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Christian

1983

The  
High Privilege  
and  
Responsibility  
of being  
**STEWARDS**  
of  
**GOD**

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# CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP

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## STEWARDS OF GOD

**Scripture Text:** *"Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy"* (1 Cor. 4:1,2).

Christian stewardship is much more than giving a portion of our material possessions to the Lord's work. Few Biblical terms state so comprehensively the task and calling of a Christian in the world as being called "a steward of God"!

In Biblical usage, a steward occupied the position of highest responsibility in the household of his lord. He was entrusted with the management of his master's possessions. Abraham's steward, most likely Eliezer, was in charge of "everything Abraham owned" (Gen. 24:2). In Jesus' parable of the vineyard (Matt. 20:1-16), the steward was in charge of paying the labourers. In the parable of the unjust steward (Matt. 18), the steward managed the very considerable possessions and resources of the master.

Every Christian is a steward of high responsibility in God's household. Paul would have himself and those associated with him to be regarded as "servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God". A Christian steward has received a sacred trust. The above passage designates the content of that trust to be the "mysteries of God". Within the household of God and in the world, these "revelations of God" are to be cared for, and shared according to the directives of God. Other passages of Scripture indicate that believers have been entrusted

with—life, gifts and abilities, opportunities and material possessions! In their management, they are called to accountability before God.

From the beginning of creation, man was made a vice-regent of God; he was called to subdue the earth and rule over it to the glory of God (Gen. 1, 2). Increasingly, progressively, and climactically, God, in Christ, revealed to man magnificent glimpses into His purposes and plans on the earth. These became a part of man's trust. It is his glorious responsibility to be a steward of God, a custodian of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge received in Christ!

"It is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy", writes Paul. This calls for the following characteristics:

**Accountability:**

A steward is not free to do his own thing in the world; he is directly and ultimately accountable to God for the way in which he has fulfilled his responsibilities before God.

**Dependability:**

It is not the brilliance that a steward displays in the exercise of his gifts that God looks for, or the way in which he expends the energies he has received, or the way in which he faces the opportunities before him. A steward will be judged according to his faithfulness in fulfilling the purposes God intended for him.

**Availability:**

A steward is always a man under orders! God's kingdom is worldwide. Because of his availability, Paul was sent all over Europe and Asia Minor; a Carey was sent to India; a Hudson Taylor to China; a Livingstone to Africa.

## **STEWARDS OF THE WORD OF GOD**

**Scripture Text:** *"I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, that is the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations*

*but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:25-27).*

**Christian stewardship involves receiving as well as giving.** All we are and have—has been given to us by the grace of God. Any understanding of Christian stewardship must begin here.

Among the many gifts received to be administered under Christ, is preeminently the Word of God! In the above passage, Paul expresses his stewardship of the Gospel to the Gentiles, to the end that men might be complete in Christ. Both the burden and the joy of that responsibility motivate Paul; "woe is me if I do not preach the Gospel", he writes to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 9:16); "I am eager to preach the Gospel", he states to the Romans (Rom. 1:15).

What is entailed in being a faithful steward of the Word of God? It means preaching or communicating a Christocentric Gospel. When Paul defines the stewardship of God's grace given to him, he defines it as preaching to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ (Eph. 3:2,8).

It involves a God-centered Gospel. Paul defines the magnitude of his task in making known God's grand scheme—His eternal purposes in Christ (Eph. 3:10).

It means maintaining a pure Gospel among men. The Gospel is a deposit which needs to be guarded from deterioration; it is not to be tampered with (2 Cor. 4:2); it is not to be corrupted (2 Cor. 2:17; 2 Tim. 2:2).

It requires proclaiming the whole range of the Word of God. The Word must be faithfully, fully, and completely taught. Exhorting the elders at Ephesus, Paul testifies, "I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable" (Acts 20:20).

Stewardship of the Gospel very decisively incorporates proclaiming it to all men. "Go and make disciples of all nations", says our Lord (Matt. 28:19).

**Finally, it is absolutely essential that a faithful steward appropriate the Word of God and its riches for his own life.** Ezekiel the prophet proclaimed the Word of God only after he had opened his mouth and eaten the scroll, filling his body (Ezek. 3:3). Jeremiah the prophet



refers to his own faithfulness in the words, "Thy Words were found and I ate them, and Thy Words became for me a joy and delight of my heart" (Jer. 15:16). Paul exercised himself in obedience to the Word lest, he writes, "after I have preached to others I myself should be disqualified" (1 Cor. 9:27).

## **STEWARDS OF GIFTS AND OPPORTUNITIES GIVEN BY GOD**

**Scripture Texts:** "As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Pet. 4:10).

*"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited me in; naked, and you clothed me; I was sick, and you visited me; I was in prison, and you came to Me" (Matt. 25:35, 36).*

It is the consistent testimony of the Scriptures that every Christian has received a special gift to be used and developed for the good of the whole. God's gifts vary according to His manifold grace! Every Christian is accountable for the way in which he exercises his gift in the service of others, whether it is the gift of speaking, or the gift of music, or the gift of administration, or the gift of being helpful—all are to be placed into the service of Christ!

As Bach, the great composer, penned the words, "to the glory of God" on his compositions, so we need to dedicate each of our gifts to Christ.

Because Christian gifts vary from one person to another, we need each other in order to grow to maturity. God desires believers to be interdependent. Paul, therefore, sums up the purpose of Christ's giving of gifts to men with the words, "for the equipping of the saints, for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12).

Whenever Christians take their stewardship of personal gifts seriously, a virile active growing Christian community emerges!

But not only are we stewards of our personal gifts, we are stewards of our total lives. Every

day we live is a gift from God. Every moment is an opportunity provided by Him.

**Two kinds of opportunities receive high priority in the Scriptures.** One is the opportunity to minister to the poor, the oppressed, and the suffering. No word calls us to a clearer accountability than the word of Christ on the day of judgment: "for I was hungry, and you gave me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite me in; naked, and you did not clothe me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit me" (Matt. 25:42, 43).

The other opportunity of highest priority is the privilege of communicating with our Lord. We must exercise in sacred trust that greatest of all privileges in the Christian life! The practice of Christ is our pattern. His busy, loving ministry among men was interspersed liberally with times with God: "but He Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray" (Luke 5:16). Having our regular quiet times with God is fundamental in abiding in Him and following Him in discipleship.

## **STEWARDS OF OUR MATERIAL POSSESSIONS**

**Scripture Texts:** *"Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, Who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed" (1 Tim. 6:17-19; cf. Mark 12:41-44).*

The Bible has a great deal to say about riches and material possessions. God has placed an abundance of resources into the world to be enjoyed and used by men to the glory of God and to the service of mankind.

Wealth, riches and possessions can be very important in the kingdom of God; they can also be most destructive. When the desire to lay up earthly treasures captures the heart of man—wealth becomes a god and a curse. Jesus warns us with the words, "You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24). Likewise, to those whose lives are motivated by excessive

concerns for clothing, food and shelter, Jesus says, "seek first the kingdom of God and its righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6). Life does not consist in the abundance of things a man possesses!

It is equally true that wealth can be used to lay up treasures in heaven! Paul instructs rich Christians to use their wealth to do good and to share with those who are in need. Wealth is to be seen as a trust from God; every Christian is called to be a steward of all that he possesses. Through such stewardship, he makes investments for eternity.

John Wesley once said, "earn all you can, save all you can, give all you can". To that maxim, John Wesley added a simple lifestyle so that he would be able to give a great deal to the Lord's work.

One of the finest expressions of Christian stewardship of things comes from the reflective mind of David Livingstone, missionary to Africa: "I will place no value on anything I possess save in relation to the kingdom of God. If anything will advance the kingdom of God it shall be given away or kept, only as by the giving or keeping of it I shall promote the glory of Him to whom I owe all my hopes in time and eternity" (from *Effective Workers in Needy Fields*, Student Voluntary Movement, 1902, p. 28). Wealth and riches can, therefore, be a power within the kingdom of God. **Under the direction of the Holy Spirit, the believer can translate his wealth in an exciting way into action:**

- he can participate in world evangelism
- he can assist in training men and women in Christian schools for Christian life and service
- he can help feed the hungry and clothe the naked in the world
- he can assist in caring for the sick, the handicapped and the aged.

The tithe and first-fruits to be given to God, are not to be seen as devoting *a part* of what one possesses to God. Rather, they are concrete symbols that *everything* we have, we have received from our Lord and it belongs to Him. The fact that our Lord watched people make contributions to the temple ministry indicates His deep interest in the stewardship of our



possessions.

Jesus wants us to experience the joy and the blessing of generous and intelligent giving. He urges us to invest our possessions and our treasures in His great enterprise on earth. He loves a cheerful giver! ■

## Further Study

*The Practice of the Presence of God*, by Brother Lawrence (East Ridge Press)

*Stewards of God*, by Milo Kauffman (Herald Press)

*The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, by Henry Scougal (Bethany Fellowship)

*Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, by Ronald Sider (Inter-Varsity Press)

*Living More Simply*, by Ronald Sider (Inter-Varsity Press)

"A Steward", *The Preacher's Portrait*, by John R. W. Stott (Eerdmans)

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\* An abridgement of this brochure appeared in the October 1982 issue of *Decision* magazine.

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