

THE MEANING OF STEWARDSHIP

2 Corinthians 8:1-5

Introduction: The word "steward" means an officer or employee in a family or on an estate. His/her task is to manage the domestic concerns, supervise the servants and the children, collect income, keep accounts and so on. The original English word for "steward" means a guard or guardian and the word carries with it the understanding of faithfulness, responsibility, honor and trust. A Christian is a steward of the Gospel, a steward of Jesus Christ, one who is faithful to Jesus Christ and who carries the responsibility of spreading the Gospel. If you are a Christian, then you have a tremendous responsibility.

You ask, "how do I go about being a good steward?" In our text lies the answer. Paul is writing to the Corinthian Church telling them of an unusual incident which happened at Macedonia. Paul had gone there and they took an offering for others who were in trouble. They were poor people, yet they gave more than they could afford. How? Why? Why did they sacrifice and give far beyond their ability? Because they had given themselves to the Lord first.

I. THE SECRET TO STEWARDSHIP

1. Many church members don't want the pastor to speak about stewardship for they haven't given themselves to the Lord.
 - This is why Baptist institutions seek financial aid from their churches.
2. This is why Children's homes have to make an annual plea for financial aid.
3. It is empty to say "I love my children" and do nothing for them.
 - It is no use to say "I love my neighbor" and refuse to help him/her.
 - There is no use for us to say "I love my country" and continually drift along taking every thing for granted.
 - There is no use to say "I love my Church" and refuse to support it with our tithes and attendance.
 - There is no use to say "I love God" and refuse to show any love back in return.
 - No wonder we get irritated when the Pastor starts talking about giving. We haven't really given ourselves to the Lord.
4. The Macedonians had given themselves to the Lord first before they had tried to help anyone. This is the secret of a good, happy, successful Christian life.
 - Jesus asked Peter three times, "*...lovest thou me?*" Three times Peter answered "*I do...*" Then the Lord allowed Peter to feed His sheep.
5. In order for one to be a good steward, he/she must know where to start.
 - The wise men came to the Christ child with gifts, but first they bowed down and worshiped Him, then they offered their gifts.
 - The giving of self must come first, not second, third or last, but **FIRST**.

- A successful marriage does not depend upon plans, rules, or gifts. It depends upon the mutual giving of each other FIRST. If the husband hasn't been completely honest with his wife, and vice-versa, the marriage will no doubt be a failure.
6. The main purpose in Stewardship is not increasing the budget as most think. The main mission of a Church is not having great crowds or offerings. The main mission of the Church is to win the lost to Jesus. Jesus wants our selves FIRST and above all else.
 7. The Macedonians were happy givers. A good steward who has given him/herself first to the Lord will not be constantly griping about having to give first to this thing and then to that.
 - Why do we like Christmas so much? It is a season of GIVING. Everyone is happy during that time, so what does that tell you? If we spent our time giving instead of wanting, we could be so much happier.
 - Christianity should be as happy as Christmas because one can give all of his/her Christian life and not just at a particular time of the year. Give yourself to the Lord first and you will be a cheerful giver.

II. GIVING YOURSELF TO GOD MEANS GIVING ALL

Remember the widow who gave two mites (1/2 cent each or total of 1 penny)? It was ALL she had. It was enough to buy a bit of food which she needed badly but she gave it to God because she loved Him and because she had given herself to God first.

- You can be a good steward and give a glass of water, IF it is the best you can do.
1. Giving yourself to God means giving your body therefore take care of yourself, don't subject your body to habits or circumstances which would hinder your service to God.
 2. You give your mind to God when you give completely. Avoid reading and watching things which would be degrading to a servant/steward of Jesus Christ and read the Bible daily.
 3. When you have given everything, you will have given your SOUL to God.
 - Your soul is eternal therefore it must be fed spiritual food which can come only from above.
 - Read your Bible and pray regularly.
 - You are a trustee of your soul and only you can decide where your soul will spend eternity.
 - Think of the danger of being lost forever, doomed to Hell.
 - Stewardship means giving yourself, your very soul to God. Paul said, *"I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day..."*

III. BEING A STEWARD MEANS YOU LOVE

1. Love has done odd things. It has changed a worthless drunkard into a hard-working, faithful husband and loving father. It has changed a temperamental, giddy, gadd about girl into a beautiful, sweet, sensible, loving wife and mother. It changed Saul from persecuting and threatening the Christians into Paul, the great Christian Apostle.

2. The way to good stewardship is not to first make a lot of promises and pledges, not to draw up a lot of laws and resolutions, but to give yourself completely to Jesus Christ FIRST. Love will do the rest.
3. Jesus said, "*It is more blessed to give than to receive...*" Why? Because when we give, we will always get something in return, something better than what we gave. If we give love, joy or truth, we will be rewarded with the same and if we do give these things, how can we ever really lose them?

CONCLUSION:

1. You cannot be a good steward and not give yourself to Jesus Christ FIRST.
2. You cannot be a happy Christian and not give yourself to Jesus Christ FIRST.
3. You cannot be a joyful giver and not give yourself to Jesus Christ FIRST.
4. You cannot be a soul-winning Christian and not give yourself to Jesus Christ FIRST.
5. You cannot have peace of mind and not give yourself to Jesus Christ FIRST.
6. You cannot have salvation and not give yourself to Jesus Christ FIRST.
7. The secret to being a steward of Jesus Christ and His Church is to give yourself to Jesus Christ FIRST.