

## 03.02.2018 - STEWARDS AFTER EDEN

***“But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.” 1 Thessalonians 2:4.***

A steward is *“one who manages affairs of an estate on behalf of his employer.”* We find this definition in Biblical times and from early mediaeval times in old English and French.

The employer is the owner of the estate and master over the steward. The steward’s role was a key administrative role and he usually ranked immediately below his employer. He was independent of the master’s other servants.

A steward managed his master’s possessions. These possessions included both property and persons. He was responsible for the management of his master’s lands and possessions and often also given responsibility for the management of persons employed by the master.

Our study this week is about stewardship after Eden i.e. after the Fall. If we look for a moment at Adam and Eve’s duties before the Fall, we see that they were made stewards of the Garden of Eden. Adam was first appointed to the job, but since Eve was to be his helper, we can safely assume that she was involved in the work of stewardship of the Garden. It is clear from the Genesis account before the Fall that man was created for work and that work was the stewardship of God’s creation.

*“Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.” Genesis 2:15.*

### **Stewards after Eden**

Since the Fall, God’s people are not only called to be stewards of God’s creation. We are also called to be good stewards of spiritual realities – stewards of the gospel and the mysteries of God.

*“...good stewards of the manifold grace of Christ.” 1 Peter 4:10.*

*“...ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.” 1 Corinthians 4:1.*

### **Biblical Stewardship includes the following principles:**

1. The Principle of Ownership.
2. The Principle of Responsibility.
3. The Principle of Accountability.
4. The Principle of Reward.

### **The Principle of Ownership**

*“The earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness; the world and all who dwell therein.” Psalm 24:1.*

This is the fundamental principle underlying all stewardship. God owns everything; we are simply managers or administrators acting on His behalf.

A good steward commits himself and his possessions to God’s service, recognising that he does not have the right of control over his property or self. Unlike the self-glorifying steward who says, *“My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me”.* Deuteronomy 8:17. The steward who fears God follows the command found in Deuteronomy 8:18, *“Remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth.”*

*“And what do you have that you did not receive?” 1 Corinthians 4:7.*

Every faculty you have, your power of thinking or of moving your limbs from moment to moment, is given you by God. If you devoted every moment of your whole life exclusively to His service, you could not give Him anything that was not in a sense His own already. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*.

## The Principle of Responsibility

“Owners have rights; stewards have responsibilities.”

*“Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.” 1 Timothy 6:17.*

Since God owns everything, nothing really belongs to us. But as stewards, we have been given responsibility for how we treat God’s gifts and our use of those gifts. Men and women today are always thinking of the ‘rights’ they deserve; God always reminds us in His Word about our responsibilities.

We are called as God’s stewards to manage that which belongs to God. While God has graciously entrusted us with the care, development, and enjoyment of everything He owns as His stewards, we have the responsibility of managing His holdings well and managing them according to His will.

God gave Adam and Eve dominion over the earth (Genesis 1:28). But this was to be exercised in a relationship of obedience to the Creator, in accordance with the principles He had laid down.

Despite the Fall, man still has dominion over the earth. This is possible only through God’s grace, for He has redeemed mankind. So, the Psalmist sings after the Fall:

*What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honour. You have made man to have dominion over the works of Your hands. You have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, even the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea that pass through the paths of the seas.*

*“O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth”! Psalm 8:4-8.*

We also have spiritual responsibilities.

*“Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.” 1 Corinthians 4:1.*

*“For a bishop (elder) must be blameless, as the steward of God.” Titus 1:7.*

*“Likewise, deacons must...hold the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.” 1 Timothy 3:8, 9.*

We have a responsibility to be stewards of God’s grace. Our whole life’s energies are to be spent in studying the Word of God and having a revelation of Christ. We must graduate from ‘milk’ to the ‘meat’ of God’s Word (*Hebrews 5:12-6:2*), knowing the deep things of God (*1 Corinthians 2:6-13*) and understanding the ‘mysteries of God’ (*Mark 4:11, Romans 16:25, 1 Corinthians 2:7, Ephesians 1:9; 3:3-9; 5:32; 6:19, Colossians 1:26, 27; 2:2; 4:3*), that have now been revealed to us.

We are then expected to share this wonderful good news with a world that is perishing without knowledge of God and His love. We are to tell the world that every man and woman was created by God for righteousness and eternal life from before Time began; that they have been redeemed and justified so that they may have peace and joy and rejoice in the hope of sharing God’s glory. (*Romans 5:1, 2*).

*As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 4:10, 11.*

The truly faithful and God-fearing steward recognises that he can never match the faithfulness of God:

*“Even so on your part, when you have done everything that was assigned and commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy servants [possessing no merit, for we have not gone beyond our obligation]; we have [merely] done what was our duty to do.’” Luke 17:10 (Amplified).*

## **The Principle of Accountability**

*Moreover, it is required in stewards that one be found faithful. 1 Corinthians 4:2.*

A steward is one who manages the possessions of his employer. He must give an account of how he has managed his employer's wealth, lands and possessions.

As stewards of God, we will be expected to give an account of how we have managed the good gifts God has given us. These include our time, money, abilities, talents, knowledge, wisdom, relationships (spouse, children, colleagues), and positions of authority God has given us.

God will hold us accountable for what we have done with the story of His grace. How have we shared the gospel? Have we been faithful in drawing men and women to the love of God? Or have we been unfaithful servants, giving people a wrong picture of God...*"I knew that You were a harsh man."* Matthew 25:24.

*"Cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness"* Matthew 25:30 is the judgement upon the unfaithful servant.

*"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).

## **The Principle of Reward**

*And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. Colossians 3:23, 24.*

Jesus promised us that faithful stewards will be rewarded. They will be rewarded on earth, but more abundantly in heaven. This is recorded in the gospels in His promises and His parables.

*"Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods."* Matthew 24:45-47.

*"Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord."* Matthew 25:21, 23.

## **Examples of Faithful Stewards**

Abraham: *You found Abraham's heart faithful before You. Nehemiah 9:8.*

Moses: *My servant Moses...who is faithful in all My house. Numbers 12:7.*

Joseph: *"The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. And his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made all he did to prosper in his hand. So, Joseph found favour in his sight, and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all that he had he put under his authority."* Genesis 39:3, 4.

Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego: *"Among them all, none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore, they served before the king."* Daniel 1:20.

*"Daniel was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him."* Daniel 6:4.

Hananiah: *"I gave Hananiah the ruler of the palace, charge over Jerusalem: for he was a faithful man, and feared God."* Nehemiah 7:2.

John the Baptist: *"John performed no sign, but all the things that John spoke about this Man were true."* John 10:41.

Paul is the great example of a faithful steward of the gospel and of the mysteries of the God. May his testimony be ours as faithful stewards of the grace of God:

*"I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labour, striving according to His working which works in me mightily." Colossians 1:25-29.*

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## **Quotes on Stewardship**

'The gift of God is eternal life, but Jesus would have us not so anxious concerning rewards, as that we may do the will of God because it is right to do it, irrespective of all gain. Paul kept in view the crown of life to be given him, and not only to be given to him, but to all who love His appearing. It was the victory gained through faith in Jesus Christ that made the crown so desirable. He ever exalted Jesus. All boasting of talent, of victory in ourselves, is out of place. *"Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord."* Those who will receive the most abundant reward will be those who have mingled with their activity and zeal, gracious, tender pity for the poor, the orphan, the oppressed, and the afflicted. But those who pass by on the other side, who are too busy to give attention to the purchase of the blood of Christ, who are full of doing the great things, will find themselves least and last.' *EG White: Counsels on Stewardship. p 339-340.*

"If God was the owner, I was the manager. I needed to adopt a steward's mentality toward the assets He had entrusted, not given, to me. A steward manages assets for the owner's benefit. The steward carries no sense of entitlement to the assets he manages. It's his job to find out what the owner wants done with his assets, then carry out his will." *Randy Alcorn.*

"When a man becomes a Christian, he becomes industrious, trustworthy and prosperous. Now, if that man, when he gets all he can and saves all he can, does not give all he can, I have more hope for Judas Iscariot than for that man!" *John Wesley.*

"How different our standard is from Christ's. We ask how much a man gives. Christ asks how much he keeps." *Andrew Murray.*

"God is not glorified when we keep for ourselves (no matter how thankfully) what we ought to be using to alleviate the misery of un-evangelised, uneducated, un-medicated, and unfed millions. The evidence that many professing Christians have been deceived by this doctrine is how little they give and how much they own... God increases our yield, so that by giving we can prove our yield is not our god." *John Piper.*

My take on tithing is that it's a middle-class way of robbing God. Tithing to the church and spending the rest on your family is not a Christian goal. It's a diversion. The real issue is: How shall we use God's trust fund—namely, all we have—for His glory? In a world with so much misery, what lifestyle should we call our people to live? What example are we setting? *John Piper.*

Scripture speaks to parents as stewards of the Lord, responsible to provide a proper nurturing environment for children, whom the Lord has graciously placed into their care. Like all stewards, parents will ultimately give account for how they have fulfilled their stewardship. *John MacArthur.*

Give as you love and measure your love by your gift. *CH Spurgeon.*

I would be faithful through each passing moment;  
I would be constantly in touch with God;  
I would be strong to follow where He leads me;  
I would have faith to keep the path Christ trod.

*Who is so low that I am not his brother?  
Who is so high that I've no path to him?  
Who is so poor I may not feel his hunger?  
Who is so rich I may not pity him?*

May none, then, call on me for understanding,  
May none, then, turn to me for help in pain,  
And drain alone his bitter cup of sorrow,  
Or find he knocks upon my heart in vain.

*I would be friend of all—the foe, the friendless;  
I would be giving, and forget the gift;  
I would be humble, for I know my weakness;  
I would look up, and laugh, and love, and lift.*

Howard Walter

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