
Article XIII. Stewardship

God is the source of all blessings, temporal and spiritual; all that we have and are we owe to Him. Christians have a spiritual debtorship to the whole world, a holy trusteeship in the gospel, and a binding stewardship in their possessions. They are therefore under obligation to serve Him with their time, talents, and material possessions; and should recognize all these as entrusted to them to use for the glory of God and for helping others. According to the Scriptures, Christians should contribute of their means cheerfully, regularly, systematically, proportionately, and liberally for the advancement of the Redeemer's cause on earth.

Genesis 14:20; Leviticus 27:30-32; Deuteronomy 8:18; Malachi 3:8-12; Matthew 6:1-4, 19-21; 19:21; 23:23; 25:14-29; Luke 12:16-21, 42; 16:1-13; Acts 2:44-47; 5:1-11; 17:24-25; 20:35; Romans 6:6-22; 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 4:1-2; 6:19-20; 12; 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8-9; 12:15; Philippians 4:10-19; 1 Peter 1:18-19.

(Sermon Title)

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

INTRODUCTION: I have the unenviable task to preach today on the issue of stewardship. Stewardship is one of those doctrines is dealt with in practical theology, putting something into practice. Churches are not always attentive to the message of stewardship, but it is vitally important in the life of who we are as Southern Baptists, but more importantly, it something vitally important in the life of who we in relating to our God. The Baptist Faith and Message declares concerning stewardship, "God is the source of all blessings, temporal and spiritual. All that we have and are we owe to Him. Christians have a spiritual debtorship to the whole world, a holy trusteeship in the gospel and a binding stewardship in their possessions. They are therefore under obligation to serve Him with their time, talents and material possessions, and should recognize all these as entrusted to them to use for the glory of God and for helping others. According to the scriptures, Christians should contribute of their means cheerfully, regularly, systematically, proportionately and liberally for the advancement of the Redeemers cause on earth."

When turning to the scriptures to determine which passage on stewardship to deal with that encapsulates all these ideas, again it comes back to the issue of practicality because stewardship is not one of those doctrines that we deal with from a Calvinist or Arminian perspective or open and closed views of God, but it is what we do with it. How is it practiced, what impact does it have on us as believers as we practice this issue of responsibility before God. And so, we could have chosen several of the

parables Jesus used to teach on the issue of stewardship but I want to focus on the practical expression of that in the life of the church. Paul deals with this issue in 2 Corinthians 9:6-15. We pick up in the middle of a discussion as Paul is writing to the Corinthians about the offering that had been pre-arranged and the offering that he was planning to collect from them as they were helping out those in need, so Paul says I thought it necessary to urge you to go ahead and collect so that when we get there you won't be embarrassed because you have not done what you committed to and not have the offerings, so go ahead and make preparations for that. So he is writing to them to remind them of their commitments and remind them of what they had promised. In verse 6 he turns to more of an application of this issue of giving and of stewardship. (Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-15)

Stewardship is defined as “utilizing and managing all resources God provides for the glory of God and the betterment of His creation.” When we look at the scriptures we find that stewardship permeates the pages of the Bible because how we respond to God in relationship, how we respond to God's expression of Himself is at the very heart of the Bible. God's desire is that as human beings we relate to Him, we respond to Him in a positive way. So stewardship is a matter of the heart, it is not just a matter of the wallet. So often we think of stewardship only in terms of finances, but when we understand biblical stewardship, the Bible teaches that it is a far greater concept involving how we respond to and how we relate to this God who is the giver, the provider, and the sustainer of all life. So Christian giving, financial giving is only one aspect of a total stewardship responsibility that comes to us because as God's created beings, He made us to have dominion, not to dominate, not to exploit His creation, but to have dominion, which is God's call for us to be good and gracious managers of His creation. So God has given us a stewardship responsibility, a managerial responsibility for all of His creation. So when we come to the New Testament, the issue of stewardship is fully intact, but with even more responsibility, because we are not only entrusted with the creation, that is intact, we are still responsible as managers and stewards of the creation. So when we come to the New Testament, it is not only the creation and the resources that God has provided us to live that we are managers of and stewards of, but the Bible also teaches us that we are stewards, we are managers with the mission and the purpose of the gospel. So when we come to the New Testament, stewardship is not an outdated system, that we regarded as part of the law, but we have a fuller, more complete responsibility in terms of stewardship because now the responsibility and the entrusting of the mission and purpose of Christ is given to us. Paul said it aptly in I 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 (or faithful).”

So Jesus, in His discussions with the disciples and others, was not satisfied with simply a slice of the pie of our obedience. He did not rejoice in simply the tithe, or rejoice in a big offering that came out of abundance instead of poverty, such as with the widow's mite. So He did not rejoice when we tithed, that is expected. But Jesus rejoices in the sacrificial and complete giving and absolute surrender of ourselves and our substance to Him. Can I put it this way, Jesus wants it all and that is biblical stewardship. Tithing of our resources, our time and our talents, in the words of Dr. Ergun Caner, "tithing is for wimps." Tithing is to be the least that we do, because Jesus demands it all. In Matthew 25 and the parable of the unfaithful steward, reminds us that there is an accounting that will take place of that stewardship responsibility and that the unfaithful steward stands before the Lord, not in a way in which Paul said that we are required to be faithful and trustworthy, but stands before the Lord lacking.

I am a collector of cartoons and I have a Curtis cartoon from a few years back. In the first frame of the cartoon, Curtis is standing in the kitchen begging his mother for five dollars, "Can I have \$5 please, please can I have \$5?" Of course she is not giving in, until he finally says, "but it is for my offering envelope tomorrow." So she smiles and gives in. In the last frame, Curtis and his brother are sitting in a theater, eating popcorn and his brother asks, "what are you going to put in your offering envelope tomorrow?" to which Curtis smiles and replies, "an IOU." What the New Testament calls us to as stewards is a full commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord, when He becomes Lord of who we are He becomes Lord of our time, talent and treasures. He becomes Lord of everything, so in this message, we want to look at the practical expression in the life of this church and Paul's discussion of stewardship, at some principles of Christian stewardship so that we do not have to leave an IOU and be found wanting when the Master asks an accounting of us and we can truly be those servants that are found faithful and trustworthy.

I. CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP HAS A DEFINITE PLAN – 9:6-7

Paul addresses this issue with the church because that had been their previous discussions that had taken place with the church at Corinth. Paul says in verse 1 that it was superfluous for him to write to them about this ministry to the saints because for a year prior they had been prepared to make this collection for the saints and Paul boasted of that to the Macedonians. They had made some commitments to take this offering. The plan for Christian stewardship then includes:

A. Prior commitment of the heart: It is a volitional choice that we make that we are going to give everything. We understand that when we come to faith in Christ, we are no longer our own, we have been bought with a price and God has given everything to us, God has held nothing back from us of His love, His mercy, His grace, His goodness in our lives. God has given us everything we need for life, for freedom, to enjoy the

relationship we have with Him. Now we have a list of wants and there is some lack there, certainly. But on the list of what God has given us in our relationship with Him, there is no lack at all, He has given it all. Consequently, He asks of us, a commitment of the heart, a volitional choice that says now everything that I am and everything that I have and everything that I ever will be is completely and totally surrendered to You. In turn, God says you are allowed to live in this relationship and here are the resources I will provide for you, here are the blessings of my goodness to you in order that you can live and enjoy the life that I have called you to, but understand that you are manager of all of these resources. The Bible says that God owns the cattle on a thousand hills and He owns the hills also. The earth and everything it is His, none of it is ours. So in this relationship with God this plan of giving, of stewardship includes a prior commitment in which we realize and we understand and commit to giving God everything that we have and everything that we are.

Now we don't make the decision to be that good steward on Sunday morning when you are looking at your checkbook, and there is not enough to tithe or enough to make that missions offering or whatever. You don't make those decisions on the spur of the moment, you make those as part of your life commitment to say, in your own life and your family life, this is who we are. There are some things that are already set for us. Tax season is set for us and other things that require us to abide by a preplanned schedule already established. Our stewardship responsibility is the same way. You should not, even though we sometimes do, wake and say, "I wonder if I will get up and go to church today, do I feel like going to church or doing something else?" That should be a preplanned and determined decision that you make as a part of your stewardship, "God, here is my life and when my local community of faith, that I belong to, gathers in worship, I will be present." That is not a decision that we make when we wake up the morning of, that is a decision that we make that Sunday is coming and I will be in my place, I will be in my place of service because I have committed my life to that, and so Christian stewardship is according to a prior commitment. But this plan also includes,

B. Generosity: We remember that there was a particular situation that was taking place in Corinth. These readers were in a poverty situation themselves. They had experienced persecution, the loss of jobs, the loss of homes and loss of family and all of those things that others had, they themselves were in need. But Paul commends because they are generous. Generous is, well how do you define generous? It is determined by the need. If there is a \$500 need and we say, "let's give \$700 or \$800," that is quite generous. Well how do we determine generosity according to a determined plan? How do we determine generosity according to a plan, how do we know before hand what the needs are so that we can give to meet the need and even be generous and go above and beyond that? Well we can't, so we determine that we are going to be completely surrendered and we are going to give the very very best that we have. That's what Jesus was trying to say to those disciples that watched the widow walk by and she cast in her mite and Jesus affirmed that she had given all and they said did you not see what she gave and what others gave, how can you say that she gave more?

These others are giving much more than she will ever be able to give. Jesus said they have given out of their wealth, they have given out of their abundance, they won't even miss it, they gave out of an account that they used for incidentals. They have not truly tapped into their wealth, but she gave it all because she gave out of her poverty. She saw the need and she responded with her generosity. ILLUSTRATION: A story is told of a man that was not wealthy; he was just getting by, only able to tithe \$1 each week. But he worked hard and saved, and was able to buy a business that became quite prosperous. His tithe came to more than \$500 a week. He came to his pastor and said I just don't I can afford to give away this kind of money each week. He said I can't continue to tithe like this, so I am going to have to stop. His pastor said, "You really don't want to go back on a commitment that you made," because he had prayed and made a commitment with his pastor, that even though he was struggling, he was going to tithe. His pastor said, "You can't go back on a commitment, but what we can do is pray that God will take you back to an income level that you only have to tithe that \$1 week." He did not like that answer either. We are to be generous in our giving.

C. Cheerfulness: Paul tells us here that this plan also included cheerfulness. The Bible says here that God loves a cheerful giver. Literally it is a hilarious giver. That is one that looks at the opportunity to give and gives with great delight, hilarity and with great joy rather than saying "Lord I am going miss this money or what could I do with this money or what could I do with this time and I could be doing something else with my time or my talent or treasure." But rather we determine we will be a giver that gets joy, who senses joy and understands what will happen when we give. ILLUSTRATION: Two wealthy men were traveling with a group on a world tour. They were travelling in Korea and stopped on the road beside a rice paddy and out in the field was a young boy harnessed to a plow and an old man who was guiding the plow as the boy pulled it. They were taking pictures and they thought this was quite humorous and said, "That is a curious sight." The missionary who was guiding the tour said, "Yes that is the family of and said their name. When the church that they attend was in need of money to build a new building, they wanted so desperately to give and be part of that, but they had no extra money, but they had an ox. So they sold their only ox, and gave that money to the church to help with the building of the church. Now, this spring they are having to pull the plow themselves to make their crop." Of course these two did not respond right away, but took that all in. Finally one of them said, "That must have been a real sacrifice that must have been a very difficult decision." The missionary said, "They did not call it a sacrifice, they thought they were very fortunate that they had an ox that they could sell and give. They were delighted to give." As someone has said, "Some of you like to part with your money like a chicken likes to part with his feathers." Some of you like to part with your time like a chicken parting with his feathers, because time is the currency of the 21st century and we guard like it is our possession to use at our own discretion. Our plan of giving often is no more than as if we are tossing coins in the hat of a street performer if he pleases us. To give a tidbit to say that we did give but we have no other plan than that, spur of the moment, determined as we are benefitted or as we enjoy the time, then we may give something. But the Bible says if we are going to be Christian stewards, there must be a plan.

II. CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP HAS A DEFINED PURPOSE – 9:6, 9-12

A. The purpose of Christian stewardship is sowing and reaping. When we sow, and the principle of sowing and reaping is always at work in our lives, when we sow, there is going to be a harvest. Paul tells us here that if we sow bountifully, we will reap bountifully, but if we sow meagerly and miserly we will reap miserly. Even the smallest seed sown will produce much fruit. That is what the Cooperative Program of the Southern Baptist Convention is about. It is when individual believers give to their local church and those seeds can be multiplied with other churches giving. It is when those seeds of the gospel are given and sown it has an impact not only on one individual's life, but when they come to faith in Christ; it may impact an entire generation of people. So the purpose of Christian stewardship is for sowing and reaping. It is sowing what God has entrusted to us. I don't have all the resources in the world. You don't have all the resources in the world. But what we do have, we give and sow into the ministry in a cheerful way, in a determined way and a planned way, and God takes those resources sown, and He multiplies them and God blesses those and fruitfulness and abundance are the outcome.

B. The purpose of supplying needs. Paul instructs here and in 1 Corinthians that we have a stewardship responsibility with the ministry that we have been called to in order for us to meet the needs of others. This is God's ministry that He has called us to, so we must serve in accordance with who He has called us to be and in a stewardship responsibility we are the managers of this ministry, we are not the possessors and owners of this ministry. We are to go where He calls us to, we don't make those decisions based on the paycheck or the neighborhood or the location. But we make the decision of service based on the fact of where is God sending us, as a steward and managers, as those agents called to meet the needs of others in the world. We are stewards of the gospel. So it is not up to us as to how and where we will utilize our calling to serve. We are responsible to God and to others to bless them with the gospel of hope where He sends. So Christian stewardship is according to a definite plan, a defined purpose, but Christian stewardship also has definitive results.

III. CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP HAS DEFINITIVE RESULTS – 9:8

Paul states that when we practice Christian stewardship God makes sure that our good works will abound, so much so that God supplies the seed that we sow. So God is not asking us to supply the seed, God is not asking us to supply the resources, He is giving those to us and when we utilize those, the results are that our good works abound. That means that there is an impact across the board. That means that when we are faithful in sowing, there is a reaping of a harvest that comes because God continues to supply the resources. But He also tells us that the result of our stewardship is a proof of our faith. In verse 13a, says "that because of the proof given by this ministry", so Christian stewardship is a proof of our faith and our faithfulness. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 4, that it is given to stewards to be faithful. It is our duty as Christian stewards to be faithful. How do we know if we are being faithful as stewards, because we are doing what we are told. That is what the parable in Matthew 25 concerning the unfaithful steward is about. Jesus came to the last steward and he had done nothing

with what he had been given. He was holding on to it, he was hoarding it and he was condemned for that. But the way that we know that we are being faithful to God and the way that we know that we are walking in faithfulness in stewardship is because we are being responsible and there are results that are taking place in our life and in the lives of those we are impacting with our ministry.

Paul also tells us that the result of Christian stewardship is that God is glorified. In verse 13, Paul says that when that proof of faith is given by and through this ministry of stewardship, he says “they will glorify God for (or because) of your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all.” Isn’t that what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount when He said, “let your light shine before men,” and what will be the result, they will put your name up in lights, they will write stories about you, they will attach your name to the ministry so that it will be all about you and they will glorify you for your good works. He said “let your light shine so they will see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” Now, if we are not being good stewards, and our idea is ownership rather than management and administration and stewardship, then we will see that ministry as ours and we will become jealous for the name up in lights, we will become jealous because we will want our name glorified and it becomes all about us. But if we are good stewards, in the way God has called us to, when we take that responsibility seriously, it becomes all about Him and nothing about us and He is glorified because we are faithful to the ministry that He has called us to. Paul says here, “by your obedience and your faithfulness and commitment to this ministry, God will be glorified and they will give praise to Him and not to you.”

Then He says the result of our stewardship is that God’s grace is given to us in return. It comes back to us. He tells us that God provides the seed for sowing and in verse 14 he says, “While they also by prayer on your behalf yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you, thanks be to God for His indescribable gift.” God’s grace is being supplied back to us. ILLUSTRATION: There was a family that had blackberry bushes on their farm. There was a little boy in the family that would watch those berry bushes intently all spring and waited until they were ready to pick. The son in the family went out to pick berries for his mother because he loved her and wanted to do this for her. He went out and worked hard and picked berries for his mother. He brought them in and presented the fruit of his labor to her and says these are for you. She took his gift of the berries picked with love and hard labor, washed them and put some in bowl, poured sugar and cream over them and gave them to her son as a reward and in response for his labor of love and his gift to her. That is how God responds to faithful stewardship given in faithful sacrifice to Him. He takes those offerings of our life, our treasure and our talents and everything that we are and everything that we have that we say to Him when we give it, “this is for You, this is for

Your glory, this is for Your honor, for Your good. This is so that Your Name can be known throughout the earth. God these things, this stuff, everything that I am and everything that I have is Yours, here it is." And He gives it back to us, sweeter and sweeter each time, because His name is honored.

CONCLUSION: In his poem, *Mauld Muller*, John Greenleaf Whittier wrote these words, "for all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these, it might have been." Imagine what could be done, if we were not a bunch of wimps when it comes to stewardship. Imagine what could be done if we did not look at those things and who we are as our own possession, but instead we responded to the One who is the greatest model of stewardship in the Scripture. Consider these words from Jesus' prayer in John 17:2ff "even as though gavest Him authority over all mankind, that to all whom Thou has given Him, He may give eternal life. And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent. I glorified Thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast given Me to do. And now glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was. I manifested Thy name to the men Thou gavest me out of the world. Thine they were and Thou gavest them to Me, and they have kept Thy word. Now they have come to know that everything Thou hast given Me is from Thee; for the words which Thou gavest Me I have given to them; and they received them, and truly understood that I came forth from Thee, and they believed that Thou didst send Me...And all things that are Mine are Thine and Thine are Mine and I have been glorified in them. While I was with them, I was keeping them in Thy name which Thou hast given Me; and I guarded them, and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled." (vs. 2-8; 10; 12) "I have given them Thy word (17:14a):" "As Thou didst send Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world...And the glory which Thou has given me I have given to them; that they may be one just as We are one; (17:18, 22)."

You recognize these words as the words of the Lord Jesus on the night before He was crucified as He met with His Father in intimacy and He said as He stood before the Father, "Father, I have been a good steward of that which you have given to Me. You called Me to a task and I have completed that task. I have completed it faithfully, I have completed it diligently, I have completed it honorably." Jesus was given a stewardship and He gave it all. We sing, "Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe, sin had left a crimson stain, He washed me white as snow." The Bible says we are not our own, we have been bought with a price, and what we have is not our own, we owe it to Him. Jesus is no wimp.

In light of the fact that many of us have put an IOU in an envelope, we need to have an offering. Not an offering as we think, but let us be faithful with everything that

God has given us, everything that we are and everything that we have and everything that we ever will be is because God loves us, God desires to use us, but God asks of us that we give our best, not our least. Let's prayer together over our stewardship responsibility with everything that God has given after the model of Jesus who gave it all for us and that we would give it all for His glory and the good of those who need to know Him.

Dr. David Coggins