

## 11. Stewardship (2Q 2009—Walking the Walk: The Christian Life)

**Biblical material:** Deut. 8:18; Ps. 50:12; Matt. 24:46; 25:14–30; Luke 4:16; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20.

### Quotes

- The use of our possessions shows us up for what we actually are. *Charles Caldwell Ryrie*
- Stewardship is what a man does after he says, ‘I believe.’ *W.H. Greaves*
- We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give. *Duane Hulse*
- Are you giving God what is right, or what is left? *Anon*
- I am persuaded that there is nothing upon which the Christian conscience is so ill-informed as the subject of Christian giving. *Samuel Chadwick*
- Have you ever noticed the difference in the Christian life between work and fruit? A machine can do work; only life can bear fruit. *Andrew Murray*

### Questions

How would you explain stewardship in a Christian setting? Why is this far more than fundraising? Why does God tell us to give? In an age that is dominated by materialism and consumerism, how do we demonstrate that we have different motivations? What is God really looking for from us?

### Bible discussion

Deut. 8:18 tells us that it is God who makes us successful. But how do we measure success? God is identified as the owner of the whole world (Ps. 50:12) so anything we “own” is a very temporary matter. Many of the parables speak about wise stewardship (e.g. Matt. 24:46; 25:14–30). Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19) and we need to make the best use!

### Comment

Once a local church treasurer arrived at the Conference office with the weekly offering, surprisingly large. He was asked why so much—had there been many visitors? “I had a dream about a horse race,” he told the Conference treasurer, “and so I put the whole offering on a horse. And it came in first.”

Good stewardship? Hardly! The Conference treasurer made it clear this was gambling, dream or no dream, and extracted a promise from the man never to do this again.

A few months later the same thing happened again—with even more spectacular results. “But what about your promise?” he was asked.

“I know, I know—but the dream was so vivid and real, and I just couldn’t say no!” the man replied. This time the Conference treasurer made it crystal clear that if this ever happened again, he would be sanctioned. It never happened again that the church office knew about. And as the Conference treasurer commented, he didn’t know whether he’d bet the offering and had lost it all!

A principled man, entrusted with the church’s funds, betting the divine service offering on horses! Split-level thinking is that bizarre.

There is nothing as dangerous as an inconsistent Christian, yet we all seem to have that capacity for split-level thinking, in different ways and at different occasions. We are all capable of revealing discrepancies in our ideals and principles, times when we don't practice what we preach. But this schizophrenic spirituality that allows us to believe one thing and act quite oppositely will damage us and those around us.

For in the end Jesus died at the hands of those who clung to their split-level thinking. Caiaphas who said it was better for one man to die instead of all the people. The ones who were so dedicated to stewardship that they paid tithes on the herbs in their gardens. The self-righteous saw Jesus as a blasphemer. Those who claimed to know God failed to see Him in their midst. And in the final irony, the faithful made sure the Lord of the Sabbath was dead and buried, so they could go home and observe the Sabbath.

So how are we to make sure we use all our resources for the best? While stewardship often comes down to debates about money, more significant is our motivation and dedication. As Jesus said about the widow with her two mites—she has given from her lack. The much larger gifts of the rich were not comparable because they did not affect the giver to the same degree. The motivation to dedicate what we have to the Lord is what is truly significant. What God wants us to demonstrate is that we are not selfish people, concerned only about ourselves. He has no need of the money—everything is his anyway—but he knows how much we value our possessions. Of course this is tragic, since like the rich young ruler we can become preoccupied with what we think we have. But ultimately, what do we really have? A little time, some resources for a short period, and then life is over.

The best then is to invest where there's no moths and no rust, as Jesus declared. Things of value are not things! One of the great lessons we need to learn is just that, and to see that the value system of this world is completely upside-down. God's value system is very different, and he wants us to see that so that we can live truly happy lives.

### **Ellen White Comments**

Heaven is watching to see how those occupying positions of influence fulfil their stewardship. The demands upon them as stewards are measured by the extent of their influence. In their treatment of their fellow-men, they should be as fathers,—just, tender, true. They should be Christlike in character, uniting with their brethren in the closest bonds of unity and fellowship. {GW 495}

God may entrust men with money and possessions, but because of this they are not to lift themselves up. All they have they hold in trust; it is lent them by God that they may develop a character like His. They are on trial. God wants to see whether they will prove themselves worthy of the eternal riches. If they use their Lord's goods to set themselves above their fellowmen, they prove unworthy of a place in the kingdom of God... But if those whom the Lord has made stewards regard their treasures as His gifts and seek to manifest compassion, sympathy, and love for their fellowmen, they are in harmony with the character of God, who gave His only-begotten Son to die for their salvation. If they value the souls of the human race according to the price paid for their redemption, they will not work out their natural impulses, but will manifest the attributes of the mind and will of God, and will be channels through which God's generous, loving sentiments may flow to humanity. {TM 286}

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