

The Christian's Stewardship

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Christian stewardship is a principle approved alike of God and man. Stewardship implies responsibility and responsibility demands faithfulness. The apostle emphasizes this fact when he declares, "Moreover, it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful." The principle of stewardship is applicable to all men, but especially to all who have acknowledged the lordship of Jesus Christ. We should feel a profound sense of this responsibility as we think of the application of this principle to ourselves.

All human life is a sacred stewardship. In everything it is required that we should be found faithful, and if at heart we are thus found it will be easily seen. This great principle is approvingly emphasized in the Word of God, and I do not hesitate to declare that its practice upon the part of all God's people is one of the greatest needs of the world today. Therefore the importance of impressing the truth of Christian stewardship at this time.

I. First of all, let us think of the ground of stewardship.

As I see it, the ground of stewardship is divine ownership, but this ownership has the warrant of a five-fold title.

1. The right of creation. Who can question this for a moment? Man is under obligation to the God that made him, but, alas, too often it must be said, "Of the rock that begat thee thou art unmindful and hast forgot God that formed thee." (Deut. 32: 18.)

2. The right of redemption. "I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine." (Isa. 43: 11.) "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price." (1 Cor. 6: 19.) Again, "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ." (1 Pet. 1: 18.)

3. The right of discovery. We were lost and ruined sinners, but Jesus sought us and found us.

"I was lost, but Jesus found me,
Found the sheep that went astray;
Threw His loving arms around me,
Drew me back into His way."

4. The right of regeneration, recreation. He not only found us lost and dead in sin, but He quickened us into life and made us new creatures. Blessed ownership!

5. The right of consecration. Christianity is a voluntary matter, but it assumes obligations. The Christian acknowledges the Lordship of Christ over his life, therefore he gladly says, "I am the Lord's, 'whose I am and whom I serve'."

If we are real Christians, we belong to Him in all these senses, though there may be a sense in which He does not truly possess His own. Alas, alas, that this is too often the case! I may own a treasure but it may be in the possession of another. Jesus owns us, but we may be now possessed by another. God's ownership is of the whole of man and all that he possesses, and a sense of this fact is the inspiration of all true Christian dignity and strength.

This will suffice to emphasize the ground of stewardship.

II. *Let us think now of the practice of stewardship.*

This is the great need of the hour. I mean by the practice of stewardship that practice which will merit divine approval. In this connection three things are necessary:

1. There must be a recognition of the fact that stewardship involves the administration of a trusteeship. A steward is a trustee to whom something has been committed which must be administered in accordance with the will of the owner. Through this administration the steward is tested with a view to larger trust in the future. This fact is clearly brought out in the parable of the talents and the parable of the pounds, and also in many other passages of the New Testament that are related to the subject. (1 Pet. 4: 10; Matt. 16: 27; 25: 14.)

2. The second thing is the administration of this trusteeship.

Now, this takes in everything with which God has entrusted us. Among these are time, talent, influence, power, wealth and life itself.

Time is allotted to man by the Creator. Man cannot create it, he has no power even to prolong his days beyond his Maker's will. The days of our years are brief even for the oldest. We live this life but once. This gives to time an inestimable value and to life a peculiar solemnity. We should be faithful and loyal in the use of our time.

What is true of our time is true also of our talents, our influence, our power, our oppor-

tunity, and our money. But as Christians we are also stewards of the Word which has been committed unto us and of the manifold grace of God. Therefore, it is ours to give the gospel of the grace of God to all who have it not the world around. If we cannot take the gospel ourselves, then we must see to it that others carry the message. The measure of progress will be determined by the measure of our faithfulness in the administration of our trusteeship.

3. The third thing in the practice of stewardship is administration under divine guidance, and, therefore, prompted by the right motive. These two things are absolutely necessary in order to merit the divine approval, but if we have these we cannot go wrong. The trouble with too many of us is that we consult with flesh and blood instead of the Divine Spirit, who alone is able to guide us in our administration, and are lacking in the true motive.

I am reminded of a negro slave girl who was sold on the block in one of our Southern states during slavery days. She was bid in at a high price, and when she realized that she had a new owner, which would probably mean the breaking of all her earthly ties, she was greatly distressed and gave way to her feelings, but the man who had made the highest bid at once offered unto her her freedom, whereupon her weeping was turned into joy and she fell at his feet and begged that she might serve him.

That is the love that should prompt the Christian—love for the owner.

We come now to the thing of greatest importance:

III. *The reckoning of stewardship.*

The parables referred to above emphasize reckoning and rewards. Both warn us of danger. There may be a tragedy ahead. This is what many of us today need to think more about. Two things will suffice in this consideration.

1. First, let me impress the *fact* of reckoning. We *must* give account. This should stir us to careful examination now lest that fact discover unfaithfulness on our part. Now is the time to look into the matter. If we are failing, we may have time to correct before it is too late. It may be that we are defaulters in our trusteeship, and I am fearful that many Christians are. It is the part of wisdom to have rules and regulations and thus to keep strict account.

This leads me to press the importance of method and of proportionate giving. We ought to be systematic in all matters, but especially in the practice of stewardship. The haphazard way that most of us serve our Lord is dangerous. If we could ever keep in mind the awful fact that there is to be a reckoning, no doubt we would be more careful in the use of our time and talents, as well as our money.

But the greatest need, I feel, is in the adoption of definite system and method in the administration of our money. There can be no mistake if one will adopt the tithe as a minimum and make his payments in accordance with the scriptural teaching. "Upon the first day of the week let each one of you lay by him in store as he may prosper." (1 Cor. 16: 2.)

There can be no question in my mind but that some people these days should give more than the tithe, and I am rejoiced to find many men are giving all they make above their living expenses.

Here is an important question to ask: "How think you your account stands today?" The Owner may appear at any moment. Are you ready to meet Him and give account?

2. I would have you note the manner of the reckoning. Mark you, this will be in accordance with our faithfulness to our ability and our opportunity. God expects from no man what He has not given him the power to do, but he who is wise to see and prompt to act when opportunity is presented will win success and honor. Not to do the plainly revealed duty of the moment is to entail weakness, disappointment and suffering. If you have but one talent, use that talent. God does not expect from you what he does from the five-talent man, but your reckoning will be in accordance with your faithfulness. This is as true with the man of small means as with the rich. This thought should encourage us to do our best with what He has given us:

"Give as you would if an angel
Waited your gift at the door;
Give as you would if tomorrow
Found your giving were o'er.

"Give as you would to the Master,
If you met His loving look,
Give as you would of your substance,
If His hands the offering took."