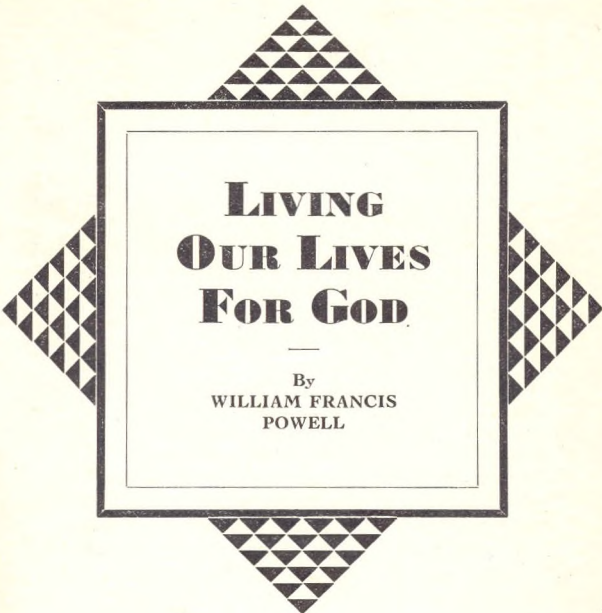


#419



**LIVING
OUR LIVES
FOR GOD.**

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By
WILLIAM FRANCIS
POWELL

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Living Our Lives for God

By *William Francis Powell*

The parables of Jesus teach us that a steward has full charge of something belonging to his Lord; that every steward is held accountable to his Lord for whatever is entrusted to him; that every steward will be called upon to render an account of his stewardship; that goodness and faithfulness are the indispensable qualities in a steward; and that the unprofitable steward who buries that which has been entrusted to him finds later that he has buried himself with the neglected entrustment.

Nothing the Master ever said has such admonitory significance for Southern Baptists today. A Christian bulletin bears the following interrogation: "What is 'Stewardship' but God's word for this generation?" Stewardship is God's word for *every* generation. The reality of conversion exists in the consciousness that "I am my Lord's and he is mine." In salvation Jesus is Saviour. In service Jesus is Lord.

The Lordship of Jesus is the stewardship of life. By this stewardship of life traditional Christianity becomes experimental in every age. That is our supreme need now—for traditional Christianity to become experimental. True Christianity concerns itself with life. It is a life, and must be lived.

Christ Must Have All of a Life

Stewardship of time or talents or possessions is impossible without the stewardship of life. Christ must have all of a life to make the most of the least of a life.

"Lord, I give my all to thee,
Talents, time and earthly store,
Soul and body thine to be
Only thine forevermore."

The pity with us is that we seem to have forgotten the all-inclusive conditions of "the great transaction" of that happy day. Paul never got over being saved.

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me; and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me." Galatians 2: 20.

"For none of us liveth to himself and none of us dieth to himself. For whether we live we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's." Romans 14: 7, 8.

That is ownership, and ownership means Lordship, and Lordship implies stewardship. Only the steward can call Jesus "Lord." He warns us that many will call him "Lord" who have no right to use the name.

But hear Paul further on the stewardship of life—2 Corinthians 5: 14, 15:

"For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died; and he died for all, that they that live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto him who for their sakes died and rose again."

The stewardship of life, therefore, is enforced in the fact that the Christian's life is not his own. Whether he lives or dies he is the Lord's. He is blood-bought. This does not apply to one group of professing Christians more than to another. A Christian is a Christian. A Christian life is a Christian life, whether its stewardship is investing it in the ministry of the gospel, as a missionary in the homeland or on the foreign field, as a professional or business man or woman, as a student or teacher, in the house or on the farm. One Christian life belongs to the Lord Jesus just as much as another. The stewardship of one life may be better than that of another. In fact, sometimes the Lord owns more lives than he is privileged to possess. A friend of mine once gave me a beautiful ruby pin. It was stolen from our home. I still own it but a thief possesses it. So is the life of the Christian withheld from the Lord. How much of modern, worldly, self-centered and self-indulgent church membership amounts to no more than baptized paganism! Looseness of living leads

to the lowering of the highest ideals. The sky may sometimes be reflected in a puddle but woe to him who expects to reach the stars thereby!

Stewardship Corrects Modern Complexities

The stewardship of life is the only corrective for the complexities of modern life. Paul has a word of help for us at this point:

“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 are bought with a price; glorify God therefore in your body.” 1 Cor. 6: 19, 20.

It is a poor steward of his life who through self-indulgence would turn such a temple into a tomb.

“For he that soweth unto his own flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth unto the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap eternal life.” Gal. 6: 8.

The parables of stewardship are packed with the doctrine of retributive justice. They prove that “He that findeth his life shall lose it.”

Consider the disproportion between the duration of the objects for which many lives are lived and the duration of the souls squandered in seeking them. “They call their lands after their own names; they think that their houses shall continue forever. They go down into the dust. Their glory shall not descend after them.” And God engraved on their epitaph “Thou fool.” That is poor stewardship of land but how much poorer stewardship of life!

Man Becomes Like That He Seeks

A man becomes like that he seeks. The German people have made many contributions to the literature of the world but I think one of the finest is the main lesson taught in their Rhinegold stories—that a man begins to turn to a serpent when he begins to hoard money. Accumulation makes the money but distribution makes the man.

Nothing can be kept back from him who pleads:

“I gave my life for thee,
My precious blood I shed,
That thou might'st ransomed be,
And quickened from the dead;
I gave, I gave my life for thee,
What hast thou given for me?”

The Christian life begins at the Cross and ends at the throne. Coleridge said:

“Unless above himself he can erect himself,
How poor a thing is man!”

Man, then, reaches renown only through renunciation. Paul put it thus: “For me to live is Christ.” Thirty-three years of such stewardship of life qualified him to say: “I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me.” This must be, then, the Christian's immediate and immovable position—that his life is the Lord's; that however poor it may seem Christ purchased it at an awful price; that however rich his life may be it is not his own—ever mindful of having been redeemed “not with corruptible things, with silver or gold—but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, *even the blood of Christ.*”

Life of Service Only One That Counts

That is the yielded life. Everything else must conform to that. Man's calling must be considered, entered upon and followed with the dominant aim of thereby so living a life as to make it mean most for Christ. Any life is great when lived for an end so great—to live a life as an entrustment from God. The secret of every great life for Christ is to be found here. It is significant that the text: “A brand plucked from the burning” was the life motto of Henry Martin, John Wesley, John Fletcher and George Whitefield. And David Livingstone so construed the seriousness of the stewardship of life that he said, “I will place no value on anything except as it relates to the kingdom of God.” How faithfully he discharged his stewardship is the story of how a cotton factory lad in Scotland became Scotland's noblest

hero and brought daybreak to this dark continent, died alone except for his faithful blacks, in old age in the heart of Africa, on his knees, after penning with a dying hand: "All I can add in my solitude is, may heaven's rich blessings come down on every one who would help to heal this open sore of the world!" The representatives of five great nations came together after the burial of Livingstone in Westminster Abbey, to destroy the slave trade in Africa. And poor benighted Africa made more advancement in the ten years following the death of Livingstone than in the ten hundred years before. The stewardship of life is that process by which vicarious lives become God's instruments of human progress in the obedient doings of his will. This is the challenge of the hour. It is the only life that counts.

Only the man who thus regards his obligation can pray, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Only the Christian steward of life can "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." Only by practicing the stewardship can the Christian "Lay up treasure in heaven." And never until life is held in trust for him can one obey the great commandment "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy soul, heart, mind and strength and thy neighbor as thyself." It is loving him who first loved us, and loving others for his sake. Only by the stewardship of life can we "Let our light so shine before men that they may see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven." The candle cannot shine which is unwilling to burn.

**"Heaven doth with us as we with torches do,
Not light them for themselves; for if our virtues
Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike
As if we had them not. Spirits are not finely
touched
But to fine issues; nor Nature never lends
The smallest scruple of her excellence,
But like a thrifty goddess, she determines
Herself the glory of a creditor—
Both thanks and use."**

Shakespeare had sensed the secret of the stewardship of life—that man must answer for divine en-

trustments. It was the payment of a debt in the mind of Paul: "So then, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh; for if ye live after the flesh, ye must die; but if by the Spirit ye put to death the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God."

Stewardship Alone Can Pay Our Debts

We are debtors, and the stewardship of life alone can discharge the debt. We owe a debt to the past. Adam was the only man who ever lived who owed no debt to his predecessors, but God made him a steward of the present. We are debtors, though, to the past.

The achievements and attainments of six thousand years of struggle and sacrifice, of treasure and truth, have been committed to us from the nerveless grasp of those gone before. Every milestone of humanity's progress is a tombstone under which some one fell for our sakes. The libraries and art galleries of the world, the Parthenon and the Pyramids, the laws and liberties, the colleges and churches, the homes and hospitals, the inventions and discoveries, the professions and the industries, all that make life thirty-five times richer and more varied than in the days of King David, twice as long and four times as productive as in the time of Shakespeare, with the opportunities and capacities for self-improvement and service in this land of ours "where the air is full of freedom and where the flag is full of stars"—what a trust has been committed to us from the past!

We Are Responsible for the Present

And we are responsible for the present. Every advancement and every resource of this golden age must be mastered for the Lord. The soul of man is still dead in sin. A lost world still rotates on its axis inside Christ's broken heart. We must love him with all our hearts and serve him with all our lives now.

Thus did the early Christians, before Pentecost, faithfully order their lives as he had bidden, so re-

ceived they the power at Pentecost for such self-surrendered, Spirit-filled lives that were regarded as "a third race"—and they were—and so are all who are born of the Holy Ghost—new creatures—created in Christ Jesus for good works. They arose to greater service because they obeyed the Master's great commission.

He meant for every Christian to be a blessing to all the world. The experience of Pentecost may be repeated. Deciding now that ours shall be the stewardship of life in its fullest, deepest and highest meaning, he will give us all the power we may be willing to employ in his service. For he has promised his presence and his power to those who will carry out his program in the world. Only stewards of life can receive it.

Thus we will pay our debt to the past, perform our obligation to the present and present the account of our stewardship of life to him when he comes.

"While anthems of rapture unceasingly roll
And the smile of the Lord is the feast of the soul."