

Stewardship

The first record given us of man's responsibility concerning his stewardship is to be found in the Garden of Eden: "And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. Adam was endowed with a God-given privilege: to be manager and caretaker of that which was owned by the Creator. To Adam was given one commandment: "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it." Every other fruit of the trees of the garden was his for the partaking. But he became a thief of the worse magnitude, not only stealing of the forbidden fruit, but of himself from his Creator. He failed in his office of stewardship. Now as sons of Adam we are charged, "Let him that stole steal no more!" Through Jesus Christ, the Second Adam, we are once again entrusted the privilege of stewardship. How shall we respond? Are we to follow the steps of our former father, Adam?

Stewardship and Giving.

Herein lies an aspect of stewardship of which Adam initially had no concern. In the beginning there were no other people, and had there been, they would not have been in want or lacking anything! But there *was* giving: God gave Adam a wife - that was good. Eve gave Adam of the forbidden fruit - not good!

"Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth" Eph. 4:28.

What of the present day sons of Adam? Do they not yet steal? Do they not continue to eat of the fruit of the forbidden tree? Is not the fruit of their labor the thorns and thistles of the cursed ground? Is the cursed fruit that is given to others in need given as unto the Lord, and according to His riches in glory? How *can* it be as they do not own Him as Lord; indeed are at enmity against Him all the day long?

We observe all around us the "milk of human kindness;" the nation and its peoples, rallying in support of those in need; many whose homes and whose livelihood have been utterly swept away. Truly, men ought to be responsible stewards to God in temporal things - even in their state of sin and depravity. But concerning the Believer and his stewardship in behalf of his Lord: what causes us to differ? May the comparison of scriptures afford us a little insight.

"Let him that stole steal no more." That is, we are to "not eat" of the forbidden fruit; but we "mayest freely eat" of Christ Jesus, the fruit of the tree of Life. It is a gift, freely given. One cannot possibly steal that which is given him!

"Rather, let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is *good*." The thing with which Adam labored with his hands was under a curse; thorns and thistles. Contrarily, for the Believer, it is the thing which is good. It is *AGATHOS*, "that which is good, lit., 'the good,' as being morally honorable, pleasing to God, and is therefore beneficial. Christians are to prove it, Rom.12:2, to cleave to it, 12:9, to do it, 13:3, Gal.6;10; 1 Peter 3:11, John 5:29; to follow after it, 1 Thess. 5:15; to be zealous of it, 1 Peter 3:13; to imitate it, 3 John 11; to overcome evil with it, Rom.12:21. (Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, page 504.)

". . .that he may have to give to him that needeth." "When the Son of man shall come in glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: . . . Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was hungred, and ye gave me meat:

I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have *done it unto me*” Matt. 25:31, 34-40. Let us weigh these words that we discern their heaviness; let us meditate upon them until we begin to know of the heart of God and of the depth of His compassions.

The Importance of Stewardship.

“And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him?” Luke 11:5,6. Now I am aware of the usual approach to this passage, but I would like us to pursue the reasoning; the motivation behind it. This fellow was indeed a good steward and I want us to see it. The beginning of Luke 11 finds us reading the Lord’s Prayer. In verse three we find these words written: “Give us day by day our daily bread.” Herein is a willingness to place our faith, our trust, our dependence in Jehovah Jireh, the Lord Our Provision. But another might find this an excuse for his selfishness. “Lord, I’m a humble man. Give me only what I need to provide for my family; you know - us four and no more!” And he secretly does not care that God would enable him to meet the need of another! Again, one might pray for an abundance of provision to lay back in store - but what does he more greatly esteem; the things of mammon? or in faith, waiting upon the Lord; to count His mercies, His grace, the greater treasure?

It is the midnight hour. “A friend of mine *in his journey is come unto me.*” In the journey of life is my friend come unto me - and he is in need; he is hungry. “And I have nothing to set before him.” You see, it is midnight. The daily bread for which he prayed is eaten; nothing remains. My own thoughts might be, “I’m sorry my Brother. I have nothing to give you - but I would if I could!” An excuse that gets me off the hook, right? But look at the determination, the “importance” (petition, insistence, appeal) of this man. “Lord, my brother is come to me. He’s hungry and I come praying to you in the darkness of night in behalf of his need. . .”

Lend me three loaves. . .but the thought is not that I’ll repay you, but that I myself am willing to sacrifice and be in want of my own daily bread that my brother might eat. I dare say that in this narrative this fellow *cannot* pay back his Friend for the loaves he is borrowing. Can you imagine the spiritual portayal: “Lord, if you will lend me. . .I will repay You. . .! Really? With what? Unthinkable! Impossible! And what of the three loaves? Is there more here than meets the eye? The friend is come at midnight; he is in need; he is hungry. “I AM the bread of life. . .As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me” John 5: 48,57. Someone may say, You’re carrying this too far: the scripture speaks only of temporal bread! Really? Read on.

Asking, Seeking, Knocking - the Motivation.

The next two verses ought to be read within the context of scripture in order to gain a right understanding: “And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” Luke 11:9,10. Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, knock at the door of Jehovah Jireh, the Lord Our Provision. Not for an

increase of your (our) own abundance, but in order to meet the need of a brother in want. Our dear Brother is asking, seeking, knocking, is he not? If his desire is only for loaf bread, then why within the context of asking and receiving does the scripture tell us, “. . .how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that *ask* him?” vs. 13.

Sacrificial Stewardship.

“Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. . .Praying with us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave themselves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God” II Cor. 8:1,2,4,5. Astounding! Great trial of affliction? Accompanied by the abundance of joy? Deep poverty? Abounding unto riches? How can we explain such things? They presented themselves first, a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God . . .and then unto us by the will of God - *reasonable service!* Is it not the fulfillment of Romans 12:1?

Stewardship - Giving forth the Gospel of Christ.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captive, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.” Luke 4:18, cf. Isaiah 61:1.

The Captain of our faith has gone before us; let His army of Christian soldiers follow close behind Him; to fight if need be; to enlist in the ranks of those who would bring healing, deliverance, and recovery. To those who are hungry, give them of the Bread of Life; to those who thirst, lead them to the Fountain of Living Water; to the stranger, bring him under the shelter of the Cross; to those who are naked, tell them that they may be clothed with the Righteousness of Christ; to those who are sin sick, visit them with the remedy of the Gospel; to those who are in prison, deliver them to the Son who is able to make them free. . .

To the Nicodemus, who is drawn from the darkness into the Light, give of the three loaves. He too is hungry and thirsty; he is naked, sick and imprisoned. Make known unto him the Gospel of Christ and his need of the New Birth. Make much of Jesus! He is Creator and due our utmost loyalty and praise. He is our Lord and we are to be found at His feet in reverential worship. Lift the banner! Glorify the King, the Lord of glory!

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