

# The Christian Stewardship

By David Phillips

In 1 Peter 4:10 Christians are referred to as stewards of the manifold grace of God. “Stewardship is the management of another person’s property, finances, or household affairs. As far as Christians are concerned, stewardship involves managing God’s work through the church” (Nelson’s Bible Dictionary). As stewards, all Christians are obligated, or rather privileged to serve God in His kingdom. Often, we go about our daily lives enjoying the wonderful blessings God has provided for us, but do we truly consider the fact that we have been given those blessings for a reason? We thank God for our food before we eat and we acknowledge our blessings every first day of the week as we contribute to the collection, but how often do we stop to consider, “Have I been a faithful steward of God’s grace? Have I used what God has provided me to serve Him as effectively as I can?” Stewards are those who serve the will of their master, as in the parable of the talents in Matt. 25:14-30. If we are to be faithful stewards of the manifold grace of God, then we must strive to do the Lord’s will according to the ability that He has given us.

Within the church God established a pattern which includes apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, and deacons. Those who are in the position to fulfill these roles are stewards within the church. They are workmen or servants who manage the Lord’s church according to the Divine pattern. Many people are aware of these responsibilities, yet it is often the case that those who do not fulfill those specific roles somehow feel that they are without obligation or duty—that since they are not leaders in the church they have no responsibility. The fact is that every person who receives the gift of salvation through the blood of Jesus Christ has great responsibility in the church. As all have been blessed by the grace of God, all have become stewards of that grace that they may serve God in His kingdom. This is the understanding Jesus impressed upon us in many of His parables. In the Parables of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matt. 20:1ff.), the True Vine (John 15:1ff.), the Barren Fig Tree (Luke 13:6ff), and in many other places Jesus impresses upon us our need to bear fruit for God and to serve Him faithfully in His kingdom.

In Romans chapter six the entire chapter discusses the fact that those who have been buried with Christ in baptism have been given a new life. Seeing that they have been made free from sin, they must serve God in righteousness. “*But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life*” (Rom. 6:22). All who obey the gospel are purchased by the blood of Christ (Eph. 1:7). At that point our bodies no longer belong to us but to God, for we were “*bought at a price*” (1 Cor. 7:23). We were cleansed from our sins to prepare us for the Master’s use. “*For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s*” (1 Cor. 6:19-20). This fact must be clearly understood by all who would come to Christ. The denominations wish to do away with the responsibilities that accompany salvation while living according to their own lusts, but God deserves more! Because we have been purchased by Christ’s blood we have become His stewards.

What is our responsibility as Stewards? Just as the apostles were ambassadors of Christ and stewards of over the mystery of the gospel, just as elders are stewards over the flock of God and evangelists and teachers are stewards over the word of God, every Christian is a steward over the grace of God which is given them (1 Pet. 4:10, 11). God has bestowed His grace on each and every one of us. The gifts or abilities given to one person may differ from those of another person. That is the beauty of God’s wisdom, for when we serve God according to our abilities we are like different members of a body harmoniously working together under one head who is Christ (1 Cor. 12:12). But in order for us to be complete, each member must be doing its part. “*For as we have many members in one body, but all the*

*members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them...*" (Rom. 12:4-6).

In the Parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-23), three servants were given a portion of their master's money (vs. 14, 15). Though that money belonged to the master the servants had control over how it was to be used; they had the power to use the money for whatever purpose they desired. It was as if the talents belonged to them except that, in the end, each servant was expected to give an account for how they used their master's money (vs. 19). They were required to have used that money to create profit for their master (vs. 20-21, 25-26). When the master saw that the first two servants bore fruit with what he had given them he praised them and blessed them (vs. 21). But, when the master inquired after the third servant he found that the servant had not gained any profit. Therefore, he was rebuked and punished (vs. 26, 30).

This parable is an illustration of our responsibility in the kingdom. As stewards of God's grace we must apply what we learn from this parable to our own service. Just as the master in the parable gave a number of talents to each servant, God has given numerous gifts to every Christian. Like the three servants in the parable, nothing that we have is our own nor did we earn it through our works. Rather all that we have is given to us by the grace of God, as Peter wrote, "*As each one has received a gift*" (1 Pet. 4:10). Every spiritual blessing, every physical gift, and every ability that we have are given to us so that we can serve our Master

For that reason we must give the more earnest heed to Peter's instruction to "*Minister it to one another.*" We must use every opportunity and every ability to serve God according to His will. If we have freedom, we must use that freedom to do good (1 Pet. 2:16). If we are able to teach, to exhort, to encourage, to help others, to lead, to show mercy, etc. then we must do those things with all of our might (Rom. 12:6-8).

If we fail to serve God according to our abilities then we fail in our stewardship (Jas. 4:17). One of the greatest challenges facing God's people, especially in our culture, is our love for physical things. There is great reluctance to part with our physical possessions in order to do the Lord's work because we often think of our lives in light of self rather than God. "My money, my car, my house, my clothes, my time, my energy." However, we must understand that everything we have, both physical and spiritual, has been given to us by God, and is not our own. "My time" is merely the time God has allotted us that we may learn to turn our hearts to Him (2 Pet. 3:9). We have it by God's grace and are therefore stewards, not owners (1 Cor. 6:19-20). In order to fulfill our stewardship we must do as Paul instructed in Phil. 2:5-11, "*have this mind in you which was also in Christ.*" Christ humbled Himself to the point of death on the cross to fulfill His charge. In the end we see that He was glorified by the Father. We will be able to join Him in that glory if we hold fast our charge and prove ourselves to be faithful stewards of the manifold grace of God.

*April, 2007*