

Responsibilities Of Being A Steward

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Date: 06 November 1988

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[0 : 00] Our God, we ask that you will teach us from your Word things which we so very much need to know, perhaps not so much individually because lots of us know a good deal, but we need to know in relationship to one another the things which your Word teaches, and to encourage and strengthen one another accordingly.

So grant us that as we apply our minds and hearts to your Word in Christ's name. Amen. I want to take you on what Dick Lucas calls a paper chase, and that is we go from verse to verse in Scripture. So if you'll get your Bible ready in front of you, I'll tell you where I'd like to start. 1 Corinthians chapter 4 and verse 6, and this is to be the text of what I want to say.

Are you there? 1 Corinthians 4 verse 6, and it's page 158. And it reads, that you may learn by us, St. Paul writes, and the us is Apollos and Cephas and Paul, not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another.

And one translator says, that you may learn, do you see where it says that?

[1 : 49] That you may learn to live according to the Scriptures. In other words, that we may learn to live according to what Scripture teaches us.

That's the text. You got it? That you may learn to live according to the Scriptures. Now do you want to have a picture of what the Scriptures don't teach? Turn back to Matthew chapter 6 and verse 2, and I'm going to ask Ed Norman to help me with this, to interpret it.

The human pattern of giving alms is described there. Thus, when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by men.

The great motivation for giving is to be praised by men. Mr. Norman, would you give us a fanfare so that we can imagine better what that means, to give in that way.

You come with your... There you are. So, and then the collection plate goes around.

[3 : 04] And that was the pattern which was established. Well, now, turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 4 on page 158, and you'll see what Paul says about stewardship.

And chapter 4 says this. Chapter 4, verse 1, page 158. This is how one should regard us as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

Now, their stewardship was the stewardship of the mysteries of God, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.

And they had been entrusted with this, and they were to take it and make it available to the whole world. And that was their stewardship. Then Paul becomes very practical and says, it's required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.

In other words, if you've given something, then you've got to prove that you are worthy of the trust that is invested in you when you are given that.

[4 : 27] And that's why one of the very serious concerns of the church and the officers of the church is to prove themselves trustworthy with the money that is given to them for the purposes of God's work in this parish.

And when somebody gives you something, then you have to prove to the person who gives it to you that you are trustworthy. That's the supreme qualification of being a steward.

But then it goes on to say, Paul says, this thing which was given to me not by you, but by God, I am responsible not to you, but to God.

So that when you are asked to make your commitment of time and gifts and money to God's work, you are being asked to be stewards of what God has given to you.

And Paul points out how having been made a steward of what God has given to you, you ultimately are responsible only to God. So that a trumpet fanfare becomes unnecessary because God knows

what's going on and he doesn't have to have a trumpet to announce it.

[5 : 52] And so he says, and I find this the most liberating thing, it's an amazing sort of statement to me if you look in verse 3 of chapter 4.

Paul says, I'm not responsible to you. I don't care what you think. You are not my judge. even if you take me into court and sue me, I'm still not responsible to you.

I count it, Paul says, a very small thing indeed that that I counted a very small thing to be under your judgment.

Now, of course, what most of us do is we live in utter dependence upon people around us thinking well of us.

We make it a very big thing. I want to be thought well of by people and so the trumpet makes sense to me because I want it to be a way of people seeing who I am and what I'm doing so that they think well of me.

[7 : 11] But Paul says, you're not responsible to them. You're responsible to the person who gave it to you. And what you do with it is strictly between you and that person.

Paul goes on to say, I don't even judge myself. And by that, I think he's pointing out that we are very poor judges of ourselves.

We simply don't know ourselves. And you're wasting your time being introspective and looking into yourself to see if you can come up.

It's like time spent before a mirror. It's a very little advantage because it's just there temporarily then it's gone.

Paul says, I'm not aware that I've done anything wrong but that doesn't relieve me. I can't acquit myself because I'm not aware of what I've done that's wrong.

[8 : 10] I don't care what you think. I don't care what the courts think. I don't even care what my own opinion of myself is. I'm not acquitted by that.

But he says, he says, if you look at it, it is the Lord who judges me. And until I face that judgment, I'm not going to waste most of my life worrying about what you think or even about what I think because it is the Lord who judges me.

And when he judges me, his judgment will be perfect and will be final. And the reason it will be perfect and will be final, it says, is because at that point, he will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.

God doesn't see as we see one another. God brings to light the hidden things of darkness, the things we can't penetrate through to. I don't think this necessarily refers to evil, but the things we simply can't comprehend.

We don't know how this is going to work out. But God brings to light his purpose in your life. He brings to light the hidden things of darkness.

[9 : 42] And not only does he do that, but he brings to light the purposes of the heart. So God doesn't wait until you tally up your giving for the year.

God tallies up the purposes of our hearts. And that's why I think we're encouraged to spend a great deal of time before God in making these decisions.

Because these decisions ultimately reveal the purposes of our hearts. And that's what we need to know. That's why I think we need, we spend a lot of our time worrying about what other people think of us.

We spend a lot of our time in introspection. Paul says if you want to spend a lot of time spend it with the God who reveals the hidden things of darkness and makes known the purposes of the heart.

That means you've got to spend a lot of time in scripture and in prayer and in seeking to know God in the deepest levels of your own heart.

[10 : 55] So that it really is very much between you and God. And I think this is a tremendous charter of freedom. Freedom from what other people think, freedom from that trumpet fanfare, freedom from your own introspection.

You're free of all those things. Because there is a final, you know, there's a final accounting and that's before God.

and that accounting is going to take into consideration the deepest thoughts of your heart. And the things which you can't possibly penetrate by your intellect, which even your psychiatrist can't get to.

God will bring those things to light. Now, another verse. And you have to go to 2 Corinthians chapter 9 verse 8 for this, and this is on page 173.

And on page 173, it tells you quite a lot about who God is. And so that when we make a commitment, as we're invited to make today, particularly with reference to money, and money is terribly important, I mean, how we use it is terribly important, it's not important to other people, but it's important in terms of our relationship to God.

[12:32] And I would suggest, before you make any commitment at all, that you come to grips with verse 8 of chapter 9 of 2 Corinthians, which says, God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance.

abundance. Are you able to believe that? If you're able to believe that, then that's the faith in which you can make a commitment.

If you can't believe that, then I would advise you not to make a commitment, because it would be very risky for you to do so, until you come to the place where you believe what Paul says, that God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance.

That's an amazing statement, isn't it? That's the basis on which we can make a commitment, and it's the only basis, as far as I know, that the God in whom we believe is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance.

And God is not watching the stock market. He's not even watching the rate of inflation. He's not watching interest payments.

[13:53] God is simply being God. And under any circumstance, the promise is that he is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance.

And because we have such a God, that you may always have enough of everything, it says, that is, enough for you, and may provide in abundance for every good work.

That is, not only may you have enough, but you may be able to provide for the good work for which God has called you and redeemed you in Christ. There is money to do that, because God is able. I think there is a technical glitch here, which I would like Paul to have to face sometime. I would discuss it with him. And that is that he made this statement before anybody invented direct male appeals, in which we are confronted with hundreds and hundreds of good works all the time, and we have to sort our way through them.

but even as you sort your way through them, this is the God who is able, and this is the God who, quite apart from anything else, is able to bring to light the hidden things of darkness and to reveal the purposes of the heart.

[15:21] So that's how God works, and that's the faith we need to believe in. Now, that statement is preceded by another statement with which I will conclude this short talk, and that is where it says in the end of verse 7, God loves a cheerful giver.

Now, it's a wonderful passage. You know, it's he who sows sparingly, how will he reap? Sparingly. He who sows bountifully, how will he reap?

Bountifully. Each one must do as he has made up his mind. That is, you're responsible to make up your own mind. You're not to be reluctant or under compulsion.

And the reason I hate preaching this sermon this morning is that some people interpret it as me putting you under compulsion, but I'm not.

I mean, I don't, I don't, I have to leave God to judge that, whether I am being disobedient in that way. But it says you're not to do it reluctantly or under compulsion, but it says God loves a cheerful giver.

[16:50] And the lovely part about the cheerful giver is that the Greek word that is used for cheerful is the root word of the word we use in English, which is hilarious.

So God loves a hilarious giver. Hilarity is acquainted in our society largely with the result of having drunk too much.

So that you will know that a lot of us, I can't include myself in this, but I, for purposes of my public image, but I, you will know that most of us with a little bit to drink are much nicer than we are normally.

And what I think Paul is saying is that there is a condition of hilarity induced by a kind of over indulgence in the grace and joy of the Holy Spirit, which allows us to do things which otherwise we might consider to be somewhat rash and not the mean, miserable kind of thing that is associated with our total sobriety, but is something which is hilarious, which is an expression of the joy and when we're being who we really want to be, so that God commends us, Paul says in 1

Corinthians 4, God commends us after having judged the secret things of darkness and the purposes of our heart. God commends us for that, and we commend God in a sense by our willingness to trust his ability to keep us, and it's in that framework that we make any commitment that we make, even the commitment you're asked to make today.

[19 : 23] So will you be guided to learn by those scriptures how to live and how to face that commitment which is the basis of our relationship?

to Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Let us pray.

we thank you, Lord Christ, for the promise of your presence.

Help us to remember that you are with us now as we meet to pray. Make us of one heart and mind that we may agree in what we ask. And as we offer our petitions, so may we pray in accordance with your will and glorify our God and creator in heaven.

Let us pray this series of petitions, saying together at the end of them, Lord, hear our prayer.

Loving God, we thank you for your many gifts to us, the love which brings us together, for the earth which provides for our needs, for the new life you have given us in Jesus Christ.

[21 : 13] Lord, hear our prayer. We pray to you for our Christian family, for this congregation, and for the grace to grow in your love.

Lord, hear our prayer. We pray to you for our world, for all its cares and needs, and for all those who lead us and care for us.

Lord, hear our prayer. we pray to you for those in need, for the sick and the lonely, for the hurt and the frightened, and especially for those who live without hope.

Lord, hear our prayer. We pray for those we love who have died, which will surround them with your care and love. Lord, hear our prayer, and we pray for one another, asking you to bless us, our friends and relatives, our neighbors and workmates.

Bless the places where we work, and bless our homes, and bless our lives together. Lord, hear our prayer. O Lord God, when you give your servants a task to do, be it great or small, grant us also to know that it is not the beginning, but the continuing of the task until it be thoroughly finished, which yields the true glory.

[23 : 06] Through him that for finishing of thy work laid down his life, our Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Christ, you have been pleased to call us together as your servants in your church.

Make us, we beseech you, O Lord, to be modest, humble, and constant in our serving. Grant us a ready will to observe all spiritual discipline, and may we become ever more stable and strong in thy Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Lord, we must confess that we love to be independent, and we find it hard to give thanks for everything that happens to us, everything that comes our way.

We want to feel that we have deserved success in a home and friends and honorable work, so sometimes our thanksgivings ring false, words, just words that we take on our lips without meaning, without understanding.

We are not ungrateful, but at times we expect our due. We feel we have earned our place in society, and that by our own labors and our own thinking and our own vision, we have got where we are.

[24 : 31] so we forget that the whole earth is yours, and you gave it to us. We forget that the breath of life is your gift, and you made us living souls.

We forget that our best purposes are yours, and that you have inspired us to achievement and strengthened us for fulfillment. And so, Lord, let us remember that it is you who have showered such abundance upon us, our skills and talents, our influence and power, our wisdom and insights, our ability to work and our desire to learn, our great financial resources, our contacts, our gifts of organization, management, and business, our ability to be hosts and hostesses, to teach, to dance, to laugh, and to sing, the willingness to care, and an awareness of our need for prayer.

All these, and many more things you have given us, you have trusted us with so very much, I pray, O God, that you would find us worthy servants.

Set us free to be as generous as you are generous to us, and give us a grateful heart that we may offer our thanks with gladness and understanding.

and in a moment of silence, each of us has a prayer of thanksgiving, of intercession, or of forgiveness.

[26 : 06] Lord, hear these prayers. prayers. Father, we come to you in silence, yet shouting for joy.

We come overawed by the thought of your love for us, for you loved us so much that you gave us your only son to suffer and to die. Yet to think that you love us like that makes us long to break our silence, to shout for joy and sing your praise.

You have given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In him we are ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven. Father, accept our worship and praise and thanksgiving to the glory of your holy name.

Amen. The offertory hymn is 529. H ■■■■em de la pêle Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[28 : 56] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen.