

10.02.2018. THE MARKS OF A STEWARD

“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.” 1 Corinthians 4:1, 2.

Last week we studied the Biblical principles of stewardship and our role as God’s stewards after the Fall of man.

This week we look at the marks or characteristics of God’s stewards.

Though a steward by definition is *“one who manages affairs of an estate on behalf of his employer”*, we need to recognise an important fact about God’s stewards. As stewards of God, He is not merely our employer and we His employees. No, He is our Father and we are His sons and daughters. **We are heirs, not hirelings (hired servants).**

An heir (as opposed to a hireling) is always conscious that he must be about His Father’s business. His Father’s business is his business, particularly in matters of salvation. He must recognise the fullness of the blessing he has received from God. His Father is the absolute owner of all things and Giver of every good and perfect gift, both in the material and spiritual sphere. It is the heir’s duty and pleasure to manage his Father’s business according to His Father’s will.

He does this, that his Father in heaven may be glorified.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. Ephesians 1:3.

For in Him (Christ) dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.” Colossians 2:9, 10.

“And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.” Philippians 4:19, 20.

We find our great example of stewardship in Christ Jesus. Before the cross, He was the only begotten Son and Heir of God. After Calvary, He is the *‘firstborn of many brethren’*, (Romans 8:29) and we are *‘heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ’*, (Romans 8:17). Jesus lived only to do His Father’s business; to fulfil the Father’s will so that in all things His Father might be glorified.

“Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?” Luke 2:49.

“Behold, I have come (in the volume of the book it is written of Me) to do Your will, O God.” Hebrews 10:7.

“I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.” John 17:4.

Like Jesus, we, who are the adopted sons and daughters of God, must be eager to do all His will. We will manage everything He has given us in the consciousness that this is our inheritance. We will do all things so that His Name will be glorified among the heathen.

Our study this week describes 5 characteristics of good stewards. Good stewards will be:

Faithful

Loyal

Have a clear Conscience

Obedient

Trustworthy

These characteristics were seen in Jesus, the Son of Man, and our great Example.

Faithfulness

A Christian steward will be faithful as God is faithful. He will be faithful to his mission as Christ was to His mission on earth.

“Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: thou hast established the earth, and it abideth.” Psalm 119:90.

“Thy mercies are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.” Lamentations 3:23.

“Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to Him who appointed Him.” Hebrews 3:1, 2.

Examples of faithful stewards:

Hebrews 11 is a roll call of those who were faithful to God. Some examples given in our study are:

Abraham: By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; 10 for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Hebrews 11:8-10.

Moses: And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward. Hebrews 3:5.

“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.” Revelation 2:10.

Jesus was faithful unto death, even the death of the Cross. We may not be called to martyrdom, but we are called to be faithful to Jesus until we die or are translated. This faithful following of Christ requires a daily, moment by moment denial of self.

Loyalty

The word ‘loyalty’ primarily refers to fidelity or faithfulness in service, in love, or to an oath that one has made. It also included the concept of one who is loyal to his lord; therefore, one who is ‘lawful’, who has full legal rights as a consequence of faithful allegiance to his lord.

Sons and daughters of God cannot have two masters. They are to be solely devoted to God. They cannot serve both God and Mammon (riches). There are no divided loyalties in the service of God (He is a jealous God). If our loyalties are divided, we must ask ourselves whether we are truly faithful servants and sons of God.

Joshua: “And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” Joshua 24:15.

All these men of war, who could keep ranks, came to Hebron with a loyal heart, to make David king over all Israel; and all the rest of Israel were of one mind to make David king. 1 Chronicles 12:38.

“You shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God (i.e. a God who accepts no rivals).” Exodus 34:14.

“As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever.” 1 Chronicles 28:9.

“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” Matthew 6:24.

Obedience

To a Christian, true obedience means *‘doing God’s will joyfully and continually in every aspect of life’*. It is not merely obeying 10 laws. Jesus made it clear on the Sermon on the Mount that the 10 commandments must be kept from the heart – then only will our righteousness exceed that of the Pharisees who counted themselves perfect in external law-keeping (Matthew 5:20). This attitude of seeking to do God’s will, continually comes easily to those who recognise that they are dead to the world and its principles (through the Cross of Christ – Galatians 6:14) and therefore have nothing to do with its ways.

And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God and they shall be My people.” Therefore, “Come out from among them and be separate,” says the Lord. “Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters,” says the LORD Almighty.” 2 Corinthians 6:16-18.

Jesus always did the will of His Father. His will was always subject to the will of God.

“I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.” John 8:28, 29.

“Not My will, but Thine be done.” Luke 22:42.

David said, *“I delight to do Thy will, O my God: yea, Thy law is within my heart.” Psalm 40:8.*

As sons and stewards of God’s temporal and spiritual riches, we too must delight in God’s will and allow the Holy Spirit to fulfil God’s will in our lives as we live in daily surrender to Him. It is the Spirit that writes God’s law in our hearts and makes us love to do God’s will. Otherwise we will do God’s will only out of duty, not out of love.

“I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts.” Hebrews 8:10. See also Hebrews 13:20, 21.

“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.” 1 John 5:3.

“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” Romans 12:2.

“For this reason, we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.” Colossians 1:9, 10.

A Clear Conscience

Every Christian who delights to do God’s will, who listens to the voice of the Holy Spirit telling the way he should go, will always have a clear conscience. The Holy Spirit convicts us through our conscience. Conscience condemns sin and approves the right. Those who live in constant fellowship with the Spirit know to choose between sin and righteousness.

“Thy Word have I hid in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee.” Psalm 119:11.

“Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left.” Isaiah 30:21.

Jesus said of Satan, *‘The ruler of this world is coming and he has nothing in me’.* John 14:30.

Paul's testimony: *"I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost."* Romans 9:1.

The cause of the feebleness of our faith is owing to nothing so much as the want of a clean conscience. Mark knows well how closely Paul connects them in 1 Timothy: 'Love out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned' (1: 5). 'Holding faith and a good conscience, which some having thrust from them, have made shipwreck of the faith' (1:19). And especially (3: 9), ' Holding the mystery of -the faith in a pure conscience.' The conscience is the seat of faith. He that would grow strong in faith, and have boldness with God, must know that he is pleasing Him (1 John 3: 21, 22) - *Andrew Murray*

It is the Holy Spirit who speaks to our conscience. We must be careful not to fall into 2 errors:

1. Choosing other people (even believers) to be our conscience for us. This is a rejection of the Holy Spirit's work.
2. Choosing to let our conscience be the standard for others. This is a form of blasphemy; taking to ourselves the work of the Holy Spirit.

"None of them shall teach his neighbour, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them." Hebrews 8:11.

"But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him." 1 John 2:27.

Take your conscience to the Word of God and see if your life and character are in accordance with the standard of righteousness which God has there revealed. You can then determine whether or not you have an intelligent faith and what manner of conscience is yours. The conscience of man cannot be trusted unless it is under the influence of divine grace. *Review and Herald: 03.09.1901.*

Conscience in regard to the things of God is a sacred treasure, which no human beings, whatever be their position, have a right to meddle with...God does not wish you to make your conscience a criterion for others. You have a duty to perform, which is to make yourself cheerful and to cultivate unselfishness in your feelings until it will be your greatest pleasure to make all around you happy. *Mind, Character and Personality. Vol. 1 p. 327.*

What about a guilty conscience?

When sin struggles for the mastery in the heart, when guilt oppresses the soul and burdens the conscience, when unbelief clouds the mind, remember that Christ's grace is sufficient to subdue sin and banish the darkness. Entering into communion with the Saviour, we enter the region of peace. *Ministry of Healing p. 250.*

"Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus...and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." Hebrews 10:20-22.

Trustworthy

A faithful, loyal and obedient steward will always be a trustworthy steward. He will be a son his Father delights in.

In the parable of the 2 sons (Matthew 21:28-32), the first son refused to do his father's work but later had a change of heart and went and did his father's business. In contrast, the second son who agreed to go and work for his father never turned up.

How is it with us? God has called us with a holy calling. Do we pay Him lip service only with our hearts far from Him? Or do we delight to obey Him who has emptied the treasure house of heaven for our salvation?

For Reflection:

Am I a faithful and trustworthy son? Have I shown myself trustworthy with the temporal riches He has blessed me with? Can He trust me to be a faithful steward of the gospel and the mysteries of God?

"If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones. But if you are dishonest in little things, you won't be honest with greater responsibilities. And if you are untrustworthy about worldly wealth, who will trust you with the true riches of heaven?" Luke 16:10, 11 (NLT)

Am I a faithful steward in my place of work? Do I give faithful service 'as to the Lord' whether my employment is with the world or in the church?

'not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men' Ephesians 6:6, 7

Do I live life with the moment by moment recognition that I am not my own? I belong to God. He is my Father and I am His child. His will is my will. His righteousness is my righteousness. His work is my work.

"According to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Philippians 1:20, 21.

The question comes to be then, finally, a simple question of transfer. *To me to live is myself, or to me to live is Christ...* Shall it be, then, our life for Christ? *"To me to live is Christ."* Contrast it with all the other objects of life; take all the centers out of all the great lives, and compare them one by one. Can you match the life-creed of Paul--"to me to live is Christ"?

"To me to live is...business"; "to me to live is...pleasure," "to me to live is...myself." We can all tell in a moment what our religion is really worth. *"To me to live is"...what?* What are we living for? What rises naturally in our heart when we press it with a test like this: *"to me to live is"...what?* First thoughts, it is said, are best in matters of conscience. What was the first thought that came into our heart just then? What word trembled first on our lips just now--"to me to live is"...was it business, was it money, was it myself, was it Christ?

The time will come when we shall ask ourselves why we ever crushed this infinite substance of our life within these narrow bounds, and centered that which lasts forever on what must pass away. In the perspective of Eternity all lives will seem poor, and small, and lost, and self-condemned beside a life for Christ. There are plenty of men to die for Him, there are plenty to spend Eternity with Christ; *but where is the man who will live for Christ?* Death and Eternity come in their place. Christ wants lives. There is no fear about death being gain if we have lived for Christ. So, let it be: *"To me to live is Christ."* – *Henry Drummond`.*

Christ has no hands but our hands
To do His work today;
He has no feet but our feet
To lead men in His way;
He has no tongues but our tongues
To tell men how He died;
He has no help but our help
To bring them to His side.

We are the only Bible
The careless world will read;
We are the sinner's Gospel,
We are the scoffer's creed;
We are the Lord's last message,
Given in deed and word;

What if the type is crooked?
What if the print is blurred?

What if our hands are busy
With work other than His?
What if our feet are walking
Where sin's allurements is?
What if our tongues are speaking
Of things His lips would spurn?
How can we hope to help Him
And hasten His return?

Annie Johnston Flint

God Bless!

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