of being sent on their way in a fitting manner "*whom you will do well to send forward worthily of God;*".

Therefore missionaries and church-planter should be supported by sending and partnering churches and by generous individuals.

4. Tentmaking and Kingdom business to support missionaries and church-planting pastors where team-support is unavailable

When team-support is unavailable then the missionaries and bi-vocational church-planting pastors "work with their own hands". This is often called tent-making after the trade of Paul and Apollos (Acts 18:1-3). While working with one's hands to supply one's daily bread is commended (1 Thessalonians 4:11, 2 Thessalonians 3:7-12, Ephesians 4:28) it is not God's normal way for His workers to be supported (1 Corinthians 9:14), nor was Jesus supported this way (Luke 8:1-3), it is an emergency measure that may distract the worker from the ministry of the Word and prayer (Acts 6:1-4) and it is preferred that Christian workers be focused on their work: **Acts 6:4 MKJV** *But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.* As the Gentile church matured Paul seems to have moved away from tent-making and gone over entirely to team support, this may also have to do with his aging process.

Many missionaries who wish to avoid fundraising, think of tent-making as a better solution. But team support has the advantages of having friends and prayer partners behind one in the work and frees the worker to concentrate on their spiritual tasks for which God has called them (2 Timothy 2:4). Paul boasts of his tent-making (2 Thessalonians 3:7-9) and his not burdening the new churches (1 Thessalonians 2:9, 2 Corinthians 11:7-9, 12:13-16) but Paul never imposes that lifestyle on Timothy or any of his disciples. Instead Paul strongly teaches that Christian workers should "not be muzzled" in collecting a salary from those they help (1 Corinthians 9:9, 1 Timothy 5:18).

Tent-making is perhaps best seen as a biblical backstop but not as a permanent lifestyle.

5. Sharing within the local church to meet the needs of the poor in the congregation

There is a clear N.T. imperative to meet the needs of the poor especially widows and those Christian poor who were in the same fellowship (Acts 2:44,45; 4:34-37, 6:1-5, 1 Timothy 5:3-16, James 1:27, 1 John 3:16,17) so that there might be equality in the body of Christ (2 Corinthians 8:14) and so that there be no one needy among them (Acts 4:34). Indeed refusing to help someone close to you who was in clear economic need was seen as a severe violation of the faith (James 2:14-16, 1 John 3:16,17, 1 Timothy 5:8).

These injunctions take on special meaning in developing nations where economic needs are acute and where Christians there may need to depend on one another just to survive. Even in Western nations with good social security there may be people we need

to help out of Christian love. Even so we can set reasonable conditions such as Paul does in his instructions to Timothy concerning giving to widows in 1 Timothy chapter 5. Where possible individual Christians should work and be self-sustaining and not depend on others (1 Thessalonians 4:11, 2 Thessalonians 3:7-12, Ephesians 4:28). However the truly needy among them such as widows and orphans in their distress were to be cared for by other believers (James 1:27).

Personal charity is for meeting personal needs especially within the family and the local congregation and is an expected part of the Christian lifestyle. However it can be exploited and so rules may be set so as to ensure that dependency does not result.

6. Sharing with other churches in need both locally and overseas as a form of aid and relief work in times of famine or natural disaster.

A special case of being needy is a natural disaster such as a dire famine and then churches should send aid to the Christians who are in such need (Acts 11:28-30, 2 Corinthians 8:1-16, Romans 15: 25-27) and such funds should be carefully managed and delivered by trustworthy people such as Barnabas Paul and Titus (see above verses). Paul sees this kind of charity as being especially glorifying to God, and the sort that He will reward:

2 Corinthians 9:10-15 MKJV (10) Now He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for eating, may He supply and multiply your seed, and increase the fruits of your righteousness (11) you being enriched in everything to all generosity, which works out thanksgiving to God through us. (12) For the ministry of this service not only supplies the things lacking of the saints, but also multiplying through many thanksgivings to God, (13) through the proof of this ministry they glorify God for your freely expressed submission to the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of the fellowship toward them and toward all, (14) and in their prayer for you, who long after you, because of the exceeding grace of God on you. (15) Thanks be to God for His unspeakable free gift.

Christian aid to other churches during times of natural disaster should be well organized and carefully managed, yet is fundamentally a generous outpouring of love that brings great glory to God.

7. Almsgiving to meet the needs of the poor as found in society in general.

Almsgiving was a part of Jewish life and was part of the teaching and lifestyle of Jesus (Matthew 5:42, 6:1-4, 10:8, Luke 11:41, 12:33) and Dorcas (Acts 9:36) and Cornelius (Acts 10:2-4) were recognized as outstanding in this regard. This led to a miracle for Dorcas (Acts 9:36-42) and to Cornelius' prayers being heard by God (Acts 10:31). Peter and John transcended almsgiving with physical healing in Acts 3:1-6 with the lame man at the Gate Beautiful. Part of the lesson of that particular miracle is that almsgiving is good, but making people whole and capable of earning their own living is even better. Paul saw his great famine relief gift as "offering alms to my nation" (Acts 24:17). The ethos here is "freely you have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:7) and "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). Almsgiving is to be done spontaneously, generously, quietly and unconsciously (Matthew 6:1-4) and freely and without compulsion (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Almsgiving is the blessed spontaneous gift to those in need in the general society.

8. Structures that we do not see in Scripture

Some funding structures that are popular in some circles today are not found in Scripture. They include:

1. *Independent faith ministry* - just "praying it in" without any church or system of supporters. While God certainly answers prayers for financial needs we are called to be part of the body and to be part of the giving and receiving that characterize Kingdom life.
2. *Salesmanship / Long offering speeches etc* - emotional manipulation is never a part of biblical fund-raising, though genuine appeal to conscience is.
3. *Donor cultivation* - We do not see people being flattered in order to give or "friendships" being developed simply for the purpose of fund-raising. Friendship and fellowship was a sacred participation in the body of Christ.
4. *Selling the gospel or charging for the power of God* - This is the sin that Simon Magus was so roundly rebuked for. (Acts 8:9-24)
5. *Charging for masses said for the dead or for indulgences or for the forgiveness of sins*. Salvation is FREE (Romans 5:15-18, 6:23, 11:29, Ephesians 2:8). This sin lead directly to the Reformation and Martin Luther's protest against indulgences.
6. *The selling of religious trinkets* - For instance we never see Paul selling "handkerchiefs that can heal the sick" to support his ministry (Acts 19:11,12)

CONCLUSIONS

Each form of ministry has its own funding structure that is appropriate to it and which works best to the glory of God. We cannot just go with one structure only and say that is the way for all people at all time. Instead we need to select our funding approach to match the needs and circumstances of the ministry. For instance if a missionary was to be sent to Saudi Arabia he or she could hardly go into mosques and raise funds by proclaiming the gospel! There would have to be outside team support.

Lots of money can be obtained through unethical fund-raising practices but they will not be blessed. The end does not justify the means. We need to act with integrity at all times.

Sometimes culture can get in the way of biblical patterns of giving. For instance sometimes churches established by generous missionaries from outside are sometimes used to "getting something for nothing" and when the missionary leaves there is no culture of giving and so the local pastor cannot be sustained. In rich Western churches giving to another member of the congregation is often seen as unusual as the assumption is that we can all provide for ourselves. We need to be taught properly and deeply so that we get past our cultural and personal blind-spots and can fully participate in God's economy of gracious giving and receiving in the Lord.