



**“He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much,” Luke 16:10.**

## **Christian Stewardship**

**Lesson Aim:** To see that the Christian in every area of his life is answerable to Christ for use or misuse of those assets, whether material or spiritual, which God has given him.

**L515. Date:** May 1964. **Text:** Romans 12:6-18; I Corinthians 4:1-5.

**Topic:** Stewardship.

INTRODUCTION — A “steward” is one who acts as supervisor or administrator of that which belongs to another. “Stewardship” refers to one's position and duties as manager of the affairs put under his control. “Christian stewardship” refers to the duties of the Christian believer which evolve upon him as a consequence of his relationship to Jesus Christ.

The idea that man is a steward of God in his relation to the world and his own life is inherent in the creation story (Genesis 1-3) in that man is appointed lord of all things except himself. In the New Testament the word refers to the administration of the gifts of God. In I Peter 4:10 stewardship is broadened to include all Christians and all the gracious gifts of God. Fred L. Fisher has written, “The modern emphasis on the stewardship of possessions, while true, may tend to obscure the fact that the Christian's primary stewardship is that of the gospel and includes the use of his whole life as well as his money.”

Every Christian has some things entrusted to him as a stewardship of God. He has time, talents, attitudes, and at least a small bit of financial resources. He is responsible to God for how he uses each single thing. The study of “Christian Stewardship” is most important because the Christian is answerable to Christ for use or misuse of those assets, whether material or spiritual, which God has given him.

## EXPOSITION

### I. STEWARDSHIP OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS, Romans 12:6-8.

1. Spiritual gifts show unity in diversity, verses 4-5. Whatever talents, time, or resources we have, they have come to us as a gift of God. Not all people have the same gifts or the same amount of gifts. Paul uses a favorite analogy—the human body—to demonstrate this truth. He observes that while no one has all gifts, each one has some gift. Moreover, each gift is essential to the welfare of the body. As the whole body needs the gifts of sight, hearing, taste, touch, smell, etc., so the church needs the varying gifts which each of her members possesses. Every man should enjoy the privilege of serving God in the capacity which God has given him. We all have a particular area in which we are qualified to serve. The kingdom never prospers when we try to get outside the sphere where we belong. Although we do not all have the same gift, we can be sure that each gift contributes its part to the harmonious progress of the work of our Lord. No one can say his gift is unimportant—that he is not needed in the ministry of the church, I Corinthians 12:15-25. Stewardship responsibilities are given that they might be used so as to be blessings to others. Whatever one's particular talent, it is given by the Spirit. With deep humility it should be used in accordance with God's purpose.

2. Spiritual gifts are many and varied, verses 6-8. Seven gifts are here enumerated as being conferred by the Holy Spirit: prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, ruling, and showing mercy. Each one is to be performed “according to the proportion of faith,” which probably means one's own faith in God. The gifts are divided commonly into two types: official and general. The official gifts are those belonging to an office in the church. The general gifts are those exercised by Christians in general.

(1) There are four official gifts. **“Prophecy”** is first and most important. It is comparable to the present day term “preaching,” meaning the inspired declaration of the will of God. Prophecy means to “forth-tell” and not necessarily to “fore-tell.” It is primarily proclamation, not prediction, in the New Testament terminology. Hodge defines it thus: “an immediate occasional inspiration, leading the recipient to deliver, as the mouth of God, the particular communication which he had received, whether designed for instruction, exhortation, or comfort.”

**“Ministry”** is simply “serving.” It is the name given to the deacon's office in Philippians 1:1 and I Timothy 3:8, 12. In fact, the Greek word for “deacon” is **diakonos** and is properly translated “one who serves,”

“minister,” “one who executes the commands of another.” The brethren chosen in Acts (whom we call “deacons”) were referred to as **diakonous** because they were “those who serve.” Paul uses this same word in writing, “by love serve one another,” Galatians 5:13.

“**Teaching**” involves the imparting of truth. This may be in sermon, class instruction, or private counsel. Some are left in the world with a particular ability to instruct others.

“**Exhortation**” is that ministry which appeals to others to respond to the truth of God set out by teaching. It is especially seen in the modern practice of “giving the invitation.” It is seen in Peter's sermon on Pentecost when he preached, “**And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation,**” Acts 2:41.

(2) There are three general gifts. These are giving, ruling, and showing mercy. “Giving” is to be done with liberality. One is to freely communicate of his own possessions for the good of the Christian community, being all the while inspired and motivated by love, I Corinthians 13:3. “Ruling” refers to administrative responsibility. This ministry is essential to the welfare of the church, though not so inspirational as preaching or teaching. “Showing mercy” refers to that ministry of love and forgiveness which a Christian is often called upon to perform. It is to be done without grudging, but with actual “cheerfulness” (hilarity). Godet points out this means one goes with “joyful eagerness, amiable grace, the affability going the length of gaiety, which makes the visitor, whether man or woman, a sunbeam penetrating into the sick-chamber and to the heart of the afflicted.” In all these areas of service the Christian is to be absorbed in the task assigned. He is to know his ability is conferred by a gift of the Holy Spirit and faithfully abide therein to the glory of God.

## **II. STEWARDSHIP OF SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS, Romans 12:9-18.**

Christian stewardship involves the totality of one's life. When God calls upon His children to “give an account of thy stewardship,” He will be interested in more than just tithes and offerings of our financial resources.

1. Stewardship of emotion: love, verses 9-10. The Christian steward is responsible for his emotions. Love is to be sincere and without hypocrisy. Pretended love will bring ultimate injury to self, the brother, and the church. Pretended love is actual hypocrisy before God. Indeed, pure love is so sensitive that it will cleave (“stay glued”) to that which is good. Again, pure love will have the power to abhor (“detest”) that which is evil, I Thessalonians 5:22. The love which holds to the good and detests the evil

will manifest itself in kind attitudes and deeds toward one's brethren, always giving honour to them and considering their welfare before its own. It is no wonder that the pagans were perplexed by the love of Christians for one another. Such a holy love finds its origin only in God, Romans 5:5, The Christian will account to God, as a steward, for his emotional life. What do you love today?

2. Stewardship of service, verse 11. Laziness has no business in the Christian's life. One's duties are to be performed "as unto the Lord." Luther interprets this passage, "Be not lazy as to what you ought to do." The Old Testament says it, **"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might,"** Ecclesiastes 9:10. To be "fervent in spirit" is to be warm-hearted, to boil in spiritual interests. Coldness in spiritual things is an inexcusable sin which is hateful to God, Revelation 3:15. All service is to be rendered as if we were "serving the Lord." Whether one's work is sacred or secular, the Christian must be marked by sincerity and zeal. He must account to God for what he does. **"And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him,"** Colossians 3:17.

3. Stewardship of attitude, verse 12. The Christian's attitude should be marked by joy, hope, and prayer. To walk by faith rather than by sight is the secret of this kind of life. The same hope which causes joy is intended to guarantee patience. Prayer enables one to rise above present circumstances and so inspires both joy and hope. The American Commentary suggests, "In the first clause, the adjunct expresses the **ground** of the rejoicing (thus, "in virtue of hope, be joyful"); in the second, the state in which the patience is to be exercised ("amid tribulation, be steadfast"); and in the third, the **habit** to which the instance or tireless perseverance is to be applied ("In prayer, earnestly persevering").

4. Stewardship of possessions, verse 13. "Hospitality" includes more than entertainment of one's personal friends. It includes the loving care of strangers as well. (Remember the parable of the Good Samaritan?) Their necessities are to be shared as if they were our own. **"Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"** I John 3:16. God will hold each believer responsible for what he does with his finances.

5. Stewardship under opposition, verses 14, 17a. Jesus pronounced a blessing upon those who are persecuted, reviled, and opposed for righteousness sake, Matthew 5:10-11. This passage calls for a blessing to be pronounced upon the oppressor! Sir Matthew Hale once said, "Though it is

manly to punish, it is God-like to forgive.” Man can only curse (announce judgment) as God authorizes him to do so. Again, Christians will account to God for their reaction to trouble and opposition. Only the mature Christian will keep straight on the mark without bitter feelings.

6. Stewardship of sympathy, verse 15. Self-forgetfulness enables a believer to condole (sympathize) and to congratulate. Boise suggests, “The exhortation of this verse is most important in our intercourse with our fellow-men, and implies the fullest human sympathy.” It is easier to weep with others than to rejoice with them. Weeping naturally inclines us to weep but rejoicing in others may cause envy. The Christian is responsible to God to have the spirit of God in his attitude toward others.

7. Stewardship of interest, verse 16a. Have the same concern for others as you do for yourself. This attitude is one of the finest elements of the Christian character. In lowliness of mind each is to esteem others better than himself, Philippians 2:3. Such honest concern will produce deeds comparable to it.

8. Stewardship of humility, verse 16b. No task in Jesus' name is too lowly for the Christian. The verse calls, therefore, for each one to permit himself to be “drawn away with lowly things.” This is a most searching test of true spirituality. No caste distinctions can exist among true Christians. Self-conceit is to be done away and true humility is to mark each believer. **“God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble . . . Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up,”** James 4:6b, 10.

9. Stewardship of influence, verse 17b. All Christian conduct is to be “honest” (honorable). The word “honest” also means “beautiful, attractive,” and suggests the Christian's life (influence) should be appealing to those who know him. “It is a happy thing when worldly men are constrained to say of a Christian that Tertullian makes a heathen say of a Christian in his time, 'He is an excellent man, that Caius Servius, only he is a Christian'.” — John Brown. A beautiful Christian life is of great influence. This, too, is a stewardship from God.

10. Stewardship of peace, verse 18. “Be at peace with all men if they will let you.” Sometimes being a Christian is a point of strife. The believer is to be careful that he is not bitter and censorious in his stand for the truth. He is to stand for the truth and, if men will permit it, he is to live at peace with men. Truth must never be surrendered for the sake of harmony, however. That is why the Scriptures say, **“If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.”** The point is, “Don't be a trouble maker. Encourage peace on the terms of the Gospel.”

11. Stewardship of vengeance, verses 19- 20. Vengeance belongs to God not man. Do not interfere with the divine prerogative by taking vengeance into your own hands. Entrust your cause to God. If wrath comes rushing to you, make room for it by standing aside and letting it pass. **“For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God,”** James 1:20. Instead, be kind to your enemy that he might be turned from his evil ways. The best kind of revenge is the “coals of fire” which melts the ore in the furnace to produce the purified metal. In conclusion, Paul adds, **“Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good,”** verse 21. In all one's social relationships he must learn to love, bless, do good, and pray, for thereby he will be identified as a child of God, Matthew 5:44-45. According to this standard he must answer to God in judgment.

### III. STEWARDSHIP'S MOTIVATIONS, I Corinthians 4:1-5.

1. Faithful stewardship is motivated by a sense of obligation to Christ Jesus, verse 1a. Paul speaks of all Christian workers as “ministers” of Christ. The word is often used to refer to “under-rowers” referring to those who sat on the bottom tier of the three-tiered ships of that day and pulled the oars to move the ship. The oars-men had to move according to the command of their captain who called the rapidity of the pulls. Just so, Paul declared his obligation to faithful obedience to Jesus, his Master. He delighted to refer to himself as a bonds slave of Jesus Christ.

This is why each man must be faithful as a steward: He is under the orders of Jesus! His life is dedicated to serve the Lord Jesus. His life is a trust which is given him that he might share the mysteries of God and the good news that God has come to earth in Jesus. Therefore, the believer does not belong to himself. He is not the servant of men. He belongs solely to God and is accountable to Him alone.

2. Faithful stewardship is motivated by the stewardship of the mysteries of God, verse 1b. The mystery which God revealed through Paul was that both Jew and Gentile would be reconciled to God through the death of His Son, Jesus Christ. This was good news the world must hear. A reward waited for him who preached it gladly and a judgment waited for him who neglected it, I Corinthians 9:17. The “mystery” was a matter of great value and it must in no wise be neglected. What a great honor lies in superintending God's affairs here upon earth as they relate to salvation and the church. What humility and careful stewardship this demands.

3. Faithful stewardship is motivated by the certainty of approaching judgment, verses 2-5. A basic requirement for a steward is that he be faithful

—honest, trustworthy, dependable. Moreover, as a steward of God, each man is accountable to God. The judgments of men are strictly secondary. Whether they accuse or applaud does not relieve one before God. One day the God who knows all hearts, desires, every thought, and motive will come. He will then reveal the hidden motives. Blessed is the man who will get the approval of God on that day. **“So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God,”** Romans 14:12.

CONCLUSION—Look back over the things discussed in today's study. Consider that each one who reads must account to God for each of them—spiritual gifts and social relationships. Each of us is a steward of our gifts, our emotions, our service, our attitude, our possessions, etc. We must all account to God for what we do with what we are and what we have. How will it fare with you when God calls you, “Give an account of your stewardship”? Make sure you are in the will of the Lord, right now!

### QUESTIONS

1. What does “steward” and “stewardship” mean?
2. Who confers spiritual gifts upon men?
3. What are the two types of spiritual gifts and which gifts are in each?
4. How is “prophecy” related to “preaching”?
5. In what sense is one's emotion a stewardship from God?
6. How is one's service a stewardship?
7. How can one be a good steward of his possessions?
8. How can one exercise the stewardship of influence?
9. What can you do to become a better steward?
10. What are the motivations to good Christian stewardship?