



## A Steward

Text: 1 Corinthians 4:1-2, Selected Scriptures

Series: The Christian As A Steward, #1

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### Introduction.

This morning we begin thinking about who and what we are to be as Christians, and what we are to be doing. There is uncertainty, and even an identity crisis among Christians and churches. Surveys and studies clearly point this out: overall, Christians think and act like everyone else. One survey showed that  $\frac{2}{3}$  of people do not believe there is such a thing as *absolute truth*—truth that is true for all time, people and circumstances. The study also showed that 53% of Bible-believing, evangelical Christians do not believe in absolute truth (*The Body*, Colson, p. 184).

Do we have a clear, certain picture of who we are to be and what we are to do? How do we get there? God uses many word pictures in the Bible to help us understand the truth He gives. One of those word pictures which helps us see part of who are to be, to do is that of a *Steward*. This series is focusing on that. We are looking at *the Christian as a steward*.

### The Overall Concept Of A Steward.

As we begin it is good to look at the pictures of a steward, to have an overall concept of what a steward is. Perhaps the most familiar New Testament text with the word *steward* is 1 Corinthians 4:1-2, “Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.”

The word *steward* actually means *house manager*. The picture is of the one responsible to run a household: direct other servants, ensure the house and grounds were cared for, food and supplies purchased, records kept, household budget managed. A very responsible

position, but not paid accordingly, in that usually those in these positions were servants or slaves.

One of the most familiar historical pictures in the Bible comes from the Old Testament, the one of Joseph. He was sold into slavery by his brothers, being purchased by the captain of the Egyptian Pharaoh's body guard. Genesis 39:4, 6,

“So Joseph found favor in his sight and became his personal servant; and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he owned he put in his charge ... So he left everything he owned in Joseph's charge; and with him there he did not concern himself with anything except the food which he ate.”

Joseph was the overseer, house manager, steward for this Captain.

While the term *steward* began as *house manager*, in time it was used for other positions of management in households, businesses and government. It was used of cooks, tutors for children, and civil servants. In Romans 16:23 we read of “Erastus, the city treasurer.” Some versions render it as “the steward of the city,” or “the director of public works.” A steward is one who was given a position of management.

From that overview or brief picture, let's zero in some more on the principles of being a steward that we see in the Bible. There are five basic principles of being a steward, which we just list now, and come back to later. They are,

- The responsibility is *given* by the employer, or owner.
- The steward does not own what he manages.
- The steward operates under the direction of the owner.
- The steward manages for the best interests of the owner.
- The steward's evaluation is based on faithfulness to the master and his master's best interests.

## The Christian As A Steward.

With that background of the overall or general concept of a steward, let's move to the Christian as a steward. The foundation of a Christian's stewardship, of being a steward is God's ownership. We *know* from the Bible that God is the eternal One, the Creator of all things, the One in control of all things. While we know this in a general sense, knowing it practically and personally may be another matter. God *does* own everything. In Psalm 50:10-12 God declares,

“For every beast of the forest is Mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird of the mountains, and everything that moves in the field is Mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world is Mine and all it contains.”

King David, in his prayer dedicating the great gifts for building the temple, “But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this? For all things come from You, and from Your hand we have given You” (1 Chronicles 29:14). James reminds us, “Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow” (1:17). And, going back to 1 Corinthians 4, in verse 7 Paul writes, “For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?”

The foundation of our role and responsibility as *Stewards* of God is God's Ownership. Whether we realize it or not, whether we are faithful or not, everyone of us as Christians *are* stewards of God. And so it comes down to one of two basic ways of thinking and living. Either my life is my own, to be and do what I want or my life belongs to Christ, to be and do what He wants.

So what is our responsibility, our role then as stewards of God? We come back to the five basic principles of being a steward, applying them to being stewards of God. We are to manage for God and His interests. Just as the household manager managed for his employer and his interests, so we are to manage all of what we are and have for God and His interests. The apostle Paul described elders of the church as “God's steward” (Titus 1:7). In 1 Corinthians 4:1 Paul states we are “stewards of the mysteries of God,” of the truths God has revealed to us. So, in Colossians 1:25, Paul tells us he was “... made a minister according to the *stewardship* from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might *fully carry out*

the preaching of the word of God.” A fundamental part of our responsibility as stewards of God is to live, to manage our lives, gifts and opportunities for God so others will see Him, come to know Him.

Then, secondly, our role and responsibility is to manage under God’s control. Go back to our key text again, 1 Corinthians 4:1-2, “Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.” One of the clear pictures here is of Paul operating under the direction, the control of God — and so should each of us. This means to consciously, deliberately know and submit to God’s direction (from the Bible, by the leading of the Holy Spirit) through the day, in all our activities, in all our days. *Give God control!*

A third part of being a steward of God is to manage willingly. Paul puts this in first person terms,

“For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me” (1 Corinthians 9:16-17).

The responsibility to be a faithful steward of God is constant, unchanging. When we do so voluntarily, willingly, it is more than an obligation, but a joy. And for doing that in this way there is a reward!

What motivates you to live for God, to serve Him? For some the motivation is guilt. For some others it is to try to gain God’s approval. What motivated Paul was not guilt of his failings, sin; not his failure to be good enough or do enough good, but the *marvellous, measureless love of Christ!* Listen to his testimony in 2 Corinthians 5,

“*For the love of Christ controls us*, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf” (14-15).

It is clear he focussed on, was continually amazed by God’s great love for Him, and it was this love of God for Him that propelled Paul to be a *Willing* steward of Christ.

A fourth part of the responsibility of being God's steward is to manage for the benefit of others. In our society's celebration of individualism, we tend to view our relationship with God as very personal — which it is — but sometimes as almost strictly personal — which it is not. Christ did not design His church, nor is He building it as a loose-knit association of individuals. It is, the Bible tells us, a *body*, a *building*, a *priesthood*, part of the *vine* — it is an organic union of people in Christ.

So, our stewardship is also not a strictly personal matter. In Ephesians 3:2 Paul speaks of “the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me *for you*.” Again, in Colossians 1:25, he writes that he “was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me *for your benefit*.” The apostle Peter tells us, “As each one has received a special gift, employ it *in serving one another*, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10).

While God can do anything and everything without any help, He often uses others to do His work. One man tells of a summer day when his four year-old son Jordan got a splinter in his finger. He cried, called his Dad, “I want God to take the splinter out!” His father told Jordan he could do it, but Jordan wanted *God to do it!* After all, this wasn't his first splinter, and he *knew* that it hurt when his Mom or Dad took them out. Well, it took over an hour before Jordan let his Dad remove the splinter. And, yes, with some pain. But his Dad used the experience to teach his young son *that God often uses people to do his work as they help, benefit each other.*

There is one last part of our role and responsibility as God's stewards: to manage faithfully. We go back to 1 Corinthians 4:2 once more, God tells us through Paul “it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.” This is the test, the criteria for God's evaluating His stewards: faithfulness in the gifts, responsibilities and opportunities given and, ultimately, faithfulness to Christ. Faithfulness individually *and* together — we cannot separate the two.

God's standards of evaluation are not the changing, shallow standards of our world, but the unchanging standard of faithfulness to Christ, to who we are in Christ, to what we are called to be and to do. We are to be growing in the knowledge and love of God, growing in Christlikeness, we are to be faithful to be light and salt in our dark and bland world, to be faithful right here and now.

## Conclusion.

This is something of what it means to be a steward, to be *God's steward*. There is a story about Jesus and His disciples — not from the Bible, not a true story, but an interesting story. Jesus and the disciples were walking on a rocky road one day when Jesus asked them to pick up a stone and carry it for him. John chose a large stone, Peter chose one he could easily carry in his pocket. Several hours later, the disciples being tired and hungry, asked if there was anything to eat. Jesus told them to take the stones they had picked up. He spoke and the stones became bread. Each disciple ate the bread he held. Peter's was barely a mouthful, and John shared with him.

Later, back on the road, Jesus again told them to pick up a stone. This time Peter picked up the biggest he could find. He struggled in carrying it. When they came to a river, Jesus told them to throw the stones into the river. Nothing happened, except the splashes. The disciples were confused. Jesus asked them, "*For whom did you carry the stone?*"

While not an actual, true event, Jesus does ask each of us that question today, "*For whom do you carry the stone? For whom do you dream your dreams, plan your plans, use your abilities, gifts, strength?*" As people who have been showered with the love of God, bought by the blood of Christ, we are *His Stewards*, we are to *carry the stone* for Him.

In the next few moments you spend with God, ask yourself some serious questions: "Am I really living as a steward of God?" "Am I a trustworthy, faithful steward?" And then, commit yourself, or recommit yourself, to live as, to be a faithful *steward of God*.

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