

Overview of Biblical Stewardship

Saugus Bible Readings
June, 2011

1. A steward is a servant, freedman, or employee entrusted with managing his master's household, property, and affairs. The steward himself never owns what he manages. He is motivated not by a stake in ownership, but by devotion to the owner and gratitude for the privilege (especially with a freedman). See Lk 12:42-48.
2. Originally, the Greek word *oikonomia* (stewardship) meant the management (*nomos*, law) of a household (*oikos*, house) by a trusted servant. Our term *economics* is borrowed from this word. (See Lk 12:42; 16:1, 2, 3, 8; 1 Cr 4:2; Gl 4:2; Rm 16:23. An OT use in LXX is Ps 112:5.)
 - a. *oikonomia* (8x): Lk 16:2, 3, 4; 1 Cr 9:17; Ep 1:10; 3:2; Cl 1:25; 1 Tm 1:4.
 - b. *oikonomos* (10x): Lk 12:42; 16:1, 3, 8; Rm 16:23; 1 Cr 4:1-2; Gl 4:2; Tt 1:7; 1 Pt 4:10.
 - c. Related terms: *slave* (*doulos*) emphasizes the Lord's authority; *servant* (*diakonos*) the worker's industry; *steward* (*oikonomos*) the servant's responsibility. *Steward* is often equivalent to *guardian* (Mt 20:8; Lk 8:3).
3. The key quality in stewardship is *faithfulness*: "Moreover it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful" (1 Cr 4:2). See Lk 16:10-12. Related concepts: dedication, loyalty, commitment, responsibility, integrity, initiative, industry, self-denial.
4. We are doubly owned by God and thus doubly stewards. Ownership results from either creation or purchase—and God is both our Creator and Redeemer (Ps 19:4; 78:35; Is 44:6; 47:4). We have been bought at a great price (Mt 13:44-46; 1 Cr 6:18-20; 1 Cr 7:22-23; 2 Pt 2:1). We belong to Christ (Mr 9:41; Ac 27:23-24; Rm 1:5-6; 7:4; 1 Cr 15:23; Gl 5:22-24).
5. Examples of Biblical Stewards:
 - a. Joseph was faithful "in little" while a steward in the Potiphar's house (Gn 39:2-12) and in prison (Gn 39:20-23), so God made him faithful "in much" as steward of the entire realm of Egypt (Gn 41:33-43).
 - b. The Levites (the sons of Kohath, Gershon, and Merari) guarded and maintained the tabernacle (Nm 1:53; 3:5-8, 25-26, 29-31, 36-37).
 - c. Doorkeepers guarded God's House: Solomon's temple (1 Chronicles 15:23-24), Zerubbabel's temple (Nh 12:44-45), and the (future) millennial temple (Ez 40:45-46; 44:10-16).
 - d. Husbandmen stand for the nation of Israel—especially the leaders (Mt 21:33-44; Mr 12:1-11; Lk 20:9-18). Christ's teaching about them applies to all of us.
6. Stewardship Modeled by Christ. Christ is the great example of what stewardship really is. Although He is Master of all, He nonetheless is the perfect Servant, and although He is Owner of all, He is the perfect Steward. He saw every facet of His life as a stewardship: "All things are delivered unto me of my Father" (Mt 11:27).
 - a. His Authority. "Thou hast given Him power [authority] over flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him" (Jh 17:2).
 - b. His Work. "I must be about my Father's business" (Lk 2:49). "Then said I, 'Lo, I come...to do Thy will O God'" (Hb 10:7). "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" (Jh 17:4).
 - c. His Body. "Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, 'Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me'" (Hb 10:5).
 - d. God's Truth. "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world" (Jh 17:6a). "For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me" (8a).

“I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O LORD, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation” (Ps 40:9-10).

- e. His People. “Thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word” (17:6b). “I pray for them; I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me, for they are thine” (v 9).
 - f. His Time. “My hour has not yet come” (Jh 2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 13:1). “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work” (Jh 9:4).
 - g. His Mother. “Then saith he to the disciple, ‘Behold thy mother!’ And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home” (Jh 19:27).
 - h. God’s assessment: “This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mt 3:17).
7. God’s Stewardship of the Ages (Ep 1:10; 3:9). “Dispensations” are Stewardships—God Himself engages in stewardship in the primary sense of managing the affairs of His creation—“framing the ages” (Hb 1:2). To distinguish God’s activity from other stewardships, the KJV uses “dispensation” and ESV “plan” in Ephesians 1:10 and 3:9. The term “dispensation” refers not mainly to a time period, but rather to God’s mode of administration: Innocence (Gn 1-3), Conscience (Gn 3-7), Civil Government (Gn 8-11), Israel under Promise (Gn 12:1-Ex 18:27), Israel under Law (Ex 18:28 through the Tribulation), the Church under Grace (the current parenthesis), the Millennium (Rv 20).
 8. Paul’s Stewardship of NT Mysteries (1 Cr 4:1; Ep 3:2; Cl 1:25). The Lord entrusted Paul with a unique stewardship “to fulfill the word of God” (Cl 1:25). Through Paul, the Lord unfolded “the mystery which has been hidden from the [past] ages and generations”—He completed the earlier stages of truth that He had given in OT times by revealing “the unfathomable riches of Christ” (Ep 3:8). Specifically, Paul revealed the church as the Body of Christ (Cl 1:25), and that the Jews and Gentiles together are fellow members and fellow heirs in the church (Ep 3:6).
 9. Stewardship of the Gospel (1 Cr 4:1-4; 9:16-18; 1 Tm 1:3-5). Paul saw the preaching of the gospel and teaching of the word as a stewardship entrusted to him.
 10. Stewardship of the Local Church. Paul describes the elder as one who must be blameless (Tt 1:7) and faithful (1 Cr 4:2-4). He is accountable to the Lord (Hb 13:17). See Lk 12:42-44.
 11. Financial Stewardship (Mt 6:19-21; Lk 16:13-15; 1 Tm 6:6-11; 2 Tm 3:1-5; Hb 13:5).
 - a. Includes support of the assembly and full-time workers (1 Cr 9:4-14; 1 Cr 16:1-2; Ph 4:15-19).
 - b. Example: David’s financing the temple construction (1 Ch 28:2-6, 11-19; 29:1-5, 11-19; 2 Ch 5:13b-14)
 - c. Example: The Jerusalem assembly’s generous spirit (Ac 2:41-47; 4:31-37).
 12. Stewardship of Truth. God has given us His truth as a stewardship. We receive the truth as a deposit, and God expects us to maintain its integrity and to pass it on without altering it (Dt 11:1; 1 Kn 2:2-4; Lk 11:28; 1 Tm 1:18-20; 3:15-16; 6:20-21; 2 Tm 1:13-14; 2:1-2, 14-15; 4:1; Jd 3).
 13. Stewardship of Gifts and Resources (1 Pt 4:10).
 - a. The Parable of the Talents (Mt 25:14-30).
 - b. The Parable of the Minas (Lk 19:12-27)
 - c. The Parable of the Unjust Steward (Lk 16:1-15).