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Stewardship...
God's Way

Adult Edition

The next morning the group came out early to begin their next leg of the trip, and here was this lanky young man again, getting on his cycle. This time the pastor spoke first, "Morning." And he answered, "Hi! Do you know Jesus?" The pastor was ready for that. "Are you kidding? I've known Him since I was seven years old."

And he thought to himself, here's someone who is really devoted to his Lord. If he gets to know nothing else about you, he will find out if you know Jesus Christ. For all his abruptness and simplicity, he left the pastor with the inescapable conclusion he considered nothing else in the world to be as important as knowing Jesus Christ and making Him known to others.

What kind of steward are you? Do you realize in your everyday life you are accountable to God? Being aware the priority purpose of the Christian and the church is to spread the gospel of the kingdom of God, are you satisfied with your management of this great trust God has given you? What will you do to grow toward being an even better steward of the good news of Jesus Christ?

Praying for Guidance

*F*ather, we see how Your word teaches us we are accountable to you for everything. We realize You are concerned above all things that people come into Your kingdom through faith in Jesus Christ. We want to be disciples who have this priority at the top of our lists, too. Show us what we should eliminate from our lives, which conflicts with that purpose. Show us what we must begin to do to achieve this purpose. Most of all, let us fall in love afresh with our Savior, so we will desire strongly to make Him known to people around us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

There is no more important trust than this. Even Christians who don't have a dime have the good news — that's priceless! Even believers who have no talents at all have the way of eternal life — what a gift! Good stewards are faithful in sharing the good news, first and foremost.

Jesus taught His disciples — that's us! — that we have the keys to eternal life. He said: "If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven" (John 20:23). He wasn't creating a class of priests with special power ordinary believers don't have. Jesus was simply telling His disciples they have the knowledge of the way to be forgiven, and if they share it, they are declaring the remission of sins. If they don't, they are effectively shutting the door to forgiveness.

The Good News

1. God wants us to have eternal life – John 3:16, 10:10
2. We have sinned, deserve death and hell, and cannot save ourselves – Romans 3:23, 6:23, Ephesians 2:9
3. Jesus Christ is God's solution to our problem – John 1:1, 14, 1 Peter 3:18, Romans 4:25, John 1:12
4. Our response must be to receive Jesus – Acts 3:19, 26:20, Ephesians 2:8, Romans 10:9-10

A few years ago on the way to Ridgecrest, NC, a pastor was riding along with friends in a second car when they had transmission trouble. Because of the hour, they were forced to spend the night in nearby Morganton. While they were taking things into their rooms, a young man rode up on a motorcycle. He had a rough look about him, but something was different. In a moment, he asked the desk clerk, "Do you know Jesus?" She beamed and said, "I sure do!" And he said, "Well praise the Lord! I've been a Christian for about two years."

Answering for our Witness

Group Study- Part 2

Background Passage: 1 Corinthians 4:1-6

Focal Passage: 1 Corinthians 4:2

Bible Truth: *Included in our accountability for the management of all our lives is our responsibility to share the gospel of Christ with lost persons.*

"Blood, Sweat & Tears" recorded the song, "And When I Die." It expresses bluntly the thinking of many people today about death and judgment:

*"Our troubles are many, they're as deep as a well,
I can swear there ain't no heaven, but I'll pray there ain't no
hell!"*

Many people don't believe in hell, but many of them still hedge their bets, trying to do good here and there, hoping it will keep them out of a place of punishment. Because there's a feeling in most people's hearts — whatever else they believe — that somehow they will answer for their lives.

Think about life for a moment. When someone shoots up a school, don't we hope they'll be caught, tried and punished? Of course. Why would we not? And hypothetically speaking, if one of us robbed a bank, wouldn't we expect to be hunted down, arrested, and held accountable? Naturally.

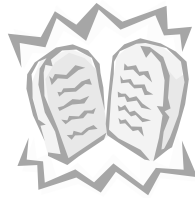
In fact, we *want* "bad guys" to answer for their crimes. That's why we sense without being told that there is final justice in this world, somebody will finally hold people accountable for evil. Believing this helps us make sense of the world as we experience it.

In our study of the biblical principles of stewardship, we've seen that God is the owner and the source of everything, and we must set apart our lives for His glory. To these principles we need to add two more: we are accountable to God for how we manage our lives, and there is one responsibility greater than all the others.



Both those principles are represented in our focal passage for this study:

Now, it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful (1 Corinthians 4:2).



God Holds You Responsible

There is a principle of accountability in the Bible we might state like this:

We are and will be held accountable for what we are and have, both here and at judgment.

Our focal passage teaches us this accountability. The word **faithful** in 1 Corinthians 4:2 means true to our commitment, or trustworthy. There are many other scriptures which teach us this truth. Here's one that's to the point:

So then, every one of us shall give account of himself to God (Romans 14:12).

There are few truths more evident throughout the whole of the Bible than this, all of us are accountable to God for our lives. The judgment at the end of the age is the perfect picture of this accountability, but is not the only time we will be held accountable.

Jesus told a parable about servants who were given money to invest. Each had to report on the results. The parable teaches all of us have the same choice to obey God, and we will be judged fairly according to our response. This parable does not teach salvation by works: what it does teach is that God rewards a Christian steward, and God's condemnation of those who do not give their lives at all to Christ, will be fair and impartial.

Paul understood this principle, and he told the Corinthian church, "It is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful."

This is why the New Testament consistently teaches Christians to support the cause of the kingdom of God with their giving. Read Philippians 5:15-18 and identify the ways in which church giving would be used.

Since we are accountable for what we do with what we are and have, and since the priority purpose of our stewardship of life is to advance the kingdom of God, what should all Christians do as a vital part of our discipleship to Christ?

Sharing the Gospel

If we expect the priority of the church to be the kingdom of God, how can we expect anything else of ourselves? Who is the church after all?

When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 4:2 the **trust** he was speaking of was the gospel. It was this trust that he believed to be the most important in the world for him to be **faithful** about.

Our priority activity in this world is to know Christ and to make Him known. People are gifted in different ways to make Christ known, but the discipline of sharing the gospel is shared by all Christians:

Every Christian is to share the gospel of Christ on some level as God gives opportunity.

Developing the habit of sharing your faith is important to the overall development of stewardship. Why? Because witnessing people are generally giving people. The less concern and passion you have for presenting Christ to a world in need, the less motivation you have for generous giving to ministry and missions.

The New Testament says our witnessing is at the very heart of stewardship, because the gospel is something we have been given as a trust. God has entrusted us with the telling of the good news. Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 2:4:

We speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel.

That makes it the mission of His body, too. He told us this directly: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel” (Mark 16:15).

There are many good charities, good causes in the world to help the poor, find cures for diseases, guide the troubled, teach those who are different. We may choose to support some of these causes. We should first commit ourselves to the cause of the kingdom of God, and never cheat it by doing other things — or by doing nothing.

What are YOUR Priorities?

There is a story about a Jewish man and a Christian man who talked one day about their respective faiths. Eventually they decided to visit each other’s place of worship. When they attended the synagogue, the Christian watched the Jew give his weekly tithe. The next day, they attended the Christian man’s church, where the Jew was astonished to see him drop a dollar bill in the offering plate. The Jew whispered in his friend’s ear, “Almost thou persuadest me to become a Christian.”

Many churches, in order to remind themselves and teach their members the kingdom of God comes first, have created what are commonly called “ministry budgets.” Every item comes under the heading of some ministry the church performs. If members are expected to be generous and responsible, it makes sense for the church to commit itself to good stewardship, too. It should use offerings to perform ministry. If something is costing the church part of the tithes of the people, but isn’t related to the ministry and mission of the church, it should be seriously reviewed.

Worship services, preaching, music, teaching, ordinances, Bible studies, fellowship events, outreach, are all obvious elements of mission and ministry. There are many behind-the-scenes events like committee/team meetings, maintenance and incidental expenses that also play a part in bringing about the total ministry of the church. Most of these things cost money.

It’s our focal passage of scripture for this study. He was restating the general truth that we will answer to God for the lives we have been given, and all their resources and opportunities because all we are and have is only on loan from Him.

The Old Testament taught this principle in stern warnings:

For every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son—both alike belong to me. (Ezekiel 18:4).

Many of the commandments are stated in the negative — “Thou shalt not” — and many of our instructions about good and evil focus on the punishment we will receive if and when we disobey. The first commandment given by God in the garden was, “You shall not eat.” The fact is, we probably need the warnings, because our tendency is not to see how good we can be, but how much we can get away with!

This is exactly the point of the scripture: we won’t finally get away with anything. We will be held accountable.

There is a positive side, however. Jesus himself, in His parable, said the master rewarded two out of three of his servants for their being “good and faithful!” And the Old Testament teaches us:

“If you are wise, your wisdom will reward you; if you are a mocker, you alone will suffer.” (Proverbs 9:12).

The Bible teaches that our own good or bad use of life tends to either bless or curse us. The Proverbs contain numerous verses illustrating how the poor steward of life experiences downfall as a result, while the good steward experiences success. Jesus told parables (Luke 18:29-30, 16:10-12) which teach the effects in this world of either good or bad stewardship. While not every act of good stewardship or generosity can be connected to a specific blessing following it, God assures us that accountability is a present reality as well as a future one, and good stewardship really is rewarded.

As sobering as it is to realize there will be a judgment where we will be held accountable for our lives, we don’t have to wait until eternity rolls to experience our accountability. We are continually held accountable for what we do and become, and often

Poor stewardship of our health, for instance, often results in chronic ailments, cancer, heart disease, and early death. Poor management of our money often results in problems with bill collectors, bad credit ratings, even bankruptcy. Poor stewardship of relationships in our lives may result in alienated children or parents, broken marriages, non-existent homes. Sometimes we are the victims of the poor stewardship of *others*, which just shows that all humanity suffers from the common problem of sin.

The fact our accounts may be called in explains one of the questions many people have had about how it is some people seem to get away with murder (even actual murder!) in this world. They may: Eventually everyone is held accountable — if not here, then in eternity.

Whose Fault Is It?

- Have you ever said, "It's not my fault?" Who hasn't! But whose fault is it when —
- You don't bring an offering to church — yours or your employer for not paying you enough?
- You cheat to get ahead — your fault, or the people around you for not treating you fairly?
- You make poor use of your time — your fault or your alarm clock's, or your watch, or are other people who didn't move fast enough, or ...

The most important thing of which we are stewards is our lives themselves. There will be many who come to God in the last day and say, "But we did this and we did that!" but they will be lost, because what they were was something other than children of God.

This suggests another principle also taught us in the Bible, the principle of the priority of the kingdom of God in the stewardship of our lives.

God's Kingdom Comes First

The principle of the kingdom's priority is that God's kingdom is to come first in our lives and in the church. This means our stewardship, our good management of life and all its resources, must *first* take into consideration what it is God wants for His kingdom.

Jesus taught this principle very simply:

But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matthew 6:33).

Jesus was not the first to say the kingdom of God ought to be first in our lives. Malachi the prophet wrote:

Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house (Malachi 3:10).

Since the tithe was to be the *first* tenth of anyone's increase, giving it meant putting God and His worship first in their lives.

The storehouse was the temple, and later the synagogues, which were worship centers representing the temple. These were like today's churches. Bringing tithes to the "storehouse" means bringing our offerings into our local church, for use and distribution in ministry and missions.

Let's learn and commit ourselves to the principle of the kingdom priority:

The priority purpose of Christian offerings is to support and build, through the local church, the ministry of the gospel and the cause of missions.

There is nothing more important our churches do than this. There are many people who say they believe in God but not the "organized church." They are deceiving themselves. While there are problems in churches — any reasonable person will admit — the church is still where God is doing His chief work today. Christ loved the church and died for it (Eph. 5:25). This tells us how important it is! The church is the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27), and Christ said His mission was to seek and save those who are lost.

