



Apostolic Offerings

A DOMINION PARTNERSHIP

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The early church exploded into vibrant life on Pentecost day and continued to gain momentum through the first century blazing a path of love through heathen lands and pagan strongholds, overcoming overwhelming opposition and impossible odds. Several factors were key to focus and release this tidal wave of God's Spirit: the priesthood of all believers, sign and wonders, the courage of early church leaders, the doctrinal purity of Jesus' sacrifice, resurrection, ascension and second coming and of course, the blood of the martyrs.

It is fact without question that these components were essential to the advance of God's Kingdom through the first two centuries. And it is also fact without question that the loss of these factors slammed the brakes on the church's progress into the third and fourth century. These subjects are well researched and understood...and should without question...continue to be entrenched in our Kingdom-seeking hearts. But one issue is not so well researched or understood. In fact some would even be troubled that we add it to so holy a list as one that includes the priesthood of all believers, doctrinal purity and the blood of the martyrs.

The oft neglected component is the *financing of the Gospel*. This oversight is no doubt the consequence of either our lack of courage to address this issue or from our reaction to those who abuse the "prosperity gospel". However, Kingdom financing was a vital piece of the good news puzzle. From the glorious birth of the church at Pentecost the *generous heart of God* was released through His people as they **"were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common...Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold and laid them at the apostles' feet and they distributed to each as anyone had need"** (Acts 4:32-35).

Many wonder just what the point behind this extravagant Spirit-led outpouring of generosity was. Jerusalem's population was around 30,000 people in A.D. 30, but would swell to ten times that number during the three annual festivals (Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles) as Jews came from far and wide to enjoy these national celebrations in the holy city. On the day of the Pentecostal outpouring 3,000 people encountered the saving grace of God (Acts 2:41), and a little over a week later this number had exploded to **"about five thousand"** men (Acts 4:4); counting women and children, anywhere between 15,000 to 20,000 people! Most of this number would have been non-residents to Jerusalem, delaying their return home to Gentile nations so intoxicating was God's Presence alive in their midst.

Outrageous displays of generosity and hospitality were heart responses to the obvious need to home and feed over-populated Jerusalem. Thus this Spirit-prompted release of generosity was the Lord's answer to both the immediate need in Jerusalem and to fulfil His longer term intention: to send this new priesthood – one and all – back to their homes and nations carrying the fire of His Spirit and the generosity of His heart. This outpouring of finances hosted the Jerusalem revival and then financed an apostolic invasion of the known world from Jerusalem and into the first few centuries.

Sadly as the fourth century dawned, the disillusioned church (battered through centuries of martyrdom) was gobbled up by Roman Emperor Constantine who sealed the growing misuse of Kingdom financing. With the reallocation of finances to build cathedrals, staff the clergy and support politics, the loss of this component of Kingdom economics – along with the disappearance of the other vital components outlined above – caused the church to begin its long slide into the darkest of ages. This article seeks then to catch afresh the generous heart of God and to recapture the vital principles associated with Kingdom financing.

The tithe...

The economic system of the local church community of the first century was the principle and practice of tithing. Without running into the contents of our article on tithing¹, some points of clarification will be helpful here.

- (1) ***The principle of tithing was a consistent practice throughout the history of God's people, including the early church.*** It was initiated through Abraham and the patriarchs (Genesis 14:18-20; 28:20-22), used in the Mosaic Law (Numbers 18:21-32; Deuteronomy 26:12-15) – along with God's other absolute principles such as the prohibition against murder – and was then upheld in the teachings and practices of the early church (Matthew 23:23; Hebrews 7:1-19).
- (2) ***The New Testament teachings on giving focus on apostolic offerings, assuming that the principle of tithing was practiced.*** At the heart of most New Testament churches was a core of Jewish Christ-followers who certainly provided an immediate strength in terms of areas such as godly reverence, moral purity, family values and tithing. If confusion concerning the Old Testament dietary laws caused so much fuss and led to so much clarification from New Testament writers, how much more would the thought of rejecting or usurping the principle of tithing? That the New Testament writers did not need to address tithing in any great detail shows just how well the principle of tithing was upheld in the practice of the early church. The focus they do make is on apostolic offerings; a new revelation of offerings, over and above the tithe.

¹ We urge you to read our article entitled, "To Tithe, or Not to Tithe?" in conjunction with this article.

For clarity sake, the tithes are the economic system behind the community of the church administered by local oversight in line with the Kingdom mission of the Lord. Over and above the tithes, believers are encouraged to sow offerings into any area of need prompted by the Spirit and the New Testament teachings focus on the new revelation of global financing: apostolic offerings.

So what are apostolic offerings?

Apostolic offerings are offerings given specifically to finance the *advance of the Kingdom through the planting and parenting of churches*¹.

The Philippian Church: An Outstanding Example...

The Bible reveals how the early church grasped their responsibility in this regard, and the churches in the province of Macedonia² – especially the church at Philippi – laid hold of this better than most. In his letter to the Philippian church, Paul expresses his gratitude to them:

“Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the Gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:15-19).

¹ Jesus came proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom (Matthew 4:17), the good news that a new day of righteous government had dawned under the rule of the loving Lordship of Christ (Isaiah 9:6, 7). This Kingdom mandate was to be carried forth by a Kingdom-seeking (Matthew 6:33) and Kingdom-praying (Matthew 6:10) church whose marching orders were to disciple the nations (Matthew 16:18, 19; 28:18-20). Our mandate to disciple the nations involves planting and parenting self-governing communities, or churches, that demonstrate the Kingdom life as the Presence of Christ manifests in our midst (Acts 14:21-23; 1 Timothy 3:15; Matthew 18:20).

The Great Commission is not just to evangelize the nations; rather it is to *disciple the nations*. While this certainly includes preaching the Gospel message (evangelism), it more importantly involves *demonstrating* the Gospel life as Christ-centred individuals and Christ-filled communities. To “**disciple the nations**” requires planting and parenting churches in each nation (Greek: *ethneōs*) – every cultural grouping – so that God’s glory fills the earth (Numbers 14:21). When did the earth first see His glory openly manifest? When Jesus came to the earth: “**And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory...**” (John 1:14). When will the earth continue to see His unfolding glory? When we as individuals and, even more importantly, when we as communities, flesh out His Word in Kingdom covenant life.

² Macedonia was a province consisting of, among others, these cities: Philippi, Berea and Thessalonica.

Notice several, vital principles from this fourth chapter of Philippians:

- The Philippian believers “**shared**” in the apostolic vision through “**giving and receiving**” (v. 15); they understood that through their generosity they participated in the global mandate personified in Paul’s apostolic work. This principle is captured powerfully in Paul’s exhortation to the Galatian churches: “**Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches**” (Galatians 6:6). This is more than just relieving one’s conscience or paying off any obligation to be personally involved. The Philippians’ apostolic offerings were Kingdom **investments** (v. 17); *through their giving they were intimate dominion partners with Paul in God’s apostolic vision*. For this reason, Paul began his letter to them thanking them “**for their fellowship in the Gospel**” (Philippians 1:6). This is more than a sentimental cliché; rather, it is a *covenant expression of dominion partnership*.
- The Philippians’ apostolic offerings met Paul’s “**necessities**” (v. 16); *their financial offerings went to underwrite Paul’s personal budget, relieving him of placing any burden on the new works he was planting*. For example, Paul was able to stay mobile through the cities of Thessalonica, Berea and Athens; he was able to minister in the marketplace of a city more freely – even “**daily**” – because of the apostolic offerings he received from the Philippian believers (Acts 17:1-17, vv. 11, 17). Even when he got to Corinth and had to, at first, lean on his tent-making trade (Acts 18:1-3), Timothy and Silas returned from Macedonia bringing further financial support (including finances, this time, from the church in Thessalonica; see 1 Thessalonians 3:6-9), which released him from tent-making so that he could “**devote himself exclusively to preaching**” (Acts 18:5, NIV).
- Paul described their generosity in giving apostolic offerings as *worship to God*: “**a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God**” (v. 18). That apostolic offerings are connected here in this phrase to an Old Testament worship practice is enlightening. *Giving apostolic offerings is now a New Testament act of worship!* When Paul testified to the Corinthian church of the Macedonian’s generosity he wrote: “**they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God**” (2 Corinthians 8:5). In other words, their financial gift was first an act of worship to God; secondly, it fulfilled a practical need: releasing apostolic people to advance His Kingdom.
- Paul’s confidence in God’s provision for the Philippian church was directly tied to their faithful application of apostolic offerings: “**And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus**” (Philippians 4:19). We are convinced that believers so often struggle short of the provision of God because their focus is on investing in their “**own house**” – their own life – rather than God’s “**house**” – His global mandate (Haggai 1:9). The Great Commission is the church’s marching orders from the Lord Himself; the fulfilment thereof requires our generosity and obedience. As Watchman Nee said: “If we care for God’s cares, God will take care of our cares”.

What tent-making was not...

The word “tent-making” is loosely used in various circles and it is a topic that has fostered some ignorant assumptions. Of course the phrase stems from Paul’s tent-making trade (Acts 18:2, 3). Generally there are two wrong views concerning tent-making, and we briefly critique them here.

(1) *Tent-making is not a step into fulltime, paid ministry.*

In some circles the phrase “fulltime ministry” is used to describe someone who goes onto the staff of a church or ministry and thus draws their full income or salary from this source. This terminology tends to play to the clergy/laity divide failing to appreciate that every Christ-follower is in “fulltime ministry” whether their vocation is in the marketplace or on the staff of a church or ministry.

In this case, tent-making then refers to the short term need to develop an income base with the ultimate intention of finally “going on staff” or being completely supported by “the ministry;” at which point, there is no longer the need to “make tents”. While we are certainly not against the need to “give up” a marketplace vocation because the demand and responsibility of a given ministry requires this, this is not what Paul did in making tents.

(2) *Tent-making is not a permanent source of income required in place of being fully compensated by a church or ministry budget.*

On the opposite side of this fence sit those who are against the notion that people receive their full income from a church or ministry. This is a growing thought among many in response to the clear abuses that have taken place in our day. In this case, tent-making refers to the permanent, income-generating source from which people can then minister “no strings attached”.

We do not agree that it is unbiblical for people to be compensated for ministry. For example, although Paul chose to initially “make tents” in Corinth so as not to burden the new work, he later explained emphatically that it was a Biblical right to do so (1 Corinthians 9:1-14). In fact, he then stopped making tents in Corinth when financial support from the established churches in Macedonia arrived (Acts 18:5; 1 Thessalonians 3:6-9). Later, in writing to Timothy, he specifically instructed Timothy to compensate various people for ministry (1 Timothy 5:17, 18). Thus, and to the point of this article, Paul clearly did not make tents as his sole source of income.

What tent-making was...

Tent-making never became Paul’s only source of revenue nor was it an interim step towards a permanent salary. Rather, Paul made tents – a vital and distinguished occupation in his day – simply *when he needed to*. This happened...

(1) Initially, with suspicions surrounding his past and his dramatic conversion, Paul had to draw on his tent-making skills to survive.

After his conversion, Paul spent three years in Arabia (Galatians 1:18). Having forsaken his path as a Pharisee, Paul would have had to have fallen back on his previously learnt trade as a tent-maker (or perhaps, he learnt it in Arabia). But as his influence grew among the church, Paul could begin to enjoy the benefit of the believers' generosity. As he began to understand and then teach concerning apostolic offerings, he was relieved from the need to make tents as his only source of income.

(2) Tactfully, whenever Paul had to lean on his tent-making trade, he used it to demonstrate that God was His Source and to teach others to live to give.

It seems that when his financial support dried up, Paul graciously picked up his tent-making trade as He trusted in the Lord as His Source and Sustainer. In doing so, he used the opportunity to impart this foundational value, teaching others to live selflessly in such a way as to be channels of God's provision to others (Acts 20:33-35).

(3) Circumstantially, whenever Paul's motives could be questioned, especially with new works or problematic situations, Paul preferred to deny his "right" to be remunerated to avoid losing objectivity in the minds of those concerned.

Herein lies the first advantage to having a tent-making option that generates an income. When Paul needed to fall back on his tent-making trade to prevent being a burden to a new work or from compromising his efforts, he could do so. Secondly, tent-making gives us a door of influence into the market place community. Paul's relationship with Aquila and Priscilla certainly was strengthened if not initiated due to their common involvement in making tents (Acts 18:2, 3). Thirdly, tent-making can provide a degree of integrity required in the increasingly business-oriented society we live in today.

Finally, tent-making removes the "budget-ceiling" from apostolic people, releasing their income-generating potential. In an apostolic team, it is a viable option for team members to have other income-generating alternatives to supplement the compensation they receive from serving on team. Old school thought may see this as a distraction, but this is a new day as we return to Biblical, apostolic team ministry. We must ruthlessly remove "sacred and secular" divides and fulfil the calling of God on our lives in both "traditional" settings and in the great harvest field of the business arena, thus releasing the Kingdom of God.

To be clear then, Paul's income base was first the generosity of believers – including the practice of tithes and apostolic offerings – and when necessary he fell back on his tent-making trade to survive or supplement his income. Thus tent-making was a crucial weapon in his apostolic arsenal, a viable option in his apostolic economics.

Vision and provision...

Apostolic men and women embody the apostolic vision and pioneer new frontiers but cannot do so alone. *Their spirit of sacrifice must be matched by a spirit of generosity to under-gird the global thrust.* Without this financial backing they are often restricted by their tent-making endeavours alone. This will severely limit or retard the urgency of the apostolic mandate. While apostolic men and women champion the *vision*, others need to *provision* the apostolic mandate¹.

Local church communities, as part of apostolic vision, should contribute significant finances to provisioning the global thrust². However, contributions from the budget of faith communities will still be insufficient to provision the vision of discipling the nations and this is where apostolic offerings are vital. This is where individuals and businesses that understand their Kingdom responsibility should release finances over and above their commitment to their local community expressed in, among other things, the tithe. This is where every believer ought to prayerfully seek the Lord as to what financial commitment He requires of them in this regard. This is where individuals graced with the motivational gift of giving should set themselves apart as a channel of global financing (Romans 12:8). If we would do this well, the church would march apostolically to the nations; advancing the Lord's Kingdom.

¹ There has been tremendous abuse of the concept of priests and kings which plays to the tragic clergy/laity divide. This is not what we are advocating here. The New Testament does not divide believers into "the priests" and "the kings". The incorrect teaching goes something like this: the five-fold clergy are "the priests" – the preachers – and everyone else – the laity – are "the kings", who are supposed to make the money to pay the preachers to do the ministry. This is contrary to the teachings of the New Testament (see Ephesians 4:11, 12; Mark 16:15-18; 1 Peter 2:4, 9; Romans 5:17). The phrase "**kings and priests**" (Revelation 5:10) – which can be translated, "**a kingdom of priests**" – is the fulfilment of God's desire expressed in the Old Testament to have a nation, or Kingdom, of priests (Exodus 19:5, 6). In Christ, we are all kings – called to rule and reign – and priests – called to minister to Him and for Him. Thus we can all preach (minister) and we can all pay (give). As we embrace the priesthood (and gifting) of every believer, we must also fully appreciate the role of apostolic people to spearhead the Great Commission and the responsibility of all to finance this pioneering task.

² Churches should contribute at least 10% towards their apostolic vision as a principle. In the Mosaic Law, the Levites were required to tithe on the tithes they received from the people (Numbers 18:26; Nehemiah 10:38). This is an "at-the-very-least" principle we believe churches should apply. As an apostolic ministry, many of our local churches contribute 20% towards our apostolic vision, and hub churches that have responsibility for a region contribute a third 10% towards our regional church planting vision.

We have found it helpful to distinguish between equipping gifts whose focus is more local in orientation (within a local church, or among a specific number of churches) and those whose focus is more extra-local in pioneering situations.

(A) Local Orientation

Typically, the grace gift of the pastor and teacher tends to serve within one or in a few churches. In this case, the bulk of their income could come from a market place occupation, supplemented by a contribution from the local church budget(s). Certainly, Paul's counsel to Timothy reveals that those who teach the Word, whether it be elders who teach or resident equipping gift ministers, be compensated accordingly (1 Timothy 5:17, 18). Biblically, the contribution from the local church budget should increase when an increasing amount of time is required in teaching – including the preparation involved – and counselling (1 Timothy 4:13-16; 2 Timothy 3:14-16, 24-26).

(B) Global Orientation

Typically, the grace gift of apostle, prophet and evangelist serves beyond the local churches; that is, they are extra-local, pioneering and itinerant. In this case, the bulk of their income could come from contributions from the local churches' who sent them and, crucially, from apostolic offerings. This would enable the extra-local minister to begin and serve new works without putting any financial burden upon them. Of course, a tent-making option would be a vital supplement to this support.

A call to action...

We trust this article has stimulated fresh thought in your heart concerning God's Kingdom economics.

(1) We urge each of you to consider afresh your responsibility to the Great Commission by sowing apostolic offerings into apostolic vision and ministry.

The church needs multiplied thousands of new dominion partnerships to blossom as believers seek the Lord as to their responsibility to provision apostolic men and women through apostolic offerings.

Although giving is certainly not the only way to be involved in the apostolic mandate, it is an area of desperate need. Yes, we need to *pray* for the fulfilment of the apostolic mandate. Yes, we can be personally involved in *short-term mission* experiences where we participate in the apostolic mission. And yes, we must *live with a sense of vibrant mission* in our own localities and church communities. But we dare not view our financial giving to the apostolic mandate as something optional...the New Testament does not allow us to!

On a practical level, we urge you to ask the Lord to knit your heart to an apostolic man or woman within the apostolic vision you are apart of. Then we suggest the following...

- Seek God as to what apostolic offerings He may desire you to sow into their lives.
- Be sure to share with this person what this dominion partnership means to you; using this article may break the ice. Speaking from experience, apostolic men and women do not want to feel “paid off”. We would be honoured to journey in relationship and partnership with those whom the Lord leads to provision us in the vision we embody. The tenderness Paul reveals through his writing to the Philippian church was due to their connection with him – **“their fellowship in the Gospel”** (Philippians 1:5) – through apostolic offerings. The sweetness of this partnership not only provisions the apostolic person, but also enlarges the sower and is a vital ingredient in advancing the Kingdom.
- You may consider giving a once off love gift offering, or better yet, consider a monthly contribution. We urge you to ensure that your monthly contribution is over and above the tithe you commit to your church community. Decide whether you want to make a six month or twelve month commitment subject to review at the end of the period. Then...enjoy making an eternal investment!

(2) We encourage those who sense they are an Ephesians 4:11 grace gift minister to prayerfully seek the Lord concerning adding a tent-making option to their ministry arsenal.

As Paul found a financially profitable trade in tent-making that he could pick up and put down when required, we encourage you to pray and keep your eyes open for the numerous opportunities that are available in our entrepreneurial-based society. Yes, every opportunity must be weighed carefully in terms of the time it requires versus the rewards it delivers. And being involved in team ministry with like-minded people who understand these things is vital.

Those who are currently serving in full-time church or ministry staff positions often, due to the wrong models of remuneration and tent-making they may have inherited, find the business world tremendously daunting and would thus find it difficult to explore tent-making options. If you are in this situation, we encourage you to ask the Lord to bring you into contact with a Kingdom-minded businessperson. Share the contents of this article with him/her, and humble yourself to learn from such a person in this vital arena of commerce. Even if finding a tent-making option remains difficult, the insight and experience you will gain from a Christ-follower who is effective in the business domain will be worth it!

The business “**field**” is certainly one of the final frontiers that the Kingdom of God needs to invade (Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43), and most Bible School or seminary-trained individuals will find themselves ill-equipped for harvest time. Time (and lack of training) can be redeemed as we humble ourselves to learn from (and support) these twenty-first century Josephs and Daniels!

**This article is part of a series entitled:
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CrossWave



Written by
Craig Kirkby

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Recently edited
October 2008

WEB

www.crosswaveglobal.com

MAIL

craig@crosswaveglobal.com

