

# Magazine

## What Is Stewardship?

Steve Reeves

Every Christian is a steward. As simple as that sounds, it may not always be at the forefront of our thinking. When asked the question, “What is a Christian?”, many might say, “a believer in Christ, one who has obeyed the gospel, a disciple of Christ, one who is saved, or one who has been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.” Yet how many would respond by saying something like “a Christian is a steward of the grace of God.” After having spoken of a life lived toward God, one full of prayer, love, and hospitality; Peter states, “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Pet. 4:10).

The concept of stewardship, the state of being a steward, is seen in Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. Adam was given a garden to “dress and to keep,” to manage (Gen. 2:15). John was on the isle of Patmos and was told, “What thou seest, write in a book and send it to the seven churches” (Rev. 1:11). This was his charge as a stewardship.

The word “stewardship” is found three times in the KJV and all in the account of the “unrighteous steward” of Luke 16:1-13. Besides this passage, the ASV also uses the word in 1 Corinthians 9:17. Here Paul states that he has a “stewardship intrusted” to him. Other versions translate this word “stewardship” as a “dispensation,” “management,” “trust,” or “commission.” The word “steward” is found thirteen times in the KJV and fourteen times in the ASV, but its concept is found in many other places in the

Scripture where the same words in the original languages are translated as “chamberlain,” “governor,” “treasurer,” “official in charge,” or “man in charge of the palace.” In the NT the original word (*oikonomos*) denoted the manager of a household or estate (Vine). The English word “steward” comes from the Anglo Saxon *stiweward*—*stige*, a hall, and *weard*, a keeper (Webster).

### THAT WHICH IS NOT YOUR OWN

The very definition of the word shows that stewardship is the managing of something that is not our own (we are not the *owners*). This was the application that our Lord made when he finished the parable of the unrighteous steward and said, “And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another’s, who will give you that which is your own?” (Luke 16:12). We are not the owners of our money, says Jesus. It is given to us only to manage. The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, felt that they could do with it whatever they wanted, mocked at this idea of stewardship (Luke 16:14).

### Special Issue: It Is Required In Stewards, That a Man Be Found Faithful

### THREE PRINCIPLES OF STEWARDSHIP

**1. God is the creator and owner of all things.** “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). As a result, all things belong to him. The psalmist states, “The earth is Jehovah’s, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein” (Ps. 24:1). Again he writes of God who says, “If I were hungry, I would not

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Subscription Rates

- \$24.00 Per Year
Single Copies — \$2.00 each
Foreign Subscriptions — \$25.00
Bulk Rates —
\$1.75 per subscription per month

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Subscriptions, renewals and other correspondence should be sent to Truth Magazine, P.O. Box 9670, Bowling Green, KY 42102.

Book orders should be sent to Truth Bookstore, P.O. Box 9670, Bowling Green, KY 42102. Phone: 1-800-428-0121.

Web Address: www.truthmagazine.com

Postmaster: Send change of address to P.O. Box 9670, Bowling Green, KY 42102.

Truth Magazine (ISSN 1538-0793) is published twice a month by Guardian of Truth Foundation, P.O. Box 9670, Bowling Green, KY 42102. Postage paid at Bowling Green, KY and additional

Stewardship of the Gospel

Chris Reeves

A "steward" is a person who has been put in charge (entrusted) by a master to watch over the possessions of the master. A "steward" is a guardian who has been given a trust. The role of a steward is not common today, but it was very common in Bible times (Gen. 15:2; 43:16, 19; 44:1, 4; 1 Kings 16:9; Dan. 1:11, 16; Matt. 20:8; Luke 8:3; 16:1-8). A Christian today is a steward and has been put in charge by God over many important possessions in this life — time, talents, money, material things, family, fellow-man, our own souls, the church and the gospel. In this lesson we will study about the Christian as a steward of the gospel.

Paul and the rest of the apostles were stewards of the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, Son of God (Mark 1:1). They had been "approved of God to be entrusted with the gospel" (1 Thess. 2:4). Paul wrote, "For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of; for necessity is laid upon me; for woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel. For if I do this of mine own will, I have a reward: but if not of mine own will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me" (1 Cor. 9:16-17). God had entrusted Paul with the gospel as a steward (Rom. 1:1, 9; 2:16; 15:16, 19-20; 16:25; Eph. 3:6-7). The gospel was God's prized and precious possession given to Paul and others. It was then and is today, to be guarded with all care. Paul described the gospel as, "the gospel of the glory of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust" (1 Tim. 1:11). Like Paul and the apostles, Christians today are also stewards of the gospel. We do not reveal the gospel as the apostles did, but we are entrusted with what has already been revealed in the New Testament Scriptures. We sing the song, "Into our hands the gospel is given, into our hands is given the light. Haste let us carry God's precious message, Bringing the erring back to the right."

We know that Christians today are stewards of the gospel because of what Paul wrote to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2. He wrote, "And the things which thou hast heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." Paul entrusted Timothy with the gospel. Timothy, a Christian, in turn entrusted faithful men with the gospel. Then, faithful men entrusted others with the gospel. Christians are the "faithful men" and the "others" who Paul wrote about here. The word translated "faithful" (Gr. pistos) here means trusted, reliable, trustworthy. The word translated "men" (Gr. anthropos) refers to both men and women. All Christians today have been entrusted with the gospel, and we demonstrate our stewardship in the following ways:

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# Stewards of Time

## 1 Corinthians 4:1-2

**Edward T. Rangel**

“This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy” (1 Cor. 4:1-2, ESV). The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian brethren and instructed them how they should view the ministers of the gospel. Ministers should be regarded as faithful servants to God and faithful in the handling and delivering of the gospel. In the same breath ministers are admonished that they, as stewards, are required to be trustworthy. Found trustworthy by whom? While it is important to have a good reputation Paul says that ultimately the Lord Jesus is the one who will judge.

A steward of the gospel should be found faithful in how he carries out his duties. It is evident that the main point of the passage is in reference to the gospel but other areas can be included. Being a good steward in reference to our money, talents, family, bodies, time, etc., should be a part of our study in stewardship. A steward is a person who is entrusted with the goods and affairs of another. In Bible times stewards were employed either as freemen or slaves to oversee and administer the affairs for the master for the benefit of the master. He did not answer to the other workers of the house but only to the master. For this reason his performance as a steward either brought honor or disgrace upon his boss. If, and when, a good steward was found, the master had a great possession, but if the steward was found to be unfaithful and irresponsible he was punished. Joseph is a great example of what a steward is; an overseer of Potiphar’s house in whom the master had full and complete confidence (Gen. 39:1-6). The narrative tells us that later on, because of Potiphar’s wife, Joseph was found unworthy as a steward and was cast into prison. As Christians we are to see ourselves as stewards for God has so appointed us over his goods, i.e., health, talents, body, time, etc. (Matt. 25:14-30).

Those that have obeyed the gospel have been purchased with the blood of Christ (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23); therefore we no longer serve ourselves but our Master. No one forced us to obey the gospel; therefore when we willingly obeyed the form of doctrine we willingly became servants or stewards of the Lord (1 Cor. 1:9; Rom. 6:17). This responsibility is given to all who have obeyed the gospel of Christ (Matt. 25:15-15; Mark 13:34). We are to manage our talents, money (Luke 16:1-17), and time (1 Cor. 4:1-2; Col. 4:5), among other blessings. Being stewards over things entrusted to our care is an immense responsibility. God expects his overseers to manage his blessings in

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a wise manner with the warning that one day we shall give an accounting of our stewardship (Mark 13:34-37).

In the kingdom of God every office from the eldership to the member of the church has a responsibility in stewardship. In the first century church even the apostles had the duty of being accountable for their actions (1 Cor. 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:4; Eph. 3:1-4, 8). Then and now elders are included in this list (Tit. 1:7), gospel preachers (1 Cor. 9:16-17), and every individual member of the church (1 Pet. 4:10; Rom. 12:3-8). This command of stewardship teaches that all are under the divine command and authority of the Master (Mark 13:34; Matt. 28:18; Col. 3:17), and he has given us a job to perform (Mark 13:34; John 9:4; Eph. 2:10) as well as being expected to use our ability to bless and honor our Master in the faithful and wise execution of our talents and blessings (Matt. 24:15-17; 1 Pet. 4:10-11; Eph. 3:21).

In reference to the wise use of our time or better yet the Lord's time, the minister of the gospel heads the list of stewardship (1 Cor. 4:-3). Paul exhorted Timothy to

... give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee (1 Tim. 4:13-16).

In order to do these things the minister needs to be a wise overseer of time. A preacher cannot grow if he is not dedicating enough time to properly studying God's word. He cannot effectively teach others if the evangelist is not taking time to prepare effectual lessons. Those who continue to preach the same lessons over and over with a slight change in the titles are not truly preparing themselves nor are they teaching others as God commands. It is not possible to rightfully exhort others to leave sin if the minister has not taken enough time to prepare himself. The New American Standard Version renders 1 Timothy 4:15 as: "Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them." This passage is loaded with the command that the minister needs to dedicate a fair amount of time for his preparation. In addition to these duties the preacher is to: be a herald of the truth (Matt. 3:1; 4:17), a declarer of the truth (Acts 13:32), speak boldly (Acts 9:29; 13:46), warn every man in all wisdom (Col. 1:28; 1 Thess. 5:14), beg on behalf of Christ for men to be reconciled to him (2 Cor. 5:20; Eph. 4:1), argue and contend with false teachers (Acts 9:29; Jude 3), reason and debate (Acts 17:2, 17; 18:19), defend the gospel (Phil. 1:16; 1 Cor. 9:3), refute those who contradict God's word (Tit. 1:9), stop mouths (Tit. 1:13), and to announce the entire counsel of God (Acts 20:27). This takes time and the minister of the Lord needs to utilize his time wisely!

Every preacher needs to set aside a time and place where he can seriously study and prepare himself for the work of the evangelist. Many ministers have an office in their home and spend a lot of time at home; this set-up has some positive and negative attributes. Some of the positive points of having an office at home can be: the preacher can work at any hour of the day or night; he can escape the constant interruptions of the telephone ringing and people coming in just to "chat"; he also avoids fulfilling the role of church secretary, church janitor, and church taxi. Some of the negative aspects can be: dad is always home and is viewed as never really working, ends up being a babysitter, constantly being interrupted by the children and spouse, etc. Whether the preacher decides to have his office in his home or the church building, the point is that the minister needs to find a place where he can effectively study and prepare himself to perform the duties of an evangelist. Whether this means that the family needs to be educated that dad really works and does not need to be interrupted or educating the church that the preacher is not the secretary, taxi, or janitor, the fact remains that the preacher needs to use his time wisely as a good, faithful, and trustworthy steward of time.

This does not mean that the preacher only studies and preaches. His still has an obligation to do personal work, visit the elderly and infirm, and a host of other things, but this applies to all Christians as well (Jas. 1:27; Gal. 6:10). There will be a day when our Lord will require us to give an accounting of our stewardship. Let us pray and resolve to be good, faithful, and wise stewards of time. Colossians 4:5: "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time."<sup>1</sup>

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Scott Vifquain, class notes on 1 and 2 Corinthians, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. Steve Wolfgang, class notes. Wayne Partain, article, "Evangelistas aprobados por Dios 2 Timoteo 2:15."

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# Stewards of the Tongue

Donnie V. Rader

Christians are stewards of their money, time, children, material possessions, and their tongues. Being a servant of God affects the way one talks. The Psalmist wrote, “I will guard my ways, Lest I sin with my tongue; I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle, While the wicked are before me” (Ps. 39:1).

There are many ways one may misuse his tongue and fail to be a good steward. Lying, cursing, flattery, grumbling, and complaining are all abuses of the tongue. However, we will focus more on anger, gossip, and other such misuses that relate to our dealing with one another.

## THE TONGUE IS A DANGER

**1. The tongue is never fully tamed.** James said, “But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison” (Jas. 3:8). This does not mean that no one can control his tongue. Rather, it means that we must keep control of it, for it can’t be trusted. Like a horse that is broke which must still have a bridle (cf. Ps. 32:9), so the tongue can’t be trusted. Even the most mature Christian must continually work on controlling the tongue.

**2. We must give an account for every word we speak.** Jesus said, “But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matt. 12:36-37).

**3. We can easily be guilty of what we say is true of others.** We may point a finger and accuse others of gossip, while we may be doing the same. We accuse others of being ugly in their speech and tone, yet we might be no different. The problem is that it is easier to see the faults of others than it is to see our own.

**4. We can sin with the tongue.** When the Bible gives a “catalog of sin” there will be a number of the sins that are problems of the tongue like “maliciousness, . . . strife, . . . whisperers, . . . backbiters, . . . boasters” (Rom. 1:29-31; cf. Gal. 5:20; 2 Cor. 12:20). Our tongues can cause us to lose our souls.

## WHAT THE TONGUE CAN DO

**1. We can sin against a brother with the tongue.** While there are many ways we can sin against a brother (Matt. 18:15-17), the tongue, no doubt, is a prominent way that is done.

**2. We can slander another.** James warns about speaking evil of one another, thereby becoming a judge of the law (Jas. 4:11-12). The Proverbs warn that a fool spreads slander (10:18). Slanderers are those who are given to “‘accusing falsely,’ . . . who are given to finding fault with the demeanor and conduct of others and spreading their innuendos and criticisms in the church” (*Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, BibleSoft).

**3. We can be gossips and busybodies.** Paul was concerned that some would be idle and “wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not” (1 Tim. 5:13). Vine defines *busybody* as, “to be working round about, instead of at one’s own business . . . signifies to take more pains than enough about a thing, to waste one’s labor, to be meddling with, or bustling about, other people’s matters. . . . This may be produced in a free rendering: ‘some who are not busied in their own business, but are overbusied in that of others.’”

**4. We can backbite.** The Gentiles were condemned for backbiting (Rom. 1:30). Backbiting means to speak

## How Can We Prevent Problems With the Tongue?

- Exercise restraint.
- Be careful what you say to and about others.
- Be careful how you choose your words.
- Be careful what you repeat.
- Give others the benefit of the doubt.

against or speak evil of another. Such mismanagement of the tongue stirs trouble for ourselves and others (cf. Prov. 25:23).

### THE EFFECT THE TONGUE CAN HAVE

1. The tongue can destroy a neighbor (Prov. 11:9).
2. The tongue can reveal secrets (Prov. 11:3; 20:19).
3. The tongue can sow strife (Prov. 16:28).
4. The tongue can separate friends (Prov. 16:28; 17:9).
5. The tongue can destroy a church (Gal. 5:15).
6. The tongue can be like poison (Jas. 3:8).
7. The tongue can be like a fire (Jas. 3:6).

### HOW CAN WE PREVENT PROBLEMS WITH THE TONGUE?

**1. Exercise restraint.** The proverb writer said, “In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, But he who restrains his lips is wise” (Prov. 10:19). “He who has knowledge spares his words, And a man of understanding is of a calm spirit. Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace; When he shuts his lips, he is considered perceptive” (Prov. 17:27-28). We do not have to say all that we think or would like to say.

**2. Be careful what you say to and about others.** What you tell may be confidential. What you say could be taken differently than you intend. What you say may be repeated and quoted. “A talebearer reveals secrets, But he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter” (Prov. 11:13; cf. 29:11).

**3. Be careful how you choose your words.** Make sure you convey what you want to say. Use some tact. “A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger” (Prov. 15:1). Think before your speak. The proverbs say, “The heart of the righteous studies how to answer, But the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil” (Prov. 15:28). Again,

“There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, But the tongue of the wise promotes health” (Prov. 12:18). Watch your timing. “And a word spoken in due season, how good it is” (Prov. 15:23).

**4. Be careful what you repeat.** Remember that there are two side to the story. “The first one to plead his cause seems right, Until his neighbor comes and examines him” (Prov. 18:17). We must not jump to conclusions. “He who answers a matter before he hears it, It is folly and shame to him” (Prov. 18:13).

**5. Give others the benefit of the doubt.** Paul said that love “believes all things” (1 Cor. 13:7). Albert Barnes comments, “But it must mean, that in regard to the conduct of others, there is a disposition to put the best construction on it; to believe that they may be actuated by good motives, and that they intend no injury; and that there is a willingness to suppose, as far as can be, that what is done is done consistently with friendship, good feeling, and virtue.”<sup>1</sup> Adam Clarke wrote that love “Is ever ready to believe the best of every person, and will credit no evil of any but on the most positive evidence.”<sup>2</sup> We must ask ourselves if all the evidence is in or could there be another explanation.

Indeed, we are stewards of our tongues. We will give an account for how we use them. Everyone of us can work harder at being careful about what he says, how he says it, and to whom he says it.

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes*, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1997 by BibleSoft.

<sup>2</sup> Adam Clarke, *Adam Clarke Commentary*, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1996 by BibleSoft.

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# Do I Consider My Job a Stewardship?

**Brian Price**

Our title poses an interesting question. Have I ever considered my job as a personal stewardship? Many view their work as nothing more than a place to collect the largest paycheck for the least amount of work as possible. It will be our effort in this study to examine some Bible principles that demonstrate how we are to be good stewards at our place of work.

The word “steward” as seen in passages like Luke 16 comes from the Greek word *oikonomos*. By definition it means an overseer or a manager. It is not unusual then to see the word being used in relationship to the work of elders in Titus 1:7. Now initially one may respond by saying, “Well I’m not the ‘manager’ at work and thus I have no real stewardship.” However, though I may not carry a specific title, eventually any work or responsibility that is passed down to me becomes mine to manage and, therefore becomes my stewardship. In Ephesians 6:5-9 the apostle Paul encourages servants to accept the stewardship granted unto them by their masters. He reminds them to do that work as to the Lord and not unto men. Some have argued that a passage like this is not applicable because it addresses the servant to master relationship, which is different than the employer to employee relationship. Though I grant that the relationships are different in many facets, notice verse 8 of the context. Paul states, “Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, *whether he be bond or free.*” The principles hold true regardless of the kind of relationship that is being addressed. When I receive a responsibility to fulfill at work, I must not give it “eye service” as trying to simply appease my employer but I should embrace that obligation with the mindset of a steward who wants to manage all aspects of that task to see that it is done properly. In the remainder of our study, let us consider some things that will hinder us from viewing our work as a stewardship as well as some things that will motivate us to honor the stewardship we have been given.

## **HINDERED BY A WORLDLY MINDSET**

When on the job it is easy to fall prey to the attitudes and influences of those around us. In the United States it seems that everyday we fall deeper and deeper into the victim and dependency mind set. What I mean by that is that more and more people are beginning to believe that everything is owed to them. I can be the most slothful unproductive creature on earth and yet still demand what I’m convinced is rightfully due me. While others may rob and steal by their lack of dedication and stewardship over their work obligations, the Christian must resist this attitude. Paul stated in Ephesians 4:28, “Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with *his* hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.” The Christian must do that which is good even when those around him may not. While the world may think that nothing is their responsibility, we must walk uprightly in the sight of men and fulfill our stewardship while on the job.

## **HINDERED BY UNFULFILLING WORK**

Though my desire would be that everyone find a job that he enjoys, that might not always be the case. The temptation to fail in my stewardship at work elevates when I’m not all that thrilled about being there. In Colossians 3:22-23 Paul again addresses the servant to master relationship. In that context he uses the phrase, “obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God.” Now I understand perfectly that no servant or employee is obligated to fulfill some work that places him in contradiction with the will of God (Acts 5:29). The commendation that Paul gives in that passage implies that there may be some work obligations that we would rather not do, yet the obligation still holds true. It must be done “heartily as unto the Lord” whether we enjoy it or not. These are the times where Christians can really shine their light. To accept the obligations of a task that is unwanted with the same fervor as work we enjoy, will demonstrate how we appreciate our stewardship at the

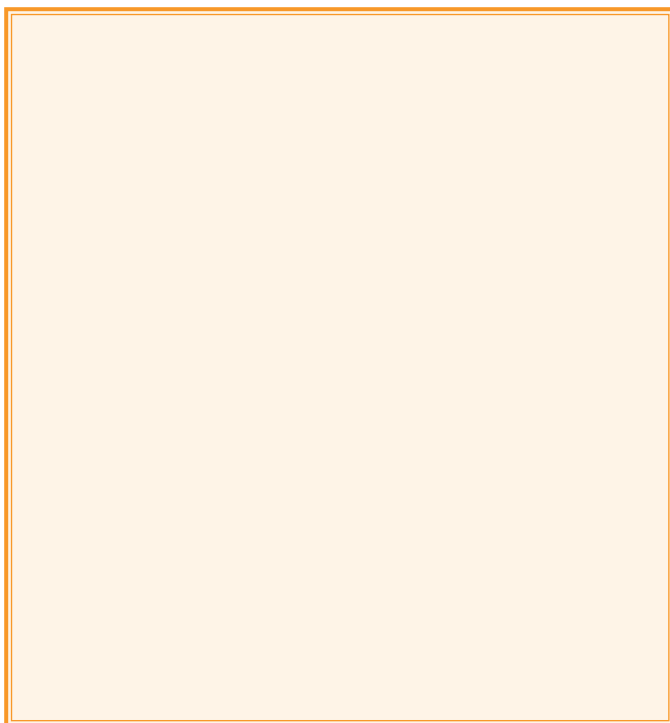
workplace. Rather than allowing your disappointment hinder you into a mediocre performance, use the opportunity to show those around you that as a child of God we accept all obligations with the same devotion and fervor.

### **HINDERED BY A LACK OF RESPECT AT THE WORKPLACE**

Initially let us understand that God has never approved of disrespectful behavior. In the marriage relationship, in the relationship of child to parent, to the elderly, to the young, etc., disrespect has always been wrong (Eph. 5 and 6; 1 Tim. 5). Unfortunately it is quite common to see a lack of respect demonstrated in the workplace. Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 6:1, “Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and *his* doctrine be not blasphemed.” Though it may be hard to respect my employer because of his character, it is not a license to be disrespectful. Again it may be commonplace by the worldly mind to show contempt and dishonor towards those in authority but it should not be so for the Christian. If we allow our minds to become filled with spite and disrespect it will ultimately affect the way we handle our workplace responsibilities. Simply put, we must fulfill our work regardless of whether or not our boss is a likeable character.

### **HELPED BY REMEMBERING THAT MY NAME WILL BE ASSOCIATED WITH MY WORK**

As we begin to examine a couple of things that will help us fulfill our stewardship at work, let us begin by remembering that my name will be associated with the work I accomplish. I don’t state this in some self-serving



way but in the sense of reputation. Proverbs 22:1 teaches that a “good name is better than riches.” If I will stop to consider that my reputation is at stake when my name is associated with something, then I will be more apt to fulfill those obligations appropriately. When my name is spoken of around the workplace I should be known as one who will accept my responsibilities and fulfill them. Because I don’t want my name associated with anything that is incomplete or unfulfilled, I will be more accepting of my management over the tasks at hand.

### **HELPED BY A MINDSET THAT EMBRACES RESPONSIBILITY**

I am reminded of the description in Nehemiah 4:6 where the people “had a mind to work.” It will help us tremendously in fulfilling our stewardships if we first set our mind to it. Rather than always looking for someone else to be responsible, we will become greater stewards when we embrace our opportunities. Rather than walk into the workplace every day hoping that there will be nothing to do, approach each day with “a mind to work.” Yes, all of us need a brief respite from time to time from the rigors of our job, but we should never let it be an everyday occurrence. When will the field be plowed (Prov. 20:4) if we never set our minds to accept the stewardship to get it done? Don’t run away each time the boss is looking for someone to accept some responsibility on a given task. Embrace the opportunity and demonstrate how Christians handle the tasks to which they are stewards.

### **HELPED BY REMEMBERING THAT ALL GOOD THINGS COME FROM THE HAND OF GOD**

One of the greatest motivators while on the job should be the constant reminder of how blessed I am to have a job. When we leave behind the hindering worldly mind set of being owed a job, and remind ourselves that God is blessing my life with the opportunity to provide for my needs and the needs of my family, we will be better stewards in the workplace. Have you ever stopped to consider that constant griping and complaining about your work could actually be seen as a complaint against the manner in which God is blessing your life (Matt. 6:25-34)? If we walk into work on a regular basis with a thankful heart (Col. 3:15), we will have little difficulty in honoring the stewardship of the work that is set before me.

Though we may never climb the corporate ladder to great heights, we all have stewardship of the work that is set before us. Whether our given tasks are small or great, may we always fulfill our stewardship “as unto the Lord.” Let us remind ourselves that how we handle the mammon in life will be an indication of how well we will handle our spiritual stewardships as well (Luke 16:11).

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# Stewards of Civil Government

Steve Deaton

Paul said a man must be found faithful as a steward (1 Cor. 4:2). Hence, we know that faithfulness is of primary importance to God. It is part of the fruit of the Spirit, a reflection of walking in the Spirit (Gal. 5:22).

A steward is a manager<sup>1</sup> or superintendent<sup>2</sup> of a household. Paul was a steward of the “mysteries of God” meaning he was a caretaker of the gospel (1 Cor. 4:1). As such, he was required to be faithful in his handling of the gospel (1 Cor. 4:2; cf. 2 Cor. 2:17).

The principle that “it is required in stewards that one be found faithful” may be applied to any area of life. One who is given stewardship of a church, family, or some occupation, must be found faithful (1 Pet. 5:1-4; Eph. 6:4-9). In whatever sphere we have a charge to keep, we must do it true to God’s will. This includes our duty as citizens of our nation; stewards of the civil government.

## HISTORY OF GOVERNMENT IN THE BIBLE

Bible history reveals government was simple at first. It was synonymous with the first family, Adam, Eve, and their children. There was a structure of authority with Adam at the head (Gen. 2:16). As time passed and men multiplied on earth, government grew more complex. Eventually, we read of cities, lands, and kingdoms with leaders and rulers (Gen. 4:16-17; 10:1-5, 19-20, 31-32; 14:1-2). Some may presume government developed purely because of man’s actions. However, the Bible is clear that God established governments; it is he who puts men in power and removes them (Dan. 4:25; 5:21).

The morality or lack of it greatly determines the life of a nation. The Lord told Jeremiah that he raises up nations or brings them down depending on their obedience (Jer. 18:1-10). As the wise man said, “Righteousness exalts a nation, But sin is a reproach to any people” (Prov. 14:34).

In light of this, some question God’s hand in governments of the past because many were wicked. Egypt had an evil ruler who oppressed the people of God. Assyria and Babylon were thoroughly pagan and persecuted the

children of Israel. The northern kingdom of Israel was apostate from its beginning. So, why did God allow evil men to rule? Sometimes it was to chasten his rebellious children, as in the case of Assyria with Israel (Amos 2:11-12; 3:14; 5:27). At other times one wicked nation was used to destroy another one (Jer. 50:18). In the case of Egypt, the oppression of the Hebrews moved them to cry out to God (Exod. 1:8-14; 2:23-24). Man’s stubbornness also plays a role. If man is unwilling to accept God’s will and is determined to have it “his way,” God permits it at times (cf. Rom. 1:18-28; 1 Sam. 8). We see this in our nation when a man who is known to be immoral is elected to office—even multiple times. Though wicked men and governments may exist, God is still in control.

## NEW TESTAMENT ADMONITIONS

Just like the Old Testament, the New Testament affirms that governments are ordained of God. Paul said, “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God” (Rom. 13:1). They exist for the purpose of promoting good and suppressing evil (Rom. 13:3-4). Some violate this principle and are brought down by God, as noted before. Still, they exist by God’s authority and we are to be subject to them, including paying our taxes (Rom. 13:1-2, 5-7; cf. Matt. 22:15-22).

Today, some may question paying taxes to a government that guts God from the public arena, promotes immoral “art,” and legalizes sins such as abortion, pornography, and alcohol. We must keep in mind the Roman government was in power when Paul wrote Romans 13. Many sins were supported by that government, not the least of which was paganism and all its attendant evils. This does not mean we may personally become involved in sin. If rulers want us to sin by commission or omission, we are to “obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). Still, the general principle is to “honor the king” (1 Pet. 2:13-17; Tit. 3:1).

## BE A GOOD STEWARD OF CIVIL GOVERNMENT

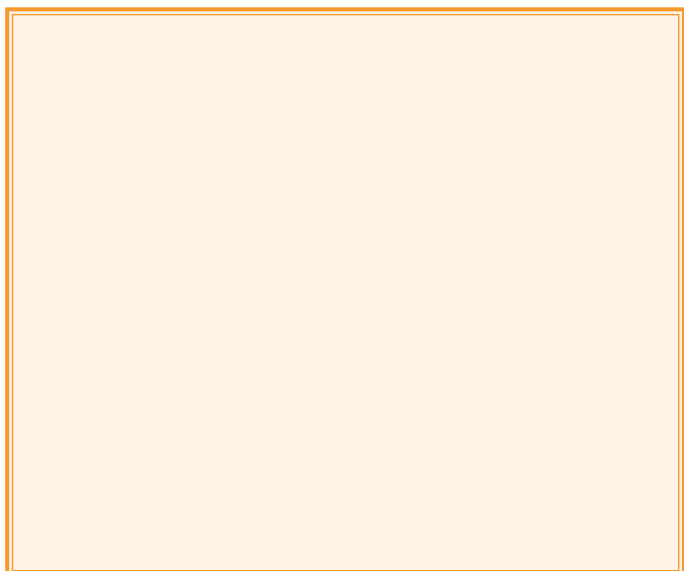
Since government is from God, Christians have the

responsibility to be good stewards of civil government. This is true not only in our submission to it, but also by our active participation and lawful influence on it. One way we can do this is through prayer. The Holy Spirit said we are to pray for rulers that “we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence” (1 Tim. 2:1-2). This allows for the gospel to spread without governmental interference, which results in souls being saved (1 Tim. 2:3-4).

Further, Jesus said we are salt and light (Matt. 5:13-16). With our righteous life we act like salt to preserve our nation.<sup>3</sup> We also shine forth the light of truth in the midst of a dark world (Phil. 2:15-16). This applies to our influence with our neighbors, as well as with our leaders. Plainly put, Christians need to vote *and* voice their “opinion” to the politicians.

In times past, some Christians believed in total abstinence when it came to politics. It is true that the church is not authorized to enter into the political fray; endorsing candidates, having campaign rallies, get-out-the-vote drives, etc. However, individually, Christians ought to exert as much influence as possible on the political process to get the right policies and laws in place and enforced.

Our nation is struggling and losing the battle with a multitude of sins. This is not because it is forced on us by an outside power, nor because our rulers are dictators. Rather, it is because the voices of the righteous are silent; that is, those who believe in the principles of truth do not speak out. Casinos and lotteries would be a thing of the past if citizens of this nation refused to allow gambling. Strip clubs and pornography would not flourish so widely if they were outlawed. Abortion would be prosecuted. Assisted suicide, alcohol, and sodomite ceremonies of matrimony would be punished. Evolution, “sex” education, and moral relativism would not be permitted in our schools.



As good stewards of civil government, we need to let our objections to these sins be known. We also need to promote and support policies and laws that uphold righteousness. Therefore, vote for good candidates,<sup>4</sup> make phone calls, write letters and emails—let your voice be heard!

### WHAT ABOUT BEING IN GOVERNMENT?

May a Christian serve in government or be a politician? One may not if it violates his conscience (Rom. 14:23). However, if one can do it in all good conscience, the Bible permits it. In the Old Testament, many faithful men served various roles in diverse governments, even pagan ones. Joseph served Pharaoh as the number two man in Egypt (Gen. 41:37-45). Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were placed in positions of authority in Babylon (Dan. 1:19; 2:48, 49; 3:30; 6:1-3).

In the New Testament, we see several men serving in government. Tax collectors and soldiers who went to John were not told to give up their positions, but to act honorably while in them (Luke 3:12-14). Cornelius served as a centurion in the Roman military (Acts 10:1). Sergius Paulus was in the appointed political position of proconsul (Acts 13:7).

Christians today may consider serving as city council members, mayors, on the school board, or as state representatives or senators. Of course, their campaigns, fund raising activities, and service must adhere to principles of righteousness. Their influence to prevent re-zoning for strip bars or “adult” stores would be great. Their “no” vote on anti-God curriculum in the local school would be terrific.

### CONCLUSION

Paul used the rights afforded by citizenship to preserve and protect him—that the gospel might be furthered (Acts 25:1-12). In this manner, he was a faithful steward of the civil government. We, too, can use the rights and privileges of our democratic nation to advance the cause of truth. We can pray, voice our opinions, and even serve in governmental positions. In so doing, we will be good stewards of civil government, an honor to God, and a preserving influence in our nation.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Vine, W.E. *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.

<sup>2</sup> Unger, Merrill F. *Unger's Bible Dictionary*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1966.

<sup>3</sup> Note the case of Sodom & Gomorrah that would have been spared for ten righteous people, Gen. 18:22-33.

<sup>4</sup> Sometimes this is hard because none of the candidates seem worthy. Still, let us do the best we can.

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# Stewards of Ability and Opportunity

Steve Niemeier

**H**e plainly states that one who does his will is the wise one and doing his will would include being wise in our stewardship of the abilities and opportunities we have.

*Webster's New World Dictionary* enlightens us with one definition of a steward as one who is responsible for the careful use of money, time, talents, or other resources especially with respect to the principles or needs of a community or group. In this article we want to consider that a steward is one who is responsible for his ability and opportunity as it pertains to one "working out their own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12b-13). Also, we want to remember what we find in 1 Corinthians 4:1-2, "Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful."

Thus, being stewards of our lives here on earth means that we must take advantage of the abilities that God has granted us and the opportunities that he has afforded us. No doubt many of us are now thinking that we all have different talents and opportunities. Certainly this is true and we find Jesus giving us a great lesson of this in the parable of talents in Matthew 25:14-30. In this parable we see the necessity of using our talents to take advantage of the opportunities presented to us. Also, we see the results of not using our talents when the opportunities present themselves. What we need to remember is that all of us have talents of some sort and opportunities afforded us to use those talents. How we use them defines what kind of steward we are. Peter gives us further instruction in 1 Peter 4:10 where he states, "As each one has received a gift, minister it to

one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

We should also remember what Paul said. "But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified" (1 Cor. 9:27). While many may never publicly speak (preach) a lesson, we are all living a life that others can see. What they see and hear from us is either (1) a lesson in how to be a good steward of our abilities and opportunities for the Lord or (2) it is a lesson that shows we are not keeping ourselves in subjection to the Lord and therefore are becoming disqualified or a castaway.

Jesus taught many lessons during his exhortation on the mountain found in Matthew 5-7. The message found in Matthew 7:15-27 is an excellent starting point to establish our firm standing as a good steward for him. First of all, in verses 15-20 he warns us that we will be known by our fruits. What we say and do will reap the fruits we are known by. Also, whether we do them with the proper attitude in our heart is the difference between good fruit and spoiled fruit (1 Cor. 13). Secondly, in verses 21-23 he gives us the stern lesson of those that will plead that they did many wonderful things in his name and he will tell them to depart for he never knew them. Again, one is known by his fruits and the intents of his heart. The third message solidifies the lesson found in the first two, he expounds upon the difference of those he likens to a wise man and those he likens to a

foolish man. He plainly states that one who does his will is the wise one and doing his will would include being wise in our stewardship of the abilities and opportunities we have. While there are three examples given in these verses, there is one overriding theme—we either discipline ourselves to listen to his words and do his will or we will be practicing lawlessness no matter the good we seem to be doing! This is certainly a lesson pertaining to the use of our abilities and opportunities isn't it?

### STEWARDS OF ABILITY

Let us take a more in depth look at our subject by directing our attention to our abilities separate from our opportunities for a few minutes. God by his grace sent his Son Jesus to be the sacrifice for our sins (1 Cor. 15:1-6; Eph. 2:1-10). Sin is a transgression against God and his law (1 John 3:4-9). Those who have a mind sound enough to understand his will are held accountable for their obedience to the teachings of Jesus Christ according to John 12:48. We must inject at this point that those who are of the mind of little children and those who are little children are not accountable to his teachings because they are not mentally mature enough to understand them. They are pure just like those who are of the kingdom of God (Mark 10:13-16).

For those able to read and comprehend this article, one would have to assume they are accountable for their actions before God. Thus, we need to consider some of the dangers of not utilizing our abilities the Lord has blessed us with. John 4:1-26 tells us a great story of Jesus being weary and sitting by Jacob's well. While sitting there he makes the acquaintance of a woman from Samaria. Jesus, recognizing the opportunity began using his ability to teach the woman about himself as the gift from God, a short but stunning lesson concerning marriage and that God seeks those who will worship him in spirit and truth. Of course, none of us is Jesus the Christ, but we do have abilities to teach and worship God. Are we using our abilities to worship God in spirit and truth as Jesus said God was seeking? There are three kinds of worship we can participate in:

**1. Truth without spirit** (Ps. 78:36-37; Matt. 15:8) where we are going through the acts of worship: praying, singing, giving, partaking of the Lord's supper, and teaching the word of God without our hearts being in our worship. As a result, we are showing impiety toward God and what he has done for us (John 3:16).

**2. Spirit without truth** (Matt. 15:9) where one might be worshipping God in spirit. However, he is doing so following the commandments of men such as inserting mechanical instruments of music, partaking of the Lord's supper on the wrong day or using the wrong emblems, adding fund raising opportunities to the "giving" portion of worship instead of how we are instructed in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 and 2 Corinthians 9:7.

**3. Spirit and truth** (John 4:23-24) where we are worshipping God in the proper frame of mind following the proper example found in God's word.

We have examples of the importance of the first day of the week (Acts 20:7 and 1 Cor. 16:1-2) given by the apostles. We are to assemble together to fulfill our responsibility of worshipping God in all aspects in spirit and truth. Hebrews 10:19-39 teaches us the need that we all have to come together to assemble and stir one another up to love and good works while exhorting each other. When we worship God in spirit and truth this will occur. We need to stop thinking that we need to make everyone feel good in our worship which usually means we are trying to make our worship "pleasing to the eye and ear." We need to humble ourselves before God and he will lift us up (Jas. 4:10). Our worship is to please God and when we use our abilities to worship him in spirit and truth we will be edified and God will be glorified! Today many want to try "new" things to improve upon God's idea of worship. Also, some challenge the idea that the Lord's supper is a memorial and strive to make it more of a celebration. We must direct our abilities to what God states and not some ideas of men.

What about our abilities to teach others the good news of Jesus the Christ (2 Tim. 2:2; Matt. 28:19-20)? It is interesting to hear folks talk about how they do not know how to teach others the gospel of Christ. These same people have no problem talking about the crises of the world to a complete stranger or even about someone else's problems to a close acquaintance. It is not about the lack of ability to talk and carry on a conversation, it is about the fear of what one will say. What if they do not want to hear about God's word? What if they disagree with his word? What if I offend them? We seem to be so concerned of not "turning people off" that we forget our job is to introduce them to the truth. Thus we must be good stewards of these opportunities to teach and our abilities to do so.

### STEWARDS OF OPPORTUNITY

The words of the old hymn "You Never Mentioned Him to Me" pierce through me every time it is sung in my presence. In our everyday living we are presented with so many opportunities to touch someone with the gospel of Christ. Yet, how many times after we failed to take advantage of these opportunities do we say to ourselves, "I should have said something about Christ to them?" Paul told Timothy: "Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you" (1 Tim. 4:16). When one is playing the game of golf and hits a shot that is headed for someone else on the course, the one who hit the golf ball is to yell, "Fore!" This is a common warning signal for all in the area to where the ball is headed to seek cover. Why is it that we can see the need to warn others about a golf ball coming

# Stewards of Money and Material Things

Steve Monts

All of us who live shall gain material things, some more than others, but we shall all have some things. James 1:17 says, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights.” All that we ever shall have or own comes from God, and we give him thanks for it—or do we? If a parent were to give a child money for a college education, would the child be thankful for their parents long hard savings if he blew it on frivolous things? The child was not a good steward of the gift given him. In like manner, whether God has blessed you with little or an abundance, you are to be a good steward of what he has given you.

Many passages are laid forth for us in divine writ to govern our gain and we should be willing to abide by them. We can be good stewards of money and material things that God has given us by using them in ways that please him

such as *contributing to our local congregations, providing for our families, and being generous to all men.* First though, let me say that there is an epidemic today of debt lovers. The first principle of being a good steward of money is to avoid covetousness and greed (Prov. 15:27). Those greedy for gain trouble their own house (Eccl. 5:10; Col. 3:5). There seem to be those who love to take on debt for the simple reason of pleasure. “Don’t have money for the vacation, its ok, charge it, you only live once!” “Want that new entertainment system, no money? Its ok, charge it!” This idea of money will lead us to be choked by our bills and thereby limiting if not eliminating our giving on the first day of the week, providing for our own, and giving to others. We must have a firm understanding on why we are here and its not to go for the gusto (yes, I’ve heard the business motivational tapes too) but to go to heaven when we die. Some may not like that statement I just made, but

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their way but fail to take the opportunity to tell one about the danger of the ways of Satan and the eternal hell in which he and those who follow him will be cast?

When we are in the presence of one taking the name of God in vain, or telling the “dirty” jokes or participating in gossip or even in a conversation where the word of God is being abused and misused, why do we feel out of place in speaking up and taking a stand for the word of God? Paul said that he wasn’t ashamed of the gospel (Rom. 1:16), are we? Those who taught the gospel in New Testament times were persecuted for taking advantage of the opportunities given them. Are we afraid or just ashamed? It is possible that we have not been persecuted because we do not take the opportunity to carry the gospel to where the sinners are. How many times did Jesus go to where the sinners were? Didn’t the apostles go to the synagogues to teach the good news about Jesus when many were still involved with worship from their forefathers on the Sabbath day? It seems as if we expect folks to come to our worship services

to hear the gospel and we do not have to take the gospel to them. There are plenty of opportunities in the taverns, drug rehab centers, homeless shelters, denominational buildings, etc. When is the last time we went there to teach the word of God?

Taking advantage of the opportunities we have means that we may have to make tough decisions. We may have to give up our bowling night or miss the guys or gals’ night out. An important ball game of our favorite team or a night to me just to “goof off” might have to be foregone. Matthew 6:33 instructs us to “seek first the kingdom of God.” Do we really do this? On the day of Judgment will our family, friends, and acquaintances give a positive testimony of the opportunities we had to use our abilities to teach them about Jesus the Christ or will they look at us and say “You Never Mentioned Him to Me!”

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let them affirm the proposition, “We are here to strive for earthly gain with all ambition and energy.” Does this mean we should we not have ambition for our careers? The Bible says, “And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men” (Col. 3:23). The Bible is clear we should, so please do not think I am advocating that we quit our jobs and become beggars. But at the same time realize that we are not put here on this planet “to have it all,” and many Christians are failing here, especially young ones. They have access to credit that in previous generations was unheard of and many are using it and finding out that slavery is not over in America; it just has a new form: “Buy now, pay later.” Oh, and so many do end up paying later except not with money but with shattered lives, broken homes, divorce, and bankruptcy.

The problem today is eye opening. *The number one reason for divorce is financial problems.* Too many families are getting in trouble with debt or greed or both. *The bankruptcy rates number in the millions each year.* I understand some may be because of medical emergencies, but many are due to living beyond their means. The average credit card holder has seven cards with an average of \$1,642 per card, that is over \$11,000 in debt (*USA Today*)! Proverbs 22:7 says debt is like slavery and it often made people slaves in Bible days (2 Kings 4:1). We should have a strong desire to “owe no man anything” and to work our way out of debt (Rom. 13:8). When Elisha miraculously provided oil for the widow his first instruction was to, “Go, sell the oil and pay your debt”; and then, “you and your sons live on the rest” (2 Kings 4:7). What happier lives we would lead if we would do likewise and follow the same order. With the rising cost of houses, cars, and college this may seem impossible, but we should work hard to pay our debt to be owners and not owers.

**We must give of our means on the first day of the week to be good stewards (1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 9:6-9).** I believe most of us understand this but how good of a giver are you? “If you record your spending in your check register, I can take one look and know a lot about your value system. If I can look at your check register and daily calendar, I will know you. Not who you say you are, but who you really are, deep down inside” (Dave Ramsey). I thought this was an interesting quote; let me take it a step further. I realize that God is not a bill that comes due on the first day of the week, but when it comes to a monthly total who gets a bigger portion? Does your phone bill get more money (perhaps you would rather talk to others more than God)? Does your cable bill get more money (for you would rather see TV than God)? What about the shopping malls (does God or Gap get more of your monthly pay)? How about your trash service, do they get paid more than God? No? We are glad to know that God is of more value than trash. He should be. Some parents will teach their children at an early age to save some of what they earn, yet won’t spend near the

amount of time teaching them the valuable principles of giving to God and the blessings of giving. What are those principles? Well it starts back in the Old Testament where God all throughout it demanded the best of the flock and the first of the fruits (Lev. 9:2-4; 2:12; Num. 18:12). God is not a waiter and you are not giving him a tip. He takes his cut off the top, and anything that is not from the top is not acceptable to him. We all realize that tithing was an Old Testament command, yet I often ask, would our giving now, had we lived under the Old Testament, have met the requirement? Now we are no longer under that law, right? We sometimes emphasize that not to uphold the law of Christ but to justify in our minds why we don’t have to give well. Do we not forget that we live under a better law with better promises (Heb. 8:6)? How much is that worth to you? Which covenant had the blood of bulls and goats and which has the blood of Christ? Which had forgiveness to look forward too, and which has it realized? Which was a shadow and which is the substance? Now again, I ask you, how much is the better covenant worth to you? I believe that many know that their giving is not acceptable, and they know they should give better. Why not start this coming Sunday? Start giving from the heart, your whole heart (2 Cor. 9:6-9). I read somewhere that in America of those who gave charitable contributions, that the higher the income the lower the contribution. Now granted, they gave a higher dollar amount than the lower brackets, but not in terms of percentage of income. This reminded me of the Pharisees that “gave out of their abundance.” The dollar amount means little to the Lord; percent of income is where faith is measured (see the widow and her mite, Luke 21:1-4).

**We must provide for our own in order to be good stewards.** “But if anyone does not provide for his own . . . he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim. 5:8). Now this means we must work (2 Thess. 3:10). Many lazy people today struggle for they do not have the work ethic that God commanded (Gen. 3:19). But on the other hand please remember that “providing” does not mean to have every nice thing under the sun. Paul said, “and having food and clothing with these we shall be content” (1 Tim. 6:8). Too often we are too busy trying to “keep up with the Joneses” all the while saying, “Well, I have to provide.” Wrong standard. Many young couples want what their parents had . . . yesterday! And they find themselves buried in debt. “The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty, but those of everyone who is hasty, surely to poverty” (Prov. 21:5). Remember it took your parents years to accumulate what they now have. Good stewards will have some form of budget to follow. “There is desirable treasure, and oil in the dwelling of the wise, But a foolish man squanders it” (Prov. 21:20). The wise don’t devour all they have only a foolish man does. There is something to be said about rationing (budgeting). God will never say, “Don’t buy a BMW,” but he will say, “don’t build a tower without first

# Stewardship of the Family

Dick Blackford

A steward is one entrusted with the good of another. We are not absolute owners of anything—not even ourselves! “Or know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have from God? And ye are not your own; for ye were bought with a price: glorify God therefore in your body” (1 Cor. 6:19, 20).

It was to the husband that God gave the responsibility of stewardship of the family. The word “husband” is a noun, from the Middle English *housbonde*, and the Anglo-Saxon *husbonða*. *Hus* (meaning house or home) and *bonða* (meaning holder, master). The husband is the bond (band) of the home. It is his responsibility to hold things together. One does not inherit the knowledge of being a bond (strength, stay or tie) to one’s household.

## PROTECTOR

Woman is called the “weaker vessel” which implied

that the man is the stronger vessel. This biblical statement has nothing to do with intelligence, but is referring to her physical and emotional makeup. Generally, the man is physically and emotionally stronger than the woman. The man is more suited to rugged work and crisis situations. If a husband loves his wife as Christ loved the church, he will want to protect her. To love one’s wife is to love oneself (Eph. 5:28). Two words are used to describe the idea of protector. They are *nourish* and *cherish*. “For no man ever hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as Christ also the church” (Eph. 5:29). There is implanted within us the love of our own bodies.

“To nourish (*ektrephei*) is to feed, to supply needs, to bring up to maturity, and to promote health and strength. There the word refers to the bountiful overflowing provision which a man offers to himself and which he should

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counting the cost” (Luke 14:28). In such statements is the idea of budgeting and it helps us provide for our families by living within our means.

## We must be generous to all men to be good stewards.

Willing to give and ready to share ought to be our motto (1 Tim. 6:18). I understand in this country there are many poorly-dressed-rich-people who will stand at corners and beg for money. Many undercover reports indicate that they make upwards of \$60,000 a year. They have found a way to be lazy and make money, and we should not help them (Prov. 21:25-26). But with those in legitimate need we should be ready and willing to help them. “Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you ever can” (John Wesley). Does not this quote echo Galatians 6:10? James 2:14-17 rebukes those not willing to help a brother, and 1 John 3:17-18 speaks of the many who give lip service to helping but do not act upon it. When was the last time you helped some of our dear brethren overseas? When have you asked around for a personal contact of one who is

faithful that you could help personally? I have heard one say before that if we gain a reputation of helping brethren then we would be flooded with requests. That would be great, but sadly he meant it in a negative fashion. We must remember the words of Paul, “For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out” (1 Tim. 6:7). It has been said that the only things you take with you when you die are those that you gave away. How true (Eccl. 11:2). Let us be generous to all men.

Henry Fielding said, “If you make money your god it will plague you like the devil.” Avoid covetousness and greed and remember we are simply stewards of God’s gifts. Let us use them in the ways that please him the most. More than any earthly blessing we could receive is to hear the great and grand words one day, “Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord” (Matt 25:21).

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provide for his wife who is a part of himself. We do not give ourselves just enough to supply the barest necessities. We do not simply want to get by. Neither are we to provide our own wives with just enough happiness, love, consideration, emotional support, and spiritual and psychological help to get her by. Nourish means plentiful supply” (C.G. Caldwell, *Ephesians, Truth Commentaries* 279).

“To cherish (*thalpei*) is to foster with tender care. It originally was used to refer to the mother’s nursing her young. Used in connection with the relationship between men and women it meant to ‘warm’ (a romantic idea). In our language the word goes farther to suggest a ‘warming’ of the heart in the thought of the other. A man who cherishes his wife warms her and is warmed by the thought of her” (Caldwell 279).

### PROVIDING LIFE’S NECESSITIES

“But if any provideth not for his own, and specially his own household, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim. 5:8). “The Christian who falls below the best heathen standard of family affection, is the more blameworthy, since he has, what the heathen has not, the supreme example of love in Jesus Christ” (*The Expositor’s Bible*).

He is not afraid of working with his hands in order to provide for others (Eph. 4:28). This also includes providing for his aged parents (1 Tim. 5:4; Mark 7:10-12).

What is he to provide? Certainly the basic necessities—food, shelter, clothing. The family should be cared for adequately, in keeping with the culture in which he lives. Unless he is extremely wealthy, this will include insurance to keep his finances from being wiped out by a disaster. Providing a grass hut in American culture and then claiming he has fulfilled his responsibility is hardly adequate. The word “provide” means “to perceive before, think of beforehand, foresee, provide, to take thought for, care for” (Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* 540). This suggests that before he becomes a family man he needs to plan ahead and count the cost. If he is not capable of providing, then he shouldn’t get married and start a family.

### PROVIDING MORAL AND SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

The whole point of the husband’s/father’s stewardship is to promote the salvation of his family. More than any other consideration he should want his family to go to heaven. This far outweighs any physical consideration. If a man provides the physical necessities and not the moral and spiritual leadership needed, he is still two-thirds worse than an infidel. What he provided physically won’t matter in eternity if he neglected the moral and spiritual leadership that is so essential for his family’s salvation. He needs to provide constant teaching (Deut. 6:5-9). He needs to be a

constant and consistent example in living a godly life and taking his family to worship regularly.

His children are loaned to him from God. “Lo, children are a heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them” (Ps. 127:3-5). To fly straight, arrows must be aimed straight. The same with raising children. He is to provide instruction and corrective discipline (Prov. 22:6). All of this must be tempered with love. He must not rule like a Hitler. That this possibility exists is pointed out by the instructions for fathers. He is to “provoke not his children to wrath” (Eph. 6:4). And he is to “provoke not your children, that they be not discouraged” (Col. 3:21).

These verses give two possible reactions on the part of the child, depending on his makeup. Some children are provoked to wrath and rebellion and will rise up against you. Others may become withdrawn and discouraged and refuse to communicate and the parents lose touch with them right in their own home. One of these reactions will come from a child who is provoked by his father.

It doesn’t take a lot of wisdom for a child to observe if you are ruling like a tyrant and making the yoke too difficult to bear. There should be a personal and loving relationship between the father and his children.

Providing moral and spiritual leadership will also include providing them with a wholesome environment in which to grow up. This includes doing things with them as a family on a regular basis so they can see his example, controlling the television, overseeing who they choose as close companions, and leading them to the point that they are able to stand on their own and make wise choices on their own.

A man’s family is a gift. His wife is a gift (Gen. 3:12). His children are an heritage (Ps. 127:3-5). They are entrusted to his care and responsibility for a short period of time on earth. The family relationship as we know it on earth will not be the same in heaven (Matt. 22:30).

### CONCLUSION

“In stewards, it is required that a man be found faithful” (1 Cor. 4:2). He is to be trustworthy and dependable with his Lord’s possessions. There will be a time when each steward must give an account of his stewardship before God (Luke 16:2).

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# Stewards of the Church: The Universal Relationship

Jarrod Jacobs

Being a steward in the Lord's church is a great responsibility as well as a privilege. Being a steward means being entrusted with something precious. In New Testament days, a steward often would have been a slave who was entrusted with his master's property and goods. In a similar fashion, Christians are called the servants (bondservant/slaves, Rom. 6:16-18; Eph. 6:6) of God. Yet, he has not charged us with earthly or material goods, but with being "*stewards of the mysteries of God*" (1 Cor. 4:1). In simple terms, the phrase "*mysteries of God*" has reference to the sum total of God's revelation (Eph. 3:4). Therefore, it is the responsibility of stewards in the Lord's church to be "faithful" as they hold on tightly to the mysteries of God, and teach it to others (1 Cor. 4:2; 2 Tim. 2:2).

There are many aspects of our spiritual life in which we are stewards, and in this lesson, we will learn that we are stewards of the Lord's church in reference to its "universal" or comprehensive sense. Regardless of where we live, or when we live, when a man or woman becomes a Christian through faith, repentance and baptism (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 8:35-39; etc.), this person is added to the church in the "universal" or comprehensive sense (Acts 2:47). Upon becoming a Christian, God adds man to a body which is composed of saints all over this world, both living and dead.

## **SOME OF THE BLESSINGS AND RESPONSIBILITIES INVOLVED IN THIS STEWARDSHIP**

As a result of becoming a Christian, and being added to the Lord's church by God (Acts 2:47), we have certain responsibilities. It is imperative that we understand that being responsible stewards demand that we (the slaves) know what God (the Master) expects of us and then make applications. For example, we need to understand that all spiritual blessings in heavenly places are available to the

saints in Christ (Eph. 1:3). Yet, we cannot enjoy those blessings until we make application of them! It is not enough to merely say, "I have the privilege of prayer as a Christian." While we have this blessing (1 Thess. 5:17; 1 Pet. 3:12), it holds no meaning to us until we spend time in prayer to God (Rom. 12:12)!

In addition to prayer, a steward must be active in service to the Lord, faithfully holding true to the word that God has given to us. A Christian is a "*peculiar*" (special) person who is zealous of "*good works*" (Tit. 2:14). What good works might a Christian do? In simple terms, he will be an active steward in doing only those "good works" which have been authorized in Scripture (Col. 3:17). Remember that "every scripture inspired of God" thoroughly equips us "unto every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17, ASV). Having said this, let us look specifically at some blessings from God, as well as responsibilities a Christian has to God, and see how we are doing as stewards in God's kingdom.

**1. Stewards must have knowledge of God's will.** How can we act in a way which pleases God if we do not know what he has said? Jesus said that his disciples would know the truth that made them free (John 8:31-32). Paul told the Ephesians that, by reading the Scriptures, folks can have his knowledge in the mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:4). The Holy Spirit also inspired Paul to demand that those brethren not be "unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:17). Yes, God's word can be understood, and our stewardship before God demands that we know what God expects of us. When we refuse this, and are not growing in the grace of knowledge of the Lord (2 Pet. 3:18), we become lax in our duties and are not being the faithful steward that God wants.

**2. Stewards must overcome temptation.** In the book of 1 Corinthians, Paul lets those brethren know, “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10:13). Stewards must be aware of the way of escape God has provided. While none are immune to temptation, we can overcome the temptation through prayer and the application of our knowledge of God’s will. Sadly, many stewards in God’s kingdom fail this test from time to time. When this happens, we need to repent and ask God to forgive us so that we may be restored to our former place in service to the Master.

**3. Stewards must help to strengthen fellow Christians.** In connection with the above point, when we see a weak brother, we have a responsibility to strengthen him. Maybe it is our strength and encouragement that will keep a brother or a sister from turning from the Lord and returning to the way of sin and selfishness. Paul wrote to the Galatians and reminded them, “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:1-2). It is imperative that stewards in the Lord’s work not only be concerned for their own souls, but also show love and concern for their fellow-laborers and fellow-heirs. Jesus himself said that the world would know who was his when we showed love for one another (John 13:34-35; 15:12, 17; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:21). Can we think of any greater way to show love for an erring child of God than when we try to get him to return to the Lord?

**4. Stewards must be active in developing their talents and abilities for the Lord’s use.** Titus 2:14 tells us that Christians are to be “zealous of good works.” The word “zealous” comes from the word “Zealot,” which described an extreme section of the Pharisees who were opposed to Rome. Therefore, to be zealous is to be uncompromising, to be eager, or desire something very intently (see Vine’s). In context, Paul is not telling folks to be involved with a certain political group, but to take the intent, the fervor, the desire and interest of a “Zealot” and channel it toward performing good works! Have we ever heard someone speaking about a person being “on fire” for the Lord? This is a description of the zealous person. There is no room in God’s kingdom for a lazy steward! Tragically, there are many who are just that. It is easy for us to allow the few to do the work of the many. In many areas of life, we can take note of the faithful 5-10% doing 90% of the work. This ought not be, and it especially ought not be in the Lord’s church when every Christian has talents and abilities which need to be in use! In the Hebrew letter, we find that the full grown Christian is the one who is “exercising” his senses

(Heb. 5:12-14). Can this be said of us? Think carefully about opportunities we have to do good. Are we taking advantage of these opportunities? When we are at work, do we look for opportunities to give a tract to someone, or invite someone to have a Bible study? Or, is this a matter that we leave to the “preacher,” “deacons,” or “elders” to do since that is “their job”? We have ample opportunities at home to teach and show the right example to our children, spouse, and “extended” relations. Are we doing this? Does our family know what a Christian looks like?

Imagine how much more can be accomplished for the Lord when we all recognize that Titus 2:14 relates to each Christian today! Spend some time with such passages as Matthew 7:12, 1 Corinthians 15:58, etc., and pay special attention to how these passages apply to each Christian in a very personal way. Peter said, “Be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless” (2 Pet. 3:14). If I am not willing to make the application to myself as I read and study, I will never be able to develop my talents and abilities as I should. How can I be the type of steward that pleases God if I am not developing, growing, and maturing in the Lord?

**5. Stewards need to be thankful for God’s providential care.** When one becomes a Christian, this blessing is his! Peter said, “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Pet. 5:7). When one is in the world, he might say as David did, “I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul” (Ps. 142:4). Yet, when one is a Christian, a steward of the mysteries of God, he has access to God’s providential care. God has promised to hear his prayer (1 Pet. 3:12).

In the worst of times, a Christian knows that God is there! Even though it is not always “easy” or “fun” to be God’s steward, we can rest assured that God loves and cares for his children! This is further seen when we take note of the many prayers offered by Christ and the apostles. Throughout the New Testament, prayers were offered to God wherein the apostles begged for God’s care and comfort, and it was supplied to them in abundance. Folks who are outside of Christ’s body do not have the comfort we do! Isn’t this tragic? At the same time, why would anyone who has become a Christian want to return to a life without God and leave this care?

**6. Stewards have a hope of eternal life.** Can we think of anything greater than this? Certainly no treasure on earth can match having a home in Heaven! When Paul wrote the Roman Christians, he told them, “Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed” (Rom. 13:11). The longer we live as Christians, the closer we get to that eternal reward in Heaven! Similarly, Paul wrote to Titus, speaking about his being “in hope of eternal life” (Tit. 1:2). Paul also wrote

to Timothy, speaking of the “crown of righteousness” he expected God to give him (2 Tim. 4:6-8). He knew this was a certainty, for God who cannot lie promised it before the world began! What grand and wonderful blessings for the steward of God. When we contrast ourselves with those who were stewards of men in the first century days, we see that our reward for faithfulness is much greater than anything an earthly steward might have enjoyed!

### WAYS IN WHICH FOLKS NEGLECT THIS STEWARDSHIP

In contrast with the above points, we find some who neglect their duties as stewards. They become lazy in the Lord’s service. We even have some Bible examples of stewards who thought that the things they were caring for actually belonged to them! This creates a multitude of problems. Consider Diotrephes, who wished to have preeminence among the brethren, and was blatantly defying the word of truth that he was supposed to have been respecting (3 John 9-11). Another such neglectful steward was Demas. He loved this present world and left the Lord (2 Tim. 4:10). Demas was once numbered among the faithful, among those whom Paul called “fellowlabourers” (Phile. 24). Yet, he left his spiritual work for “this present world.” Others have left their spiritual work looking for “new” and “different” things. They have tired of hearing “the old, old story.” They are not interested in being reminded of things they knew (as Peter said he would do, 2 Pet. 1:12-14). Folks clamor for things that they have not heard before, not unlike the Athenians Paul encountered, who “spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing” (Acts 17:18-21). Often, the cry for “new” and “different” entices men to leave what they know to be true. As a consequence, those stewards of God’s word who strive to faithfully hold on to the “mysteries of God” (1 Cor. 4:1-2) are belittled as “keepers of orthodoxy,” “Pharisees,” “traditionalists” and the like. This is a tragedy as well.

In looking at these examples, we see ways in which folks neglect their stewardship. For instance, when some want preeminence, and are tired of being the Lord’s ser-

vants, they are neglecting their stewardship! These folks forget that in the Lord’s church, the only thing we can be is servants! There is no “organization” for the church in the “universal,” or comprehensive sense except that Christ is the head, and we are the body (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22-23, 4:4; 1 Cor. 12:12; etc.)! Furthermore, how many times have we seen Christians lured away by the enticements of this life? Jesus used the description of the seed which fell among thorns to describe these brethren (Luke 8:14). What a tragedy it is to see folks who allow weaknesses in the flesh to entice them away from what they know is the truth. Perhaps you were taught the truth and converted to the Lord by one who is now no longer faithful to the very doctrine he taught you? Paul said it can happen (1 Cor. 9:27)! Furthermore, when we forsake true worship for what Paul called “will-worship” (Col. 2:23) we are neglecting our stewardship. Worship must be directed toward God, and not man (John 4:24). Yet, when I allow anything to stand between me and God, I have allowed that thing (or person, self, etc.) to become my God.

How is it possible for me to expect to have a home in Heaven when I have not been a faithful steward? If I have not been faithful in the few things, how could God make me a ruler over many things, as Christ’s parable discusses in Matthew 25:21, 23?

### CONCLUSION

When we appreciate the description of the steward as described in 1 Corinthians 4, may it open our eyes to such passages as 1 Corinthians 15:58; Revelation 2:10; and many others that stress our faithfulness to God in this life. When we follow the Lord’s plan for salvation and become a Christian, our work as a steward begins! The apostle Paul made it clear that since Christ died for us, we ought to live for him (2 Cor. 5:14-15). Are we doing this? Would God consider us faithful? If not, then repent today and determine that your life will reflect the stewardship to which you were called in the Lord’s church.

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# Stewards of the Soul

Ron Halbrook

For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matt. 16:26)

A steward is responsible for something entrusted to him. Human beings are stewards of their souls, made in the image of God. Man's body and soul are gifts involving his stewardship. The soul is the inner, invisible part of man including his heart or mind. The soul thus controls the body and utilizes it as an instrument of its will for good or evil. Each of us will give account to God for the use of our body and soul. This stewardship of body and soul makes possible every other phase of our stewardship.

## SOUL CREATED BY GOD IN HIS IMAGE

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him" (Gen. 1:26). God is a spiritual being without a body of flesh and blood, but the spirit of man created in God's image lives in a fleshly body. Soul and spirit are often used as synonyms (Isa. 57:16). Every soul enters the body and the world innocent, free from sin, just like Adam and Eve, because God alone is "the father of spirits" (Heb. 12:9).

## SOUL INHABITS BODY

The body was created from the dust of the ground to serve as a home for the soul (Gen. 2:7). When the widow's son died, "there was no breath (*neshamah*) left in him," but Elijah prayed, "O Lord my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul (*nephesh*) come into him again." The Lord answered this prayer and "the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived" (1 Kings 17:21-22). The soul leaves the body in death and returns in the resurrection of the body.

## THE SOUL ALIVE SEPARATE FROM THE BODY

"The body without the spirit is dead" (Jas. 2:26). At death, the soul lives without the body in *sheol* (Hebrew term) or *hades* (Greek term). David prophesied the resurrection of Christ in these words: "His soul was not left in hell (hades), neither his flesh did see corruption" (Ps. 16:10; Acts 2:31). It is clear that the soul is not annihilated at the death of the body but remains in *sheol* or *hades* until the

body is raised. The soul of Jesus did not remain in *sheol* but returned to the resurrected body.

In the parable of the rich man, Jesus pictured God telling the carnal, self-sufficient rich man, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee" (Luke 12:16-21). The story of the rich man and Lazarus confirms that the soul survives the death of the body. Both the rich man and Lazarus died and entered the hadean world. Their souls were conscious, they knew themselves, and they knew each other (Luke 16:22-25). Both Jesus and the penitent thief died and were buried, but the inner man or soul of each person went to a paradise prepared by God in the hadean realm (Luke 23:43).

## FUNCTIONS OF THE SOUL

The soul has a mind, intelligence, and rationality. It is capable of understanding right and wrong, and making a choice based on understanding. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul" (Ps. 19:7-8). The soul is capable of comprehending facts and information ("that my soul knoweth right well," Ps. 139:14), and remembering them so as to make rational and right choices in the conduct of life (Deut. 4:9; 11:18).

Love and hate are functions of the soul. God abhors false religion and sinful man abhors God's word: "my soul shall abhor you. . . their soul abhorred my statutes" (Lev. 26:30, 43). We are to love the Lord with all the heart, soul, and mind (Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:37).

Grief and hope are functions of the soul. As the body suffers excruciating pain, the soul within mourns (Job 14:22). We "lay hold on the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul" (Heb. 6:18-19). The soul filled with hope is well anchored against the trials, temptations, and tragedies of life.

The soul functions in prayer, worship, and service to God. Repentance leads the erring back to God, "if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul" (Deut. 4:29). Hannah's "soul," "heart," or "spirit" was active

as she grieved and fervently prayed for a child (1 Sam. 1:10:15). In Psalm 42, the soul of David deeply longed for and sought God when surrounded with enemies, dangers, and temptations:

As the hart panteth after the water brooks,  
so panteth my soul after thee, O God.  
My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God:  
when shall I come and appear before God?

Why art thou cast down, O my soul?  
And why art thou disquieted within me?  
Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him,  
who is the health of my countenance, and my God.

It is clear from such passages that the soul longs, is discouraged or cast down, hopes, and praises.

### THE SOUL ACCOUNTABLE TO GOD

The soul must give account for itself to God. This accounting is individual and personal: “The soul that sinneth, it shall die. . . . Again, when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive” (Ezek. 18:4, 27). The seat of volition, will, or choice is the soul, and so it is the soul that makes choices and must give account for them.

In view of the coming judgment, Paul prayed, “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body by preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 5:23). The “you” wholly sanctified by God through his word is “your whole spirit and soul and body.” “Spirit” and “soul” refer to the invisible nature of man and “body” to the visible. “Spirit” points to man’s eternal, immortal nature, “soul” to the life or vitality of his nature, and “body” to the home of the invisible nature of man. The soul bears the blame and guilt of sin, or enjoys the absence of blame and guilt.

The soul can be punished and tormented, or rewarded and comforted. “Both soul and body” will be cast into the eternal torment of hell, which is what it means to “lose” the soul (Matt. 10:28; 16:26). Knowing how grievously the soul suffers under the heavy yoke of sin and guilt, Jesus promised, “I will give you rest. . . . ye shall find rest unto your soul” (Matt. 11:28-29). In hades awaiting the final judgment, the rich man was “tormented in this flame” while Lazarus was “comforted” in Abraham’s bosom (Luke 16:23-25).

### THE SOUL SAVED

Our soul can be saved from sin and punishment before the final judgment day. God provided a way of forgiveness of our sins through a perfect sacrifice, the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son (Lev. 17:11; John

1:29; 1 John 4:10). The individual soul avails himself of the cleansing blood of the Lamb by obeying the gospel of Christ. Money cannot redeem the soul, but we are saved “by the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. . . . seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth” (1 Pet. 1:18-22). Though fleshly lusts “war against the soul,” Christ protects and delivers us as “the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls” (1 Pet. 2:11, 25).

Our sins are forgiven when we submit to the gospel by faith, repenting of every sin, confessing Christ as God’s true Son, and submitting to water baptism. Jesus promised, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,” which is equivalent to receiving the “remission of sins” (Mark 16:16; Luke 24:47). Those who are saved from their past sins look forward to “the final salvation of your souls,” when on the last great day we receive “an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Pet. 1:9, 3-5).

### THE SOUL IMMORTAL

Our soul passes through three stages of existence, reflecting its immortal nature. First, the soul inhabits the earthly body (Jas. 2:26). Next, in death the soul inhabits hades without its body, a state compared to a naked person, one without clothes (2 Cor. 5:3). There it waits in torment or comfort to enter its final state in heaven or hell. Finally, our souls will inhabit the resurrected body, and we will suffer the eternal torments of hell or the eternal bliss of heaven, both body and soul (John 5:28-29).

### WHAT KIND OF STEWARDS?

How we handle the stewardship of the soul determines ultimately how we handle every other stewardship God gives us. If we are failing in these stewardships, it is because we are failing in the stewardship of the soul. If we give attention and diligence to the stewardship of our soul, we will do the same toward every other stewardship.

In Matthew 16:26 Jesus challenges us with the question, how much do we value our souls? “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” The soul is eternal and immortal. Will we exchange the eternal happiness of our soul for a moment’s pleasure, or for the sake of our own stubborn will? We should be willing to make any sacrifice and pay any price to obtain the hope of eternal fellowship with God in heaven!

Let us resolve to be good stewards of the soul, and we will become good stewards of all other blessings and duties given to us by God.

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## **“Stewardship” continued from front page**

tell thee; for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof” (Ps. 50:1). God asked Job, “Who hath first given unto me, that I should repay him? Whatsoever is under the whole heaven is mine” (Job 41:11).

By law we might buy some land and record a deed to it, but in reality it is the Lord’s. God taught this lesson early on as he stated in the law of Moses, “The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me” (Lev. 25:23). As Christians, we too are reminded that we are pilgrims and sojourners (1 Pet. 2:11). Whatever land we “own,” we better use to the glory of God.

The rancher might say that he owns a thousand head of cattle. God says, “For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills . . . and the wild beasts of the field are mine” (Ps. 50:10, 11). We may be misled into thinking that because we have earned every dollar we own, it is ours. The Lord says, “The silver is mine, and the gold is mine” (Hag. 2:8).

God’s ownership of all things is the beginning point of stewardship! God owns all things and simply allows us to possess them for a time. Job acknowledged such when he said, “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither, Jehovah gave and Jehovah hath taken away” (Job 1:21). We brought nothing into this world and we will take nothing out, but we will answer for what we did with “our things” while we were here!

If it could be said that man is the owner of his things, then man is not obligated to God. This is the reason for much of atheism and humanism. Ungodly men simply do not wish to be obligated to God in any way. Therefore they will not acknowledge him, thank him, submit to his moral standard, or serve him (Rom. 1:18-32). In contrast, each Christian at Jerusalem acknowledged the things that he possessed were not his own (Acts 4:32). Even our bodies are not ours to own, as Paul stated, “Or know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have from God? And ye are not your own; for ye were bought with a price: glorify God therefore in your body” (1 Cor. 2:19, 20).

**2. We are the stewards of what we have and what we are.** In order to be pleasing to God, stewardship must be acknowledged by all. When we use the things that God has given to us in a way that is proper and pleasing to him, we acknowledge his ownership. In general, what sort of things has God placed in our hands to manage?

*He has given us our life.* We did not evolve from a stagnant slime pool. “. . . Have ye not read, that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female” (Matt. 19:4). The Athenians were taught that God “himself

giveth to all life, and breath . . . for in him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:25-28). As Christians we are to present our bodies as “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God” (Rom. 12:1).

*God gives us time to live.* We are admonished to recognize the brevity of our lives. The psalmist says, “The days of our years are threescore years and ten, Or even by reason of strength fourscore years; Yet is their pride but labor and sorrow; For it is soon gone, and we fly away” (Ps. 90:10). To this James adds, “. . . What is your life? For ye are a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (Jas. 4:14). Knowing this, good stewards recognize that their days are numbered (Ps. 90:12) and spend their days “redeeming the time” (Eph. 5:16).

*God gives to us whatever we have by way of talents or abilities.* King David acknowledged such when he said, “Both riches and honor come of thee, and thou rulest over all; and in thy hand is power and might; and in thy hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name. But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? For all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee” (2 Chron. 29:12-14). When man does not see God as the source of his talents he becomes arrogant. This proud attitude was manifested in the Corinthian church. Some of them had received various gifts of the Holy Spirit in order for all to be benefitted (1 Cor. 12:7). Some however, became arrogant and used these gifts to parade themselves and boast (13:4). This attitude fostered division. Paul rebuked them by saying, “. . . who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?” (4:7).

*God provides the ability to obtain money and wealth.* Before entering the promise land, Moses warns the people about the dangers of material wealth. God was going to give to them many good things in that land, but Satan could use the same things to lead them away from Jehovah. Moses cautions, “Beware lest thou forget Jehovah thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his ordinances, and his statutes, which I command thee this day . . . lest thou say in thy heart, My power and the might of my hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember Jehovah thy God, for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth; that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as at this day” (Deut. 8:11-18).

**3. We must all render an account of our stewardship.** All of mankind are stewards, whether or not all acknowledge it. The Scriptures teach us that all will have to render account of our stewardship. The context of Luke chapters 15 and 16, deals with the accountability of stewardship. Jesus had been teaching sinners (15:1). The Pharisees and

scribes murmured against him for associating with them (15:2). He then spoke to them the parables of the lost sheep, lost coin, and the lost son (15:3-32). They should have been glad and rejoicing that these sinners were listening to him. Unlike the “elder son,” these who considered themselves righteous, should have been happy when a sinner returns to God. The younger son (15:12) was a lost son, a sinful son, a prodigal son. The word “prodigal” means “wasteful.” The text says, “he wasted his substance with riotous living” (15:13). A sinner’s life is a wasted life! He needs to return to God and live it in service to him! These self-righteous (16:15) Pharisees didn’t recognize the accountability of stewardship. In chapter 16:1-13, Jesus admonished the righteous to use the “mammon of unrighteousness” in such a way as to obtain “eternal tabernacles.” The Pharisees mocked at this concept (16:14-15). Jesus then spoke about a rich man and a poor and sick beggar named Lazarus (16:19-31). Here was a rich man who was rich toward himself and not toward God (much like the rich man in Luke 12:16-21). God held him accountable for the stewardship of his riches. He had the *ability* and the *opportunity* to help Lazarus and he didn’t. Lazarus died and was carried away by angels into “Abraham’s bosom.” The rich man died and was taken to eternal torments! Both the righteous and the unrighteous will all give account of ourselves before God in the judgment day for our stewardship. In this teaching, Jesus was telling these Pharisees that God would judge them for their stewardship!

What things will God consider when judging our stewardship? God will judge us according to the abilities given to us. In the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14, 15), the master gave his goods unto each servant “according to his own ability.” Jesus said, “For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more” (12:48). Paul said that the Corinthians should give “according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have” (2 Cor. 8:12). We then, should not compare ourselves to others, but simply give our best to the Master.

God will judge his stewards according to the opportunities given. The rich man had the opportunity to help Lazarus as he lay at his gate, but he wouldn’t. In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus spoke of the judgment in which those who had opportunity to do good and didn’t, would be punished. He said, “These shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life.”

Stewardship demands obedient action. Man will be judged as to whether or not he used his master’s goods to his glory or he “stored” them. The “one talent” man in Matthew 25:24-30 was not condemned for being a “one talent guy.” He was punished for being lazy! God gives us life. We can’t store it, we can only live it. He gives us time. We can’t store it, we can only spend it. It’s the same thing

with our talents and money. We must not “bury” them. We must *use* them as God has instructed. “Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing” (Matt. 24:45, 46).

## CONCLUSION

Stewardship is simply a life principle. We do not waste, not because we can’t afford it, but because it is wrong to do so. As with the prodigal son, *want* will always follow *waste*. Stewardship is a complete lifestyle of total accountability and responsibility. Good stewards respond according to the abilities that God has given to them. Good stewardship acknowledges God as the creator, giver, and owner of all things. As good stewards of the grace of God, we receive his gifts with thanksgiving, cultivate them responsibly, and share them with others to the glory of God.

The prime requirement of stewardship is faithfulness. “Moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (1 Cor. 4:2). Our management or administration of God’s manifold blessings is not a matter of our own pleasure or will, nor of that of others, but solely of God’s pleasure or will, for he is our ultimate judge of the use of his blessings (1 Cor. 4:2-4).

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“Stewards” continued from page 2

**By Knowing the Gospel.** God has given us the gospel to know and understand (Eph. 3:4). Many in the world just do not know the gospel of Christ. Christians of all people should know the gospel. If we do not know it, we cannot help ourselves, our families or others, and we will certainly be destroyed spiritually. Hosea wrote, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I also will forget thy children” (Hos. 4:6). Paul wrote to Timothy, “Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). Do you really know what is in the gospel from beginning to end? If not, then you are not a faithful steward of the gospel.

**By Believing the Gospel.** God expects us to believe and accept the gospel he gives us. Yes, God’s gospel is powerful, but its power is available only to those who believe it. Paul wrote, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel: for it is



the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16). John the Baptist preached saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). The Apostle Peter preached the gospel so that people would believe. He said, “Brethren, ye know that a good while ago God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel, and believe” (Acts 15:7). Reading, studying, and knowing the gospel is not enough. The gospel in our hands must also be believed (Eph. 1:13). We must accept the gospel as true and reliable, trust it and have confidence in its power to save (Col. 1:5). Only then will the gospel give us the hope of salvation and the promise of heaven above (Col. 1:23).

**By Loving the Gospel.** The gospel of Jesus Christ is not just something we carry in our hand; it must also be carried in our hearts. God wants us to love his word. The Psalmist wrote, “Oh how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day” (Ps. 119:97; see also verses 113, 163, 165). Loving God with all of our hearts includes loving his word as well (Mark 12:30).

**By Living the Gospel.** Christians will show their love for God’s word and demonstrate their stewardship of the gospel by living the gospel. The gospel of Christ is not merely an academic exercise of study or a philosophical theory to muse about. We are not to simply *say* we love the gospel, we are to *live* the gospel (1 John 3:18). For the true Christian, the gospel is a way of life. Each day a Christian is to apply and live the gospel. We must read, hear *and* keep the things that are written in the gospel (Rev. 1:3). We are not to say “Lord, Lord” and fail to do what Jesus says (Matt. 7:21; Luke 6:46). Christians are to stand daily in the gospel (1 Cor. 15:1-2; 2 Thess. 2:15). Christians should also “adorn the doctrine of God” (Tit. 2:10), and be “doers of the word” (Jas. 1:22) daily. Each Christian should have a reputation throughout all the churches of living the gospel (2 Cor. 8:18).

**By Promoting the Gospel.** There are several ways that Christians can and should promote the gospel of Christ. First, they can preach it and teach it to others, both lost and saved (Matt. 24:14; Mark 16:15; Acts 8:4; Heb. 5:12; Tit. 2:2). Remember, all who do not obey the gospel will be lost (2 Thess. 1:8; 1 Pet. 4:17). Like Paul, all Christians must have a yearning to tell others of the gospel (Rom. 1:14-16). Like Paul, Christians should look for all open doors of opportunity to preach the gospel (2 Cor. 2:12).

Second, Christians can defend the gospel like Paul did (Phil. 1:7, 16, 27). They can stand up for truth by taking a Bible in hand and contending “earnestly for the faith” (Jude 3). They can stand up and labor with others who are taking a stand for truth and not run (Gal. 2:5; Phil. 2:22;

4:3; 1 Thess. 3:2; 2 Tim. 4:9-11, 16-17). A Christian may have to suffer for the gospel that he defends (Mark 8:35; 10:29; 2 Tim. 1:8; Phile. 13), but he is willing as a faithful steward. Christians can also stand for truth by preaching the one and only true gospel and not another gospel (2 Cor. 11:4; Gal. 1:6-9, 11). Every Christian who will shod his feet with “the preparation of the gospel” (Eph. 6:15) will take a stand for the gospel.

Third, Christians can promote the gospel through monetary support as the church at Philippi did with Paul (Phil. 1:5; 4:15-18). There are many sound gospel preachers today all around the world that can use our monetary support of the gospel (1 Cor. 9:14).

Finally, Christians can promote the gospel by living in such a way as to not hinder the progress of the gospel (1 Cor. 9:12, 18, 23). Satan tries to hide (2 Cor. 4:3-4) and hinder (1 Thess. 2:18) the gospel, but no faithful Christian will do such a thing. A faithful steward of the gospel today will not let a personal right (liberty or opinion), or a personal wrong (sin) get in the way to promoting the gospel of Christ.

Christians are stewards of the gospel. Are you a faithful (trustworthy) steward of the gospel? Do you know God’s word, or are you biblically illiterate? Has your Bible gathered dust? Do you have a daily Bible reading plan in place at this time for you or your family? Some Christians know all about the latest sports stats or the new movies and music, but they don’t know much about the gospel. What a shame! Do you truly believe, love, and live the gospel? The best Bible translation on the market today is a Bible that has been translated into the lives of its readers (2 Cor. 3:2-3)! Are you a gospel promoter or a gospel preventer? All Christians can and should demonstrate their stewardship of the gospel by knowing it, believing it, loving it, living it and promoting it. May each Christian today be found as a “faithful and wise steward” when the Lord returns (Luke 12:42-44; 1 Cor. 4:2).

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# A Worthy Life

David Dann

Jesus said, “He who does not take his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me” (Matt. 10:38). The Greek word, *axios*, is often translated as “worthy” in the New Testament. In order for something to be worthy it must be suitable for an intended purpose, it must be befitting of a set of circumstances, and it must correspond to the thing to which it is being compared.

As Christians, we are to live worthy lives. In other words, we are to live in a manner that shows we are fulfilling our purpose by following Christ. We must conduct ourselves in a fitting and godly manner under all circumstances. And, we must live up to the name “Christian” by having our attitudes and actions correspond to the attitudes and actions of our Master. Therefore, the one who does not take his cross and follow after Jesus is not fitting to be called a disciple of the Lord.

There can be no doubt that individuals can act in such a way so as to prove themselves unworthy of salvation. On one occasion Paul and Barnabas warned that the Jews who rejected the gospel had, by so doing, judged themselves “unworthy of everlasting life” (Acts 13:46). On the other hand, the Bible has much to say with reference to the ways in which we can and must live in a worthy manner. Christians are to live in a way that is:

**1. Worthy of the Lord.** No man is deserving of the sacrifice of Christ, nor can any man change that fact. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). However, if we are to please God, we must conduct ourselves in a way that is worthy of the Savior. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul writes of his desire for the brethren to “have a walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:10). While we do not and cannot deserve Christ’s sacrifice, we can and must behave in a way that is suitable and fitting for those who would call themselves after the name of Christ. We do this by conducting ourselves according to the principles set forth in God’s word.

**2. Worthy of the calling.** Paul writes, “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called” (Eph. 4:1). Paul goes on to explain that in order to live in a way that would correspond to our calling, we must conduct ourselves, “with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:2-3). Our calling is the call of the gospel message that draws our hearts to the Lord (2 Thess. 2:14). Peter writes, “but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct” (1 Pet. 1:15). Instead of acting like the rest

of the world, we are to live in a way that is suitable for those who have been drawn to God.

**3. Worthy of the gospel.** To the Philippians, Paul writes, “Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Phil. 1:27). The gospel, or doctrine, of Christ gives us the instruction that we need to please God in every aspect of our lives. We must allow our attitudes, words, and actions to be governed by the gospel of Christ, for “whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God” (2 John 9). In other words, our conduct should correspond to the principles revealed in the New Testament in every particular.

**4. Worthy of the kingdom of God.** To the Thessalonians, Paul writes, “We ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer” (2 Thess. 1:4-5). In this particular instance, Paul makes the point that the faith and patience exhibited by the Thessalonians in the midst of persecution corresponds well to their status as citizens of God’s kingdom. Our behavior should be different from those who do not know God. How does the world view the Lord’s church based on what they observe of your conduct? We must live in a way that is suitable for members of the body of Christ.

**5. Worthy of the saints.** While we must behave properly toward those in the world, we must also be careful to conduct ourselves in a suitable manner toward our brothers and sisters in Christ. In his letter to the Romans Paul instructs the brethren to receive Phoebe “in a manner worthy of the saints” (Rom. 16:1-2). We ought to treat our fellow Christians in a way that is fitting for those who are fellow heirs of the grace of God. Or, as Peter writes, “Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart” (1 Pet. 1:22).

## CONCLUSION

While we can neither earn nor deserve the grace of God, we can live in a way that is fitting for those who are recipients of his grace. We can live worthy lives. Therefore, “conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear” (1 Pet. 1:17).

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## Second Annual Truth Magazine Lectures

**July 11-14-2005**

# The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible

Bowling Green, Kentucky — Sloan Convention Center

<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>
8:00 - 8:50	What About Islam and the Qu'ran? Kyle Pope	Is the Biblical Text Reliable? John Smith	Are There Lost Books of The Bible? Mark Mayberry
9:00 - 9:50	The Glorious Church Rody Gumpad	Evidences: Prophecy: Kevin Maxey	Evidences: Unity of Bible: Steve Wallace
10:00 - 10:50	Addictive Behaviors Pornography: Steve Wolfgang	Addictive Behaviors Substances of Abuse: Art Adams	Addictive Behaviors Gambling: Joe Price
11:00 - 11:50	Creation: Dan King	Genesis 3: Paul Blake	Genesis 6-8, The Flood: Tom O'Neal
<b>Lunch Break</b>			
<b>Ladies Classes</b>			
10:00 - 10:50	Helping Christians Addicted to Pornography: Bette Wolfgang	Teaching Children to Respect Authority: Sherilyn Mayberry	Creating Peace At Home Violet McDaniel
<b>Auditorium</b>			
2:00 - 4:00	Open Forum		Elders & Work of the Church
<b>Singing Led by Various Song Leaders 7:00 - 7:30</b>			
What Does the Bible Claim For Itself? Donnie V. Rader	Is the Bible Applicable to the Modern World? Walton Weaver	Oh How Love I Thy Law: Johnie Edwards (After Wednesday evening Bible Study)	First Century Morals for the Twenty-first Century: Andy Alexander

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