

# Show-Me Your Obedience

## 1 Corinthians 4:2

In 2003 an investment company in South Carolina unexpectedly closed, informing investors by a note on its locked doors that it could not provide them with any more funds. Bewildered and angry people, some of whom had placed their entire savings in the company, soon learned that the parent company had filed for bankruptcy. Shortly afterward, charges of mismanagement flew, lawsuits were filed, and eventually charges were brought against various persons for securities fraud. A subsequent investigation found that some executives for the investment company lived extravagantly while clients' money was slowly being lost.

More than 7,500 investors lost \$275 million due to the failure of the company to manage what was entrusted to it. Many of the investors were senior citizens whose retirement funds are now gone.

Stories like this are not entirely rare. Every time a new tale of trust, mismanagement, and loss emerges, people who are hurt by these scandals ask why. In spite of what we know about human nature, most of us still find it difficult to understand how people can be so cruel and greedy. What goes on in the minds of people who betray the trust of others? How do they live with themselves when they mismanage and lose resources belonging to trusting people?

What such thieves do on a grand scale, however, is only an enlargement of a much more common attitude. How many people are profoundly aware of the fact that every human being is the steward of God's investments in us? In fact, most people do not have even a general concept of their stewardship of God's possessions.

Christians in particular should be strongly convinced that God has placed in our lives a variety of resources that He expects to be managed by us for His glory. Sermons and Sunday School lessons on giving, tithing, benevolence and commitment in general will be only minimally effective until Christians come to believe deeply that they not only live on borrowed time, but they live with borrowed possessions and wealth.

Paul the apostle taught churches everywhere that Christians are steward managers of what God lends us. In I Corinthians 4:2, Paul stated a simple truth about stewardship that is foundational for all of life.

## **It is Required in Stewards that a Man be Found Faithful**

*(Summary of verses)*

In this verse, Paul emphasized his responsibility as an apostle by referring to the general truth that a steward was required to be trustworthy in his management. By inspiring Paul to repeat that common wisdom, the Holy Spirit presented us with a principle by which He expects us to live all of life.

*(Thesis of this message)*

The principle is this - all Christians are stewards of all the blessings God gives them, and God expects us to obey Him in managing His blessings for His glory.

*(Goal of this message)*

Because it is vital not only for the ministry of this church but for your own fulfillment, every Christian should confess this truth and make this decision: I am a steward of everything God gives me, and I will obey God in my stewardship of His blessings in my life.

God wants more than lip service in a worship service; God wants life service. As He does everywhere in scripture, God challenges us to do more than speak our love, sing His praise, or say memory verses. God says, "Show me your obedience."

## **Be Good Stewards of the Gospel**

Among the gifts that every Christian has and that represent a great investment of God in our lives is the gospel. God expects us to show Him our obedience by being good stewards of the gospel.

When Paul repeated the general principle that stewards are required to be faithful, it was because he had just called himself a steward of the *mysteries of God* (one of his phrases for the newly revealed plan of salvation, the gospel of Jesus Christ). Paul was called to be an apostle, a role only a few persons in Christian history performed. Many others have been called by God to enter full-time Christian service in a variety of ways. But when Jesus gave His disciples the Great Commission, He was most certainly speaking to all His followers. All Christians are given the precious message of salvation, and all of us are expected to pass it on to others in some way.

Some of us are gifted speakers. Some of us have many friends and contacts that represent opportunities to share Christ. All of us have the ability to cooperate with others in sending missionaries and supporting our church's plan of evangelism. Most of us could do much more to advance the gospel of Christ.

Mercedes Benz once advertised its shock-absorbing car body by crashing one into a concrete wall and showing how people's lives were saved. Then a company executive explained that while Mercedes developed the technology, they allowed it to

be used freely by any car maker. He said, "Some things are too important not to share."

We have it, and the rest of the world needs it - the gospel of eternal salvation. If you had the cure for cancer, would you stay silent? Neither should any of us hoard the gospel, simply enjoying salvation for ourselves while not passing it on to others. We are stewards of the good news of the cross and the empty tomb. God wants us to obey our Lord Jesus by making disciples.

### **Be Good Stewards of Money**

One very important way that we can exercise good stewardship of the gospel is by supporting missions through our church. This brings up what most of us think of when we hear the word *stewardship* - *money*. God wants us to show our obedience by being good stewards of money.

In Paul's day many households had stewards, or managers, who took care of household affairs. Some stewards saw to the purchase of all food and incidentals, made certain that all chores were done, and even managed money - everything from household expense accounts to the investment of large sums.

Jesus told a parable in Luke 16:1 about a steward who lost his job because he wasted money or goods. Being a steward was a very responsible position. It required the highest ethics and morals, but for those who were faithful and productive there were many rewards.

Most of us are aware of our own need to manage money effectively. We know the supply is not unlimited, and that we therefore need to set priorities. We need to plan how we will pay all our bills, save some money, invest some, and so on. What makes Christian stewardship different is the concept that *God has enabled us to make the money we make, and that we are to manage it all to His glory*, not just for our convenience or benefit.

Christian money management takes in several areas. Wise spending is certainly part of Christian stewardship of money - so is planning for the future, and providing for your family. A godly steward will also demonstrate by his use of money that he is not in love with the things of the world, but with building up treasure in heaven instead. And the Christian who manages his money for God's glory will be committed to generous and even sacrificial giving for the purpose of furthering the cause of Christ.

Review your monetary giving through your church. Does your giving demonstrate

obedience to God with your money? Are you generous with the Lord's work? Do you budget money to be used in ministry to others?

Children need to learn to manage money, to give to God through the church, and to be generous with others, so their instincts will be guided toward the right. Adults need to learn the disciplines of proportionate giving, the godly use of income, and planned and deliberate support of missions. Godly stewardship means learning and obeying. Show God your obedience in your management of money by biblical principles.

### **Be Good Stewards of Every Resource**

Money is what most people think you're talking about when the subject of stewardship comes up, but it's only the beginning. Biblical stewardship includes everything you are, everything you have, and everything you do. That's your whole life, isn't it? God wants us to show Him our obedience by our being good stewards of every resource.

Paul stated the truth, "It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful," in a very general way. He made a Christian motto out of this well known fact. In doing so, he reflected the witness of the whole Bible to the truth that we are stewards of everything we have anything to do with.

1 Peter 4:10 is a wonderful summary of this total-life stewardship. Peter wrote: "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." The term "manifold grace" describes everything God has given us. We Christians are stewards of everything touching our lives. That means our time, our friendships, our influence, our opportunities, our abilities, our talents, our possessions, our heritage---everything tangible and intangible.

In the modern classic children's story, *The Giving Tree*, by Shel Silverstein, a little boy grows up playing in and around a favorite tree. In this fanciful tale, the tree and the boy, (both as boy and as man) talked to each other. Over time, the tree gave the boy a branch to swing on, apples to sell, branches to build with, and finally its trunk to make a boat to sail away. When both were old, the man returned, and the tree offered all that was left, its stump, to sit on. *The Giving Tree* has been used to illustrate truth on many levels. But notice the way the tree offered everything it had to be useful to someone else. It didn't restrict its giving to the apples on one branch, or to the use of only one or two of its limbs. It lent, gave, and sacrificed with everything it had.

Biblical stewardship is more than putting an offering envelope in a collection plate, even if it contains a tithe or more of your income. Biblical stewardship is about giving God everything you are, have, and can do, managing it all to his glory.

John Hayes' biography of author James Michener tells how a minister approached him about helping a family. Their daughter had been injured and medical bills were overwhelming. Michener reached for his checkbook, but the minister asked him to do more, to write a story inspiring others to give. At first, Michener declined because of lack of time; but finally he agreed. Overnight he wrote a story that was subsequently published in the local newspaper. The effort succeeded in raising thousands of dollars for the family in need.

Putting something in the offering plate, even something significant, may be the cheapest way of giving, and even the least effective way. God has given us unique lives with unique abilities and opportunities. No one can do what you do exactly as you can do it for the Lord. Biblical stewardship is all about finding out how God wants to use all you are to serve Him.

So, what can you do? Make a commitment today; surrender your entire life to God's control. Tell the Lord, "My life I give, henceforth to live, O Christ for thee alone." Commit to God your voice, your mind, your time, your abilities, your occupation, your relationships, your conversations, your expenditures, your priorities - *everything*. Make Christ Lord of it all. The Holy Spirit speaks to all our hearts today and says:

Do more than say you love Me;  
Do more than sing my praise:  
Show me with obedience;  
Show me all your days.

*Robert Simms*

After 9/11, Americans began to hear, far more than ever before, "God bless America." In response, someone created a bumper sticker saying, "God has already blessed America - America, bless God!" The Psalmist wrote, "Bless the Lord, O my soul!"

Donald Grey Barnhouse illustrated what blessing the Lord means. He said to think of a child giving a gift to his father at Christmas. You pay for the Christmas presents your children give you. The gifts ultimately came from you, but they were a blessing

because they came back with your children's love.

Here is a picture of biblical stewardship: Giving back what God gave us, by obeying Him in love. Most of the world's people take what God gives, never acknowledges He gave it, and uses it to please them. Christian stewards know everything comes from God, and they *show* God their obedience by managing the gospel, their money, and everything in their lives in such a way as to bless God.