

# 964

# STEWARDSHIP — OR — LIFE A TRUST

*"It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful."*—1 Cor. 4: 2.

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## Stewardship or Life a Trust

The growing interest in this Bible doctrine inspires hope. While all thoughtful citizens look upon *public* office as a *public* trust, to be administered in the interest of the public welfare, it is gratifying to note that an increasing number of Christians are now recognizing that *private* life is likewise a trust, a serious trust, a divine trust, to be administered for the highest welfare of ourselves, society and for the glory of God. This is the sure prophecy of a better day. Were all Christians sound on Stewardship, both in theory and practice, there would be no lack, either in workers or the money to support them. Stewardship implies consecration of life and treasure; it is basal to all Kingdom success.

### DEFINED

A steward is the manager of affairs or estates that are not his own. God owns the material universe and has entrusted its management to us. We are to occupy until he comes and calls for an account of our stewardship. Divine ownership implies human stewardship. They are correlative terms. Our stewardship, therefore, is the logical outgrowth of God's ownership.

### GOD'S OWNERSHIP

It is very difficult for us, as free born American citizens, who glory in our independence, to recognize fully that both we and ours belong to God. If we are willing, however, to accept the plain teaching of God's Word, there is no escape from this conclusion.

### CHRISTIANS

God has at least a double claim on us as Christians. In the first place, he created us. The Bible

teaching is as follows: "We are the creatures of his hands." "It is he that hath made us and not we ourselves." "In the image of God created he us."

We are his also, because he redeemed us. "Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price." "We were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold, . . . but with the precious blood of Christ."

## MATERIAL THINGS

In as much as *we* belong to God, he also holds the title to our *possessions*. As Dr. Gambrell says, "The wool belongs to the owner of the sheep."

Besides, the material universe belongs to God because he created it. The following is the oldest land entry we have: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." We may search the records from the beginning to the present and we shall not find any evidence that God has sold out or transferred his title.

There are some passages of Scripture that re-enforce the same idea. "All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee." "If I were hungry I would not tell thee; for the world is mine and the fullness thereof." "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein." "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine," saith the Lord of hosts, "and the cattle upon a thousand hills." "What hast thou that thou didst not receive?" Dr. Goucher, in harmony with these Bible quotations, says, "No man has originated a new force or created a new element."

## POSSESSION

In this discussion it is proper to make the Scriptural distinction between *possession* and *ownership*. In the early church, when the disciples were under the sway of the divine spirit, "none of them claimed that aught of the things which he *possessed* was

his *own*." "The earth is the Lord's; unto you it is given for a possession." Our title is to *possession*, God's title is to *ownership*. Our title gives us the right to occupy, develop and appropriate in harmony with the will of the Owner.

## SATISFACTORY

This relation should be highly satisfactory to all Christians. Personally, I am happy to consider my Heavenly Father as my Proprietor and myself as his steward, for two reasons:

First, if I "acknowledge him in all my ways," operate in harmony with his will, and am "diligent in business," I have a guaranty of success. My Proprietor has all power, owns all the resources of the universe, and controls all the agencies that make for business success. The Psalmist says, "Whatsoever the godly man doeth shall prosper." A plumber who had been earning an average of \$22.00 a week, decided that it was his duty to seek God's guidance daily and to dedicate at least a tenth of his income to him; ten years later he reported an income of \$250 weekly, all his children of accountable age Christians, and the spiritual life of himself and family greatly enriched.

Second, I am pleased with this relationship because my Proprietor is so generous with me. If I am a consistent and thrifty steward, it is my Proprietor's will that I appropriate to myself and family whatever is necessary for our highest welfare, however, not more than nine-tenths.

## COMPREHENSIVE

"Stewardship is a large word. It touches the perimeter of human life. The powers and possibilities of my being are my Lord's estate."

Stewardship is not limited to material resources, but applies to every power of body and soul. It levies its claim on our education, ability to speak, teach, sing, social leadership, executive ability,

prestige of official position, winning personality, the gift of leadership; all these, and many more, are committed to us as sacred trusts, not to be used in our own interest alone, but also for the welfare of the race and the honor of God.

## PRACTICAL DUTIES

In the first place, this doctrine of divine ownership implies that our lives should be invested in harmony with God's will. Horace Bushnell says, "Every man's life is a plan of God." Our mission is ordained of God. James Russell Lowell says, "No man is born into this world whose work is not born with him." Christ says, "As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you."

In saying that a Christian should invest his life in harmony with God's will, we do not mean that he should quit an honorable business that is suited to his talent and training, and go to preaching.

If we invest our lives according to God's will, two desirable things are sure:

In the first place, the Lord's ears will be open to our petitions. David Gregg says, "Nothing lies beyond the reach of prayer except that which lies outside the will of God."

In the second place, if we are rendering service in harmony with his will, although it may at times mean self-denial and sacrifice, we have the guaranty of an enriched life.

## APPLICATION GENERAL

For example, the Christian man has no right to engage in the profession of law or medicine, to aspire to a seat in the halls of state or national legislation, unless he is convinced that such investment of his life is approved of God. It is the duty of the steward to seek the Lord's will regarding

any important decision that he may be called upon to make.

Sometime ago three men called on a prominent citizen and urged him to enter the race for Congress. In his reply he said that he appreciated their consideration, but hesitated on three grounds: first, he was not sure that he was qualified for this responsible position; second, he was doubtful if he would be able to win; third, he said that he is a steward and must invest his life in harmony with God's plan.

On his return to his home he spoke to his wife of the visit of these men and sought her advice. She replied that he needed to bear in mind that he is the Lord's steward and that the only thing for him to do was to submit the matter to the Lord. He agreed to take her suggestion and requested her to join him in prayer. The next morning he inquired of his wife if she had received any impression as to his duty in this matter. She replied very promptly that the Holy Spirit impressed her that he should remain with his Sunday school and with his four fine boys, who needed his presence and training. He then said to her that he had a similar impression, and, therefore, declined to enter the race.

## LIFE—A KINGDOM ASSET

In the second place, we should recognize that stewardship requires us to make our life investment a Kingdom asset. The Christian farmer, merchant or mechanic, who is diligent in business, makes adequate provision for the support and education of his children, that they may "serve their day and generation by the will of God," and honors the Lord with at least a tenth of his income, is an important factor in God's program and is engaged in a holy calling. The mother who gives to the country and the Kingdom some children who are prepared both in character and training for effective service is an ideal steward.

In the third place, Stewardship demands that the Christian shall "acknowledge God in all his ways." Agassiz, the scientist, as he approached a ledge of rocks, said to his students: "Young men, before we study these rocks, let us pray unto the God that made them."

A Christian man may look to God for his guidance with equal assurance, whether he is going to a meeting of stockholders or to his church conference. "Whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." He should consult the Proprietor every day regarding the policy of his and the Lord's joint business.

### EFFICIENCY

In the fourth place, this doctrine of Life a Trust requires us to reach the highest degree of efficiency attainable. God is entitled to *expert* service. In the day of sacrifices, he demanded "the firstling of the flock." Is a Christian young man "apt to teach?" The obligation of Stewardship calls for the most thorough training his gifts and circumstances will allow. To the girl with musical gifts, the young man with oratorical power, the genius with inventive skill, is committed a sacred trust that calls for the largest development, that God may have the highest service.

Parents need to recognize that they have a grave responsibility just here. They should be impressed with the motto that William Jennings Bryan gave to the men in his Bible class on a New Year's Day:

"God helping me, I shall so conserve all my powers of body and soul, and so dedicate my life to purposes high and noble, that I may render the maximum of service to my fellowmen and be content to draw from society a reward that is in keeping with the service I may render."

"Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it."

## OUR BEST

"God wants our best; he, in the far off ages,  
Once claimed the firstling of the flock, the  
finest of the wheat,  
And still he asks his own, with gentlest plead-  
ing,  
To lay their highest hopes and brightest talents  
at his feet;  
He'll not forget the feeblest service, humblest  
love,  
He only asks, that of our store, we give the  
BEST we have.

"And is our best too much? Friends, we should  
remember,  
How much our Lord poured out his soul for  
us,  
And in the prime of his mysterious manhood,  
Gave up his precious life upon the cross,  
The Lord of lords by whom the worlds were  
made,  
Through bitter grief and tears, gave us the  
BEST he had."