

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

83 What Is Christian Stewardship?

Editors Note: This lesson was not originally included in the corpus of work that Pastor Christensen prepared under the overarching title, **Questions We Want Answered**. He prepared it separately for a church membership class. The editor thought it was of such helpfulness that it should be included in this book.

INTRODUCTION:

One of the great truths taught in the Bible is that God is the owner of all things. This ownership is based upon the fact that He brought all things into being and that He maintains what He has created. Everything there is belongs to God. Man's place in God's world is not that of an owner, rather, man is a custodian or caretaker of what God has entrusted to him.

This arrangement in the Christian teaching is known as stewardship. The concept arises from the word "*oikonomos*" which means trustee, manager, or administrator of another's affairs. We may define Christian stewardship as the systematic managing and offering of our time, ability and possessions to God based on the conviction that these are a trust from Him. We are in the world as guests. Never, according to God's plan, was man intended to own or manage anything for himself. Surely, one of the most amazing and life changing ideas to be found in the Bible is that of stewardship. As the very heart of the Christian Faith is the truth of a creator-owner God. One of the reasons for the heartache in human life is that man has come to think of himself as God in violation of the law of stewardship. Consider:

I. OUR PLACE AS STEWARDS:

Three movements mark the flow of our thought.

1 Our Availability as Stewards:

Paul describes our availability as stewards as he seeks to inform the Corinthian mentality as to what it means to be a Christian in this world. He writes in I Corinthians 4:2, "*Moreover it is required in stewards (oikonomos)...*" The whole point there is the availability of every Christian to fill the role of stewardship. It has been said that faith begins when a person

realizes that he is not God, i.e., he realizes he is not the possessor of his possessions. Secondly, the text goes on to speak of:

2. Our Responsibility as Stewards:

"It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful." This means that the steward is to faithfully manage his master's possessions. This is a quality of life which is within the range of possibility for all believers. We are not required to be brilliant, to be beautiful, or to do great things. We are to be faithful in what we have. To God there are no small offerings if they are all we have.

3. Our Commendability as Stewards:

In verses 3-5 Paul speaks of having the praise of God. In the ancient world a steward was the manager of a large estate or household. He was answerable to the owner alone. His concern was the periodic meeting with his master at which time he would render an accounting. Paul here envisions a day when all stewards will stand before their master and receive his praise. Christianity teaches that it is possible to receive the praise of the great God of the universe. It is one of the glories of Christianity that common earthly values can be transformed into uncommon heavenly wealth. God will be no man's debtor.

II. THE STEWARDSHIP OF TIME:

The Biblical concept of time is that it is a fragment of eternity given to man by God as a sacred trust to be used to glorify Him. Clearly, the intention is to make the best use of time. The Scripture informs us:

1. Time Is Short:

I Corinthians 7:29 reads, *"But this I say, brethren, the time is short."* We are all born with a built in time fuse. Some burn fast, others slow. Everyone's birthday signals a countdown. We eat, work, play, sleep while the fuse burns down.

2. Time Is Sacred:

I Corinthians 7:29-31 speaks of five time wasters.

3. Time Is Significant:

Servanthood (v. 22) and time (v. 29) are joined to teach that Christ makes time significant.

In time we hammer out a destiny. What is done in time for Christ will not be lost in eternity. (Job 7:6; James 4:14; I Chronicles 29:15; II Corinthians 6:2; Romans 8:32; Ephesians 2:19, 5:16; Hebrews 10:25) The Christian's concept of time is a striking one. It is a sacred trust to be used wisely.

III. THE STEWARDSHIP OF OUR GIFTS:

Gifts are spiritual abilities freely given by God to believers as a means of revealing Christ in a tangible way so as to evangelize the unbelieving and edify God's people. They are God-given endowments for effective service. The Holy Spirit is sovereign in the giving of gifts, but their development is left to the individual believer who is responsible for discerning what his gift may be as well as employing it. (I Corinthians 12:7, 12:11, 14:39; Ephesians 4:11)

IV. THE STEWARDSHIP OF THE GOSPEL:

In Thessalonians 2:4 we read, *"But we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel."* The good news for us to keep for ourselves. We have been given the gospel in order that we might be good stewards of this priceless message. It seems to me that this stewardship is fulfilled in the following ways:

1. We are to guard the purity of the gospel. (Galatians 1:6-10; I Timothy 4:13, 6:20; II Timothy 1:13-14; Philippians 1:17)
2. We are to establish others in the truth of the gospel. (II Timothy 2:2) The strength of the visible church lies in training and establishing others in the truth of Scripture.
3. We are to proclaim the gospel to the unbelieving world. (Romans 1:16)
4. We are to send the gospel to those who have not heard it. (II Corinthians 10:16) Dear friends, we have a unique responsibility among the peoples of the world. To us the gospel has been put in trust.

V. THE STEWARDSHIP OF OUR MONEY:

One of the most important relationships we have as Christians is with money. This is not a relationship of personality because money is an object and we cannot relate to an object in that way. Nevertheless, it is a relationship of

meaning. The meaning lies in the fact that our money represents us. It is representative of our talents, time, initiative and interests. Money represents a very large portion of our lives.

The subject of money within church life has not had a good history. For this reason here at Hope Church we have endeavored to follow a definite policy regarding the mention of money. Money is not spoken of during the announcement time or even at the offering time. In the years I have been associated with Hope Church, I cannot remember a single instance when money has been mentioned outside of the sermon. It is not a matter of pleading, pressure, threatening or scolding. It is matter of doctrine and teaching. When we understand the place money has and seek to follow God's way no one is going to be embarrassed, angry or turned off. Neither will there have to be fretting or dependence upon secular fund raising schemes. When God begins a work He knows where the people are who will support it.

The conviction we have here at Hope Church is that all money belongs to God. God has claim on everything. (Exodus 9:29; Leviticus 25:23; Deuteronomy 8:18) Secondly, we are to be careful how we use our money. (Luke 19:12-26; II Corinthians 6:10; I Corinthians 3:21) Lastly, tithing is a useful guide for beginning our giving to the Lord's work. Tithing means giving 10% of one's income (Malachi 3:10; Matthew 23:23; I Corinthians 16:2) Tithing is one of the great concepts in God's Word. We find it before the law was given in Genesis 14:20, 28:22. It is found when the Law was given in Leviticus 27 and Malachi 3. Many people at Hope Church tithe. Others give more than the tithe. Paul wrote, *"Your giving is an outward demonstration of your love."*

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