

GOD'S WAY OR THE WORLD'S WAY

By John Gagliardi



As Aurelius Augustinus (Saint Augustine) writes in his 5th Century book *De Civitate Dei* (City of God), there are two ways we can go about our business - God's way and the world's way. He calls this eternal dichotomy "the city of God" and the "city of man".

Today, as "ministers in the marketplace", we are faced daily with stark choices - whether to work God's way, and make Godly decisions based on excellence and integrity, or to work the world's way, and bow to expediency and compromise - the "short cut to a quick buck". This tension is unrelenting and ubiquitous - the temptation is always there, and we have a never-ending battle to do things the right way for the right reasons - God's way.

Ed Silvano in his excellent book *Transformation - Change the Marketplace and You Change the World* - makes the point very well when he says that the only way for Christians to work in the marketplace effectively is to work "by and through the Spirit of God". Warning that any other choice is bound to have "negative and often tragic consequences", he draws an interesting parallel from the Bible.

He points out the differences in the way Moses and Solomon went about obeying God's command to build Him a "sanctuary" in which to dwell:

- Moses chose a Godly man, Bezalel, to build the Tabernacle of Meeting in the wilderness (Exodus 31: 1-11)
- Solomon chose a pagan temple builder, Hiram, king of Tyre, to build the Temple on Mount Moriah (1 Kings 5: 1-11).

Ed explains: "Both men successfully completed their tasks, but with diametrically opposite results: Moses drew closer to God, but Solomon backslid spiritually. How can men carrying on such sacred projects meet fates that were so different? What made Moses grow stronger and Solomon weaker as they implemented on Earth designs drafted by God in heaven? The answer is found in whom these men relied upon to carry out the tasks entrusted to them.

“Moses depended on Bezalel, an artisan and the first Biblical character reported to be filled with the Spirit of God (see Exod 31). Bezalel was a capable craftsman, but after being filled with the Spirit of God, he was able to do his job in the fullness of the power of God, rather than solely in his natural strength and abilities.

“On the other hand, Solomon hired pagan temple builders (mainly from his heathen friend Hiram, the king of Lebanon) to build God’s house. This was a most unfortunate and lethal spiritual error, since God is three times holy, and Solomon hired ungodly people to erect His earthly sanctuary ... they channelled evil into Solomon’s kingdom and eventually into his personal life as well.”

It is instructive to look further into these two characters, Bezalel and Hiram. Both were skilled artisans and craftsmen; and of the two, Hiram was undoubtedly the more experienced - but where Hiram relied totally on his worldly skills, Bezalel relied on God.

Bezalel is of the tribe of Judah and the grandson of Hur (his genealogy is stressed several times Exodus 31: 2, 35: 30, 38: 22 and 2 Chronicles 1: 5). He is Bezalel, son of Uri, son of Hur. It is a long and illustrious lineage - it was Hur who, with Aaron, helped hold up Moses’ arms during the battle against Amalek (Exodus 17: 12)..

In Jewish rabbinical tradition, it is also interesting that Hur reportedly laid down his life to sanctify the name of the Lord rather than participate in the sin of the golden calf (*Midrash Tanhuma*) in Exodus 32: 1-4. In a peculiarly Jewish circle of cause and effect, Bezalel is seen to be rewarded for his grandfather’s devotion and sacrifice, while the gold collected for the tabernacle is seen to atone for the gold collected for the golden calf.

While there is no direct Biblical evidence for this, it is a tantalising prospect - Bezalel is after all the first man in the Bible to be recorded as having been filled with the Spirit of God, and given the staggering responsibility of constructing the edifice that prefigures Jesus himself (John 1: 14).

It is significant that Bezalel was not only filled with the Spirit of God, but also with wisdom, understanding and knowledge, and “all manner of workmanship” (Exodus 31: 3; 35: 31). Again prefiguring Jesus, doesn’t this sound a lot like Isaiah 11: 1-3 - “There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of His roots. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of *wisdom* and *understanding* , the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of *knowledge* and of the fear of the Lord.”

Jesus Himself ,of course, is identified explicitly with wisdom in 1 Corinthians 1: 14, “...Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God”, while Proverbs 3: 19 and 20 tell us that the Lord founded the earth by *wisdom* , established the heavens by *understanding* and “by His *knowledge* the depths were broken up and clouds drop down their dew”.

Bezalel’s name in Hebrew, B’tzalel, means literally “in the shadow of God” (beZel El) - and under God’s covering and protection, he carried out one of the most sacred, prophetic and spiritually portentous projects in all of Scripture.

Contrast this with King Hiram of Tyre, architect of Solomon’s Temple. A pagan king, he had honed his skills building magnificent temples dedicated to Baal Melqart and Astarte (Asherah) in Tyre (some commentators even believe Solomon’s temple was based on

Hiram's design for the magnificent Temple of Melqart, which among other things featured two great columns at the front, one of gold and the other covered with precious stones).

Hiram had built a strong trading relationship with the Israelites going back to the time of David, further cemented with a commercial treaty with Solomon to exchange building skills and material (notably cedar and cypress wood) and other luxury goods, for Solomon's silver, farm products and "food for the royal household (20,000 cors each of wheat and barley and 20,000 baths of olive oil each year).

It is no surprise that Solomon turned to his friend and trading partner Hiram when God told him to build Him a temple. The Bible doesn't tell us whether Solomon first tried to find a Godly man to design and build the temple, but if he did, he didn't try hard enough. Hiram offered the easy and quick option, the "worldly" option, and Solomon took it.

Solomon used Hiram to build him both the Temple and his own palace, and even co-operated with him on other great projects, such as building and manning ships at Ezion Geber (1 Kings 9: 26-28) to bring back from Ophir and other places "gold, silver, ivory, apes and baboons" (1 Kings 10: 22).

During Hiram's reign, with strategic help from both David and Solomon, Tyre grew from a satellite of Sidon into the pre-eminent Phoenician city. Israel under Solomon and Tyre under Hiram combined to fill the power vacuum left by Egypt's decline. Solomon and Hiram forged powerful commercial treaties to expand trade into Egypt, Arabia and Mesopotamia.

In the natural, Solomon's decision to rely on Hiram made all the sense in the world; spiritually, it was a disaster. By mixing more and more with pagans, compromising the faith he had inherited from his father David, Solomon progressively backslid and finally started to marry pagan women and introduced their religions into Israel:

"But King Solomon loved many foreign women ...when Solomon was old his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites" (1 Kings 11: 1, 4 and 5).

It is of more than passing interest that the Bible specifically singles out the Sidonian goddess Ashtoreth - the very same deity for which his good friend and trading partner Hiram built a magnificent temple in Tyre.

The Bible gives us a dire warning that Solomon would have been well served to have heeded - the law of sowing and reaping: "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that also will he reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life" (Galatians 6: 7 and 8).

Solomon, in spite of a stellar start, finished badly; he "sowed to his flesh", selecting the pagan Hiram, and reaping exactly what the Bible warned - corruption. Moses on the other hand chose wisely in selecting Bezalel, sowing to the Spirit, and choosing a man filled with the Spirit of God.

Moses succeeded in leading the Israelites right to the border of the Promised Land, and has gone down as one of the great heroes of faith. Solomon ended his life in tragedy and backslidden sin, leaving a legacy of rebellion and a divided nation.

It's not how you start - it's how you finish that matters. Moses started badly, murdering an Egyptian and escaping into the wilderness to avoid taking responsibility for his sin. But he ended well. Solomon started well - given a prosperous and powerful kingdom by his father David, and being endowed with supernatural wisdom (1 Kings 4: 30), but he squandered this rich heritage and ended as a sad and pathetic footnote in Biblical history.

Putting God first, as Moses did, is what it's all about. ***“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6: 33).***