

## OUR STEWARDSHIP IN CHRIST

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There are more than a dozen descriptive metaphors for the Christian in the NT. We are referred to as ambassadors, representing the Lord in this distant world and beseeching its inhabitants to be reconciled unto God (2 Cor. 5:20). We are sojourners and pilgrims—strangers in a strange land, passing through a barren wilderness en route to a heavenly destination. (1 Peter 2:11). We are also sons and heirs of God replete with all the privileges and responsibilities that come to those who are born again through faith in Jesus Christ. In addition, we are slaves bound by love to a gracious Master who has set us free; soldiers who must earnestly contend for the faith; farmers and workers, athletes and vessels, and salt and light. We are also branches that are connected to the True Vine that we might bear much fruit and glorify our Father in heaven (John 15:8). These metaphors and more aptly describe not only the position of the NT believer, but also the part that we have in knowing Him and making Him known. Perhaps that aspect—knowing Him and making Him known—is epitomized in yet another NT metaphor for the believer; that of a steward.

In 1 Cor. 4:1-2, the apostle Paul resolutely states to the Corinthian assembly: *“Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God”*. Fending off an undercurrent of criticism by those who wanted to discredit his ministry, Paul firmly declared his obligation to transmit the truth of God as it was delivered to him by the Lord. As a minister, he was called to serve, as a steward he was called to manage; a divinely-bestowed responsibility to faithfully handle that which was entrusted to his care (v. 3). Later, he would substantiate this same principle when he proclaimed: *“For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you...”* (1 Cor. 11:23). This responsibility of being a steward was not Paul’s alone, but is ours as well and that of everyone who knows and loves the Savior.

Like Paul, we are called to be stewards of the *truth*. Paul acknowledged that he was a steward of the “mysteries of God”. This refers to a number of truths associated with the NT revelation of the Gospel and the glorious work of our Savior, the Lord Jesus. These truths are indeed “mysteries” to the unsaved who are blinded by their sin and do not have the illuminating benefit of God’s Holy Spirit. In some ways, they are still mysteries to those believers who refuse to diligently study God’s precious Word. When Paul exhorted Timothy to *“lay hold of eternal life”* (1 Tim. 6:12), he was not encouraging him to come to faith in Christ, but rather to fully grasp the truth of God as a believer—to hold it and to not let it go. To be stewards of the truth then dictates that we firmly grasp it, recognizing the truth for what it is and to do so with intensity and holy jealousy. This is the key to faithful stewardship. If believers do not adequately comprehend the deeper truths of the Word, they will not have a passion for it and subsequently will be vulnerable to *“every wind of doctrine and slight of men”* (Eph. 4:14) that seeks to sway or swindle the Body of Christ.

We also have a responsibility to guard the truth. *“O Timothy, Keep that which was committed to thy trust”* (1 Tim. 6:20) was the apostle’s impassioned plea to his son in the faith. He also reminded him: *“that good thing, which was committed unto thee keep through the Holy Spirit which dwelleth in us”* (2 Tim. 1:14). Jude 3 states it similarly: *“...earnestly contend for the faith, which was once delivered to the saints”*. Like David’s mighty man, Shammah (2 Sam 23), we are to stand in the midst of the provision of God’s people – His Word – and valiantly defend all of it, since it is such a valuable piece of property. We are stewards commissioned to guard the truth of God. We are to grasp it, guard it and also give it out; first to those around us who do not know the Lord and secondarily to those who do

know the Lord, regardless if they are wayward or faithfully walking with the Lord. Luke 12:42 states: "... *Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season?* We have an indisputable mandate from the Lord to share what we have gleaned from the private and public study of the Scriptures to be a means of salvation to the lost and a help and blessing to His precious people. Just as the Syrian lepers acknowledged their responsibility, we too ought to say "*This is a day of good tidings, let us go and tell the king's household*" (2 Kings 7). Without a doubt, we have a clear responsibility to be faithful stewards of the truth.

Secondly, we are also called to be good stewards of the *talents* that God has given us. In 1 Peter 4:10, we read: *As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*" As those who have been given spiritual gifts and abilities from the Lord, we are to wisely use them for His sake and not for personal gain or self-aggrandizement. We are not to squander the opportunities that abound on every hand, but rather we are not to neglect the gift of God (1 Tim. 4:14), but rather stir up the gift of God (2 Tim. 1:6). The Lord has invested in us greatly and He is looking for good return on that investment! So we must ask ourselves the question "How many people have we won to the Lord"? How many Christians have we helped restore? How many have we encouraged on the path of faith? Searching questions indeed and an application of the truth behind the teaching of the parable of the pounds and the talents in Luke 19 and Matt. 25.

Thirdly, Christians are to be good stewards of their *time*. Eph. 5:16 exhorts: "*redeeming the time because the days are evil*". The Lord reminded us through His teaching in Luke 19:13: "*Occupy (or do business) till I come*"; Paul warned the Corinthians: "*Time is short*" (1 Cor. 7:29) and the same to the Christians in Rome: "*the night is far spent, the day is at hand*" (Rom. 13:12). Time is certainly a precious commodity and we all need more of it. However, unless the sun stands still in the sky, there is only a limited amount of hours in the day and hence a need to manage our time efficiently for His glory. The Lord endorsed the principle of time for rest in the midst of a busy schedule (Mark 6:31) – but for most of us perhaps, we camp on this verse a little too long! Could we be doing more for the Lord in our "busy" schedules? Perhaps if we assess our daily and weekly budget of time, we might be shocked to find just how much we spend on ourselves and on our own interests. Paul prayed that the Philippians would approve the things that are excellent, Phil. 1:10) and we need to do the same when it comes to our time.

Finally, we are also called to be wise stewards of our *treasures*, that is our money. In the parable of the unjust steward in Luke 16, the Lord commended an unscrupulous manager for his ability to act quickly and shrewdly through the careful use of finances to influence others. This steward realized that money "talks" and that through it he could make friends for a future benefit. The Lord in applying this parable to His disciples then made this startling statement: "*And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations. He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much* (Luke 16:9-10). The application is that through the wise use of money (which is otherwise used for unrighteous purposes), we also can also achieve a future benefit for the Lord namely, making spiritual friendships that will last throughout eternity by the careful use of the money that has been entrusted to us. Rather than viewing "our" money as "some for the Lord and the rest for me", we need to think of it in terms of it being *all* the Lord's – some to be invested directly for a spiritual benefit and the rest of it to be spent in a thoughtful manner with "eternity's values in view". If

we do, the Lord may entrust to us even more since we can handle the responsibility that comes with it and since His kingdom is furthered as a result.

Each one of us are stewards with an obligation to faithfully manage all that has been entrusted to our care—the truth, our talents, our time and our treasure. How well we perform at this task will be assessed at a future Day when we stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ. May it be said of us that we were wise and faithful stewards in household of God.

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