

## A Thoughtful Offering

Taking Care to Fill the Work's Needs

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Hope you all have had a good Feast. That is over now. We are now in a new Holy Day, and new Feast—the Last Great Day. I hope that it is as good as the last seven days have been.

When speaking with a new client, career counselors, after getting all the pertinent information on job history and the like, will often ask their client, "Now what is it that you really want to do? Where is your heart?"

Or, as the book said, "What color is your parachute?"

I am sure that they get a lot of absolutely *wild responses like*, "*Well, I have always wanted to run away to the circus!*" Or, "*I really enjoy ironing!*" (That is my wife. She just loves to do that.) Or, "*All my life, all I have ever wanted to do was sing!*"

Usually a good counselor, after hearing what it is that the person would like to do, will put that person through a battery of tests to see if his talents actually match his dreams.

Often it is not the case. The guy that wanted to run away to the circus is actually the accountant type. And, the woman who wanted to iron would make a good C.E.O. or something.

The question though (I am specifically thinking of, "Where is your heart?") is a good one. "*Where is your heart?*"

Maybe I can emphasize this differently, "Where *is* your heart?"

Not that thumping thing in the center of your chest, but I am speaking of what has been called, "The heart of hearts."

What do you enjoy doing? What are your goals, hopes, dreams, and aspirations? What do you really like to do? What makes you get out of bed every morning?

Or, maybe I should put it another way, what would make you get out of bed every morning? (Other than that cup of coffee?) What are you invested in? I am not necessarily speaking about money, but what is your life invested in?

This question is one that God requires us to ask ourselves each time that we plan to give an offering. And, how we answer this question, "Where is your heart?" determines what we are willing to give to God.

We all know Deuteronomy 16:16-17. I will just read it here for you. We all know it by heart. We hear it six or seven times a year anyway.

**Deuteronomy 16:16-17** Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed. "Every man *shall give* as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given you.

It is in that phrase, "...as he is able..." that this question of our heart appears.

On the surface it may not seem like that. It is something that appears after a process. It is a little bit down the line.

What we are able to give depends upon where we have placed our priorities. And, where we have placed our priorities is where our heart is.

In business, and even in our personal budgets, those who are in charge of such things make sure that the resources of the company, or the family, are expended on the core missions of that company or family.

What is it that they really want to accomplish? What is it that they really want to make sure gets the necessary resources?

For a company it may be that marketing needs the resources so that they can get their name out there, and people will buy their product. For others, it might be research. They are not satisfied with the product that they put out there, so they want to put more money into making their product better, and coming up with other products that will serve their clientele, and also make more money for the firm.

Or, it may be that they feel that people are the most important part of their business. This is often the case in service industries. You get the best people, you give the best service and you get the most profit. It just depends on where their interests are; where

they want to go; where the company's heart is, so to speak.

For a family the places where we put our resources are obvious: Food, paying the mortgage, clothing, educating the kids, keeping our automobile in running order to be able to go to work, to make the money, to be able to buy food, clothing, and pay the mortgage.

Our priorities, however, are not always necessities. And, this is where we start going off the track. We can convince ourselves that certain things that are really not necessities **are** necessities. Food on the table, a roof over our heads, and clothing on our backs are necessities. Those are the things that are basic to life, and supporting life.

LCD television, DVDs, CDs, microwave ovens, computers, cell phones, PlayStations, X-Boxes, or whatever are not necessities. But, oftentimes we convince ourselves that they are. It just shows that we have swallowed the drivel of the advertisers hook, line, and sinker. They always advertise, whatever the product is—maybe the "clapper," off and on—to make you think that it is absolutely necessary to have one in your home.

But, is it necessary? Are we so lazy that we cannot get up and actually turn the thing off? Just to spend a little energy to do what needs to be done, rather than spending that sum of money on the thing—the clapper? Now, for some, that might be a necessity. If they do not get around very well, the clapper might be a good idea. But, if you do get around all right, and that \$29.95 could go for something much higher on the priority list, that is good.

All of this should lead back to asking ourselves, "what are our priorities?" What is important to us? What do we really need versus what do we want?

This is Luke's version of part of the Sermon on the Mount:

**Luke 12:31-34** But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you. Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

In these verses, Jesus succinctly explains what our priorities are—where our hearts should be.

He has just finished telling us, if we would have gone a little bit further back, that we are not to even worry about those things we consider necessities. But, what does He tell us to do within these verses?

He says, "Sell what you have, and give alms."

Part of our priorities is giving. And, in this "Sell what you have, and give alms," is not a command to give all our money away. That is not what He means. It is modified by what comes after it about the money bags.

He does not want us destitute. That is not what He is talking about.

It is instruction for us to spend our resources—whether it is time, or energy, or our concentration, even our money—on the things that really matter, that will move us toward the kingdom of God; ones that will treasure up for us the heavenly and the eternal things. That is where our heart should be in those heavenly, eternal things.

Isaiah, here in Isaiah 33, gives us a pretty good idea of what that treasure is.

**Isaiah 33:5-6** The LORD is exalted, for He dwells on high; He has filled Zion with justice and righteousness. Wisdom and knowledge will be the stability of your times, *And* the strength of salvation; The fear of the LORD *is* His treasure.

So, what is the treasure? The Fear of the Lord is. That is the thing where our heart should be. We sometimes quibble about the precise definition of the phrase, "Fear of the Lord," but a more general one, I think, is actually a bit better. It is more all encompassing.

Simply put, the fear of the Lord is understanding where we stand in relation to God, and then acting appropriately. It is understanding that God is vast, and we are minuscule. God is way up there, and we are way down here. God is eternal, all-powerful, all knowing, and we are worms.

And then, acting appropriately in the humility and fear of this awesome being.

One with the proper fear of the Lord puts God first, and His will, and His goals.

Years ago we were often exhorted that if our hearts were in God's Work we would give

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generously. This is a true statement. It is absolutely true.

But, it should not be an exhortation of coercion, but one of gentle reminder. This church, the Church of the Great God, this particular organization is presently not doing a stupendous, outstanding work toward the world, which Mr. Armstrong did for years and years. We have concentrated more on helping church members themselves prepare for the kingdom of God. And, this has over time begun to expand into a work going toward the world. It is still in its infant stages. It is still very small.

But, whether it is a work toward the church, or whether it is a work toward the world, it still needs to be supported. It, too, the smaller work toward the people of God, is still a work of God. Its focus is just a little different.

So, it is not outside the bounds to ask, "Is your heart in this work in feeding the flock? Are you—this is important—are **YOU** invested in the growth and salvation of your brethren, the rest of the body of Christ? Are you willing to put your money where your heart is?"

I hope this well used verse, as we close, has a somewhat deeper meaning for us now that we understand what the purposes of our heart should be.

I would like to read, as I close, II Corinthians 9:7.

**II Corinthians 9:7** *So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.*