

SOUTH CAROLINA  
BAPTIST CONVENTION

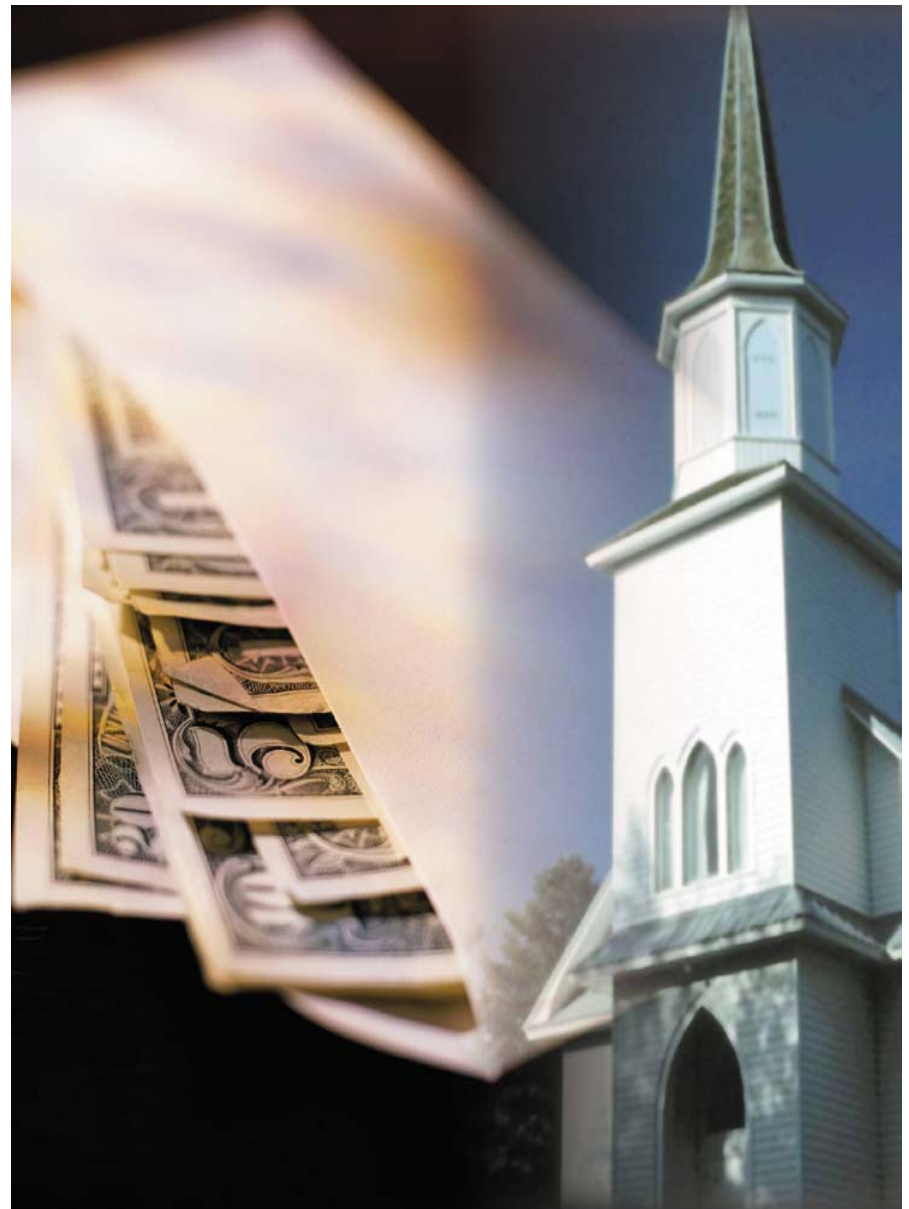
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**Stewardship...**  
**God's Way**

**Sermons**



<sup>3</sup> God gave the Israelites a commandment to tithe. According to Deuteronomy 12 they were to bring these tithes to the “place the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for His name” (v.11), in other words, the house of worship. And these gifts were to support “the Levites from your towns, who have no allotment or inheritance of their own” (v.12). The Levites were those who led worship and carried out ministry throughout the country. Applying these Old Testament passages to the New Testament church, we cannot help but conclude that the priority purpose of Christian offerings is to support the ministry of both missions and benevolence. Malachi 3:10: “Bring the whole tithe into the Storehouse, that there may be food in my house.” “Storehouse” appears to be parallel to “my house,” as if there were places in the temple where the goods were kept. At any rate the purpose of bringing the tithes to the storehouse was that the temple and its ministries might be supplied.

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## Accountable Ambassadors

### Sermon Number Two

I Corinthians 4:2

Little Willie was drawing in school one day, and his teacher asked him what it was. “A picture of God,” he said.

“But Willie, you mustn’t do that. Nobody knows how God looks.”

To which Willie replied, “Well, they will when I get this done.”

Our hope is when our special stewardship emphasis concludes, we will all have a better idea what biblical stewardship looks like. We’ve already found out everything we are and have belongs to God, who lends things to us to manage for His glory. Those are very basic principles. God’s word gets much more specific about our management of His resources. In fact, the more deeply we delve into the Bible, the more all-inclusive we find stewardship is.

The most concise statement in the Bible about stewardship is I Corinthians 4:2:

**Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.**

Paul wrote these words to the church at Corinth in defense of his entire ministry. He wanted them to realize he was compelled by his calling to preach and teach the word of God. He had to be faithful.

At the root of his compelling commitment were two principles of stewardship that Paul understood deeply and powerfully. We need to learn those principles and apply them to our lives.

### **We Are All Accountable to God**

The first of these two principles is that we are all accountable to God. The word **faithful** in our text verse means to follow through with a commitment. God expected Paul to follow

through on his trust. And Paul's use of the word **required** shows he didn't regard faithfulness as something he could take or leave. He would answer to God for it.

The word which sums up this required faithfulness is *accountability*. In the Bible, accountability is not limited to a few things or a brief time. It is sweeping and eternal:

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

In Jesus' parable of the talents (Mt. 25: 14-30), the master who gave his servants money to invest eventually came back to take full charge of His "kingdom," and called his servants to give an account. One by one they had to report on their management of his wealth. Some had done very well. One had done nothing at all profitable to the master.

It is almost universally believed that man will either pay for, or be rewarded for, his life someday. The sense of our accountability is written on our consciences, and is difficult for us to ignore. Paul stated this principle directly in Romans 14:12: **So, then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.**

Accountability isn't just bad news, but good news. Don't forget those in Jesus' parable who used their master's wealth wisely were rewarded. Jesus promised in Luke 18:29ff that everyone who follows Him faithfully, even at the loss of things he loves, will be rewarded "many times as much in this age and, in the age to come eternal life."

In Frank Capra's classic film, *It's a Wonderful Life*, the turning point in the life of George Bailey begins when Bailey Building and Loan comes up \$8,000 short, just as the bank examiner arrives to inspect the books. Nobody has stolen anything, but George can only see himself going to jail, and it drives him to go out to the bridge to jump off, hoping that his life insurance will be enough to pay off the debt.

The conviction of accountability can be sobering. It can change the way we live. This was the profound sense of accountability, or answerability, that Paul had about his life.

The greatest sense of demand Paul felt on his life had to do with his ministry. It was fitting he felt this way, because there is

The words translated "it is required" are one word in Greek, *zhteitai*, which means "it is sought." In other words, faithfulness or dependability was a qualification sought in someone who was to become a house manager. If one without this qualification was set in charge, the house would be managed improperly, and money would be lost or wasted. Thus, "sought" has the virtual meaning of "required."

<sup>2</sup> The words "secret things" in the NIV, "mysteries" in the King James, translate *musthriwn* in the Greek. This is a word indicating the formal theological concept of a thing hidden at one time but now revealed. Paul used it to refer to the entire gospel message, which Christ embodied and the Holy Spirit revealed in His coming at Pentecost. The gospel message takes in the entire scope of the ministry of Christ. His being as the Son of Man and Son of God, His death as a substitute for us, His payment for sins, His resurrection from the dead to conquer death and bring the power of life to man, and the means of our receiving the grace this forgiveness and salvation, namely, faith. Following that, every grace God delivers into the Christian's life is received by the same method of faith, and is part of that mystery.

Though the gospel is encapsulated in prophetic form in the Old Testament, it was largely hidden until the time for the Christ to be revealed — thus, the mystery.

Lenshi says this mystery is "God's gifts for our salvation as embodied in the gospel. These are mysteries, for man's wisdom knows nothing about them" (*The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, Augsburg Publishing House, 1963, p. 162). He takes "Mystery" more in the sense of "mystical," or beyond our comprehension except through the deep communication of God's Spirit to our spirits.

Grosheide says these mysteries are "all that God has revealed in Jesus Christ, the treasures of His grace. The work of Christ stands at the center." (*Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Eerdmans, 1972, p.99).

to be learned, and practiced, in the face of obstacles or contrary current.

One of the best ways to start a conversation that may lead to explaining the gospel is simply to share your personal testimony. It's your own story about knowing Christ. It contains three elements: **1. My life before Jesus Christ, 2. How I came to know Christ, 3. My life since I met Jesus.**

There is nothing like a personal testimony. You aren't just reporting the good news: you have experienced the good news.

Sharing the good news is such an urgent matter! Most people assume they will have lifetimes of an average length — about 75 years these days. Every day people die “unexpectedly.” A crusade was sponsored a few years back. There were many decisions for Christ. One who gave her life to Christ was a freshman in college. That night as she left the crusade meeting she told friends, “If I were to die tomorrow I know I would go to heaven.” Headed home that evening, she was involved in a head-on collision and was killed. Less than 24 hours after she gave her life to Christ, she met Him face to face.

Not only are you uncertain of your own life span, but your friends and neighbors have equally as little knowledge of how long their lives on earth will last. Do they know Christ? Have you been a good steward of the gospel toward them?

Churches appreciate the worthy and generous offerings of all their members. What comes into the offering plate is important. Sharing what's in our wallets does not relieve you or me of the responsibility to share what's in our hearts. People you know, to whom perhaps God has planned for you to be the chief witness of His love and salvation, need for you to share Christ with them. You are a steward of the gospel. And the Bible Says:

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

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<sup>1</sup> The NIV's phrase “those who have been given a trust” translates a single work in Greek, *oikonomoj* (*oikonomois*). This word literally means “house master,” and is usually translated with the single word “steward.” The steward was often a bondservant.

another principle of stewardship which places emphasis on what ministry should be about.

### **The Kingdom Comes First**

The principle is the kingdom of God comes first. What Paul said about being required to be found faithful, was specifically about the ministry he described as “**the secret things of God.**” These secret things were embodied in the gospel of the kingdom of God. In other words, there was a kingdom priority about his life and calling.

Paul was putting into practice what Jesus taught us:

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

Since the kingdom is the priority of the *entire church*, it is the most important purpose for which we give offerings.

The Old Testament teaches us offerings are to be brought to God's house for the work of ministry. Even in those days, ministry included benevolence and outreach.

*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 are dozens of verses in the Old and New Testament which teach this principle of the kingdom's priority, even for Israel. As well, the Old Testament lays the foundation for the purpose of godly giving: the work of the house of the Lord. Many people today like to believe it doesn't matter where their gifts go, so long as they give something somewhere for something good. Not so! Such passages as Deuteronomy 12 and Malachi 3:10 make clear the house of God was the proper recipient of the offerings of God's people. There is mission and ministry to be done by the church!

The giving of good stewards goes to support the work of the gospel. God doesn't need greenbacks, but God's people need them if they are to take the gospel to the world in a network of economies that operate on money.

We are accountable, and there is a kingdom priority about

our lives and our giving. That leads to a necessary conclusion: We must share the gospel.

### Sharing the Gospel

The church must share the gospel. The church is you. Therefore you must share the gospel. This was Paul's most direct meaning in saying stewards must be found faithful.

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

Paul felt this demanding obligation to preach "the secret things of God" (I Cor. 4:1). He later wrote, "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (I Cor. 9:16). Why is it so important to share Christ?

### We Are Keepers of the Keys

First, we are keepers of the keys. In Matthew 16:19 Jesus said, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." *Christ has given us the keys to the kingdom.* We are stewards of the gospel which opens heaven's doors to repentant sinners.

Evangelism is a personal work. Somewhere along the way, some keeper of the gospel key must let another person into fellowship with God by telling him how he may receive Christ.

Paul was convinced that he was a keeper of the keys. He did not believe he was alone in this responsibility. He said to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2, "The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others." God's plan is "Each one teach one, each one win one." Outreach, ministry, evangelism, bringing people under the sound of the gospel, leading people to Christ, are every Christian's responsibility. Every Christian is to share the gospel of Christ on some level as God gives opportunity.

We do not have the final or absolute power over heaven's occupants, but God has made us responsible for sharing what we have, and what we have in Jesus, the Savior of mankind.

### We are Trustees of the Treasure

Not only are we keepers of the keys, but we are trustees of the treasure. The treasure is the gospel, the good news that people may go to heaven if they receive Jesus Christ as Lord. In 2 Corinthians 4:6-7, the Bible says:

- 6 **For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.**
- 7 **But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.**

The treasure is "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." It is knowing God by coming to know Jesus Christ, God the Son. This is what salvation means: knowing God. We possess this saving knowledge in ourselves, our very human selves, our clay pots, our earthen vessels. God has chosen to put this knowledge in us, and to use us, clay pots though we are, as His only means of spreading the news of salvation. We are to direct humanity to Christ by glorifying Him, testifying to Him and worshipping Him. We are trustees of the treasure.

Through these and many other scriptures, the Holy Spirit is teaching us to develop the discipline of sharing our faith. In its simplest form, witnessing is not difficult. It's just sharing what we know and whom we know.

Satan tries to make it difficult. Whenever he or one of his cohorts in celestial crime hear one of us trying to share our faith, they come running and throw objections, doubts, and distractions into the conversation. They tempt old wounds to be opened, remind people of their belief that they don't need help, or suggest to them they are too bad to be forgiven. They will accuse you, yourself of hypocrisy, remind you of your sins, try to confuse you, discourage you, or make you afraid of rejection. Satan does not want you to witness, but God does. Whom will you obey?

This is why sharing your faith is a discipline. It is something