

8. Understanding How to Be a Faithful Steward

In our last topic, we saw that we are to build on the firm foundation of Christ. We saw that as Christians it should be our desire to build on that foundation the things that will last for eternity and not just be destroyed with the earth like wood, hay and stubble. In order to help our children grow in their understanding of the way that God works in and through their lives, we need to help them understand that they are stewards of everything that the Lord has given them including their time, their spiritual gifts, their abilities and everything else that the Lord has given to them. Today, we will focus in our topic on how to help our physical and spiritual children learn to be faithful stewards.

In 1 Corinthians 4:1-2, we read, “Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.” In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul warned the Corinthians not to follow a particular teacher and claim to be a follower of Paul or Apollos. Here, we see that Paul now tells them how they were to recognize Paul, Apollos or any other teacher. The word that is translated “servants” in this verse means *under rowers*. On the ships in that day, they would often have two or three rows of rowers to help the ships move when there was no wind. The “under rowers” were the slaves who worked on the lowest level rowing these boats. As a result, Paul is saying that he and other teachers were nothing in themselves because everything that they taught had been given to them by Christ. This points out that a key characteristic of a teacher is an attitude of humility.

In addition to an attitude of humility, Paul said that they were stewards of the mysteries of God. A “steward” was a manager of something that belonged to someone else. Joseph gives us an example of a steward as he served in the house of Potiphar. Genesis 39:4 says, “So Joseph found favor in his sight, and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all *that* he had he put under his authority.” Although Joseph was a slave, he was given the responsibility to manage everything in the household of Potiphar. In the same way, Paul said that he and other servants of the Lord, who proclaimed the Word (some of who later helped write the New Testament), had been entrusted with the mysteries of God.

We see that the most important requirement for a steward is that the steward is found faithful. Paul and all of the other New Testament writers had to be faithful to their Master as they wrote what became the New Testament. In the same way, as we now teach the Word of God that was written down, we are also stewards. We see that our most important responsibility is to be faithful to the Lord because He is our Master. Just as Paul and others were faithful as they wrote the Word of God, we are to be faithful and teach the Word of God accurately. As we help our physical and spiritual children develop the ministries the Lord gives them, we want to help them understand that they are also stewards of God and are accountable to Him.

In the case of Paul, we see that he was doing everything as a faithful steward. 1 Corinthians 4:3-5 say, “But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes,

who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.” Paul was not concerned about whether he pleased other people.

However, he was very concerned to make certain that he pleased God as the steward of God. That is why he said it did not matter to him if the Corinthians or a human court tried to judge him. In fact, he said that he did not even judge himself. Instead of judging himself or his own motives for serving the Lord, Paul looked forward to the day when he would be judged by the Lord. Romans 14:10-12 says, “But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: ‘As I live, says the LORD, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.’ So, then each of us shall give account of himself to God.” In the same way, we want our children to look forward to the day when they stand before the Lord.

Paul said that as far as he knew, he did not have any wrong motives as he served the Lord. However, he realized that even though he thought that he had the right motives in his daily service for the Lord, his own thoughts did not really matter. What did matter to Paul was the fact that He would one day have his motives for service judged by the Lord and he wanted to please the Lord in that day. In the same way, we want to help our children realize that it does not matter when people try to judge their motives for serving the Lord. However, it will matter to them a great deal when they stand before the Lord because He is the One who can judge the true motives of their hearts in their service for the Lord.

We see that this is why we should encourage our physical and spiritual children to be faithful stewards of the Lord. Then, they will not spend their time here on this earth trying to judge their own motives for serving the Lord. Instead, they will have peace because they know that the Lord will examine their works and the reasons why they did those works. The Lord will bring their works into the light and examine them in the light. He will reveal the reasons why we served the Lord and reward us accordingly, because He will know the motives of our heart even though others may misunderstand why we do what we do. The key thing we want to help our children understand is the importance of living day-by-day to please the Lord. Then, at the time God rewards us for our works, we will receive our praise from God.

We see that both Paul and Apollos give us examples of what it means to be faithful stewards. In 1 Corinthians 4:6-8, we read, “Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other. For who makes you differ *from another*? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive *it*, why do you boast as if you had not received *it*? You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us--and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you!” Paul and Apollos had been like faithful farmers who had planted and watered the seed of the Word of God. They had been faithful builders in building on Christ as their foundation. Paul and Apollos had been faithful stewards as they carried out of the ministry that the Lord had given to them. They had done all of these things with godly humility.

However, Paul did not want the Corinthians to give either he or Apollos more honor than what the Scriptures said they should be given. Paul summarized the way that he had served the Lord when he said in Acts 20:19, “Serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews.” Peter had shown the same attitude when he went to the house of Cornelius. Acts 10:25-26 says, “As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped *him*. But Peter lifted him up, saying, ‘Stand up; I myself am also a man.’” The apostles showed true humility and did not want to be treated with special honor or worship.

Paul wanted the Corinthians to develop this same attitude of humility. He did not want them to be proud and puffed up in their lives. That is why he told them that they were not to be puffed up one against the other. Paul said that none of them were greater than any other Christian so they should not be preferred above another Christian. He reminded them that every spiritual gift or ability we receive has been given to us by the Lord and we are to be good stewards of what the Lord has placed in our lives. Paul reminded them that if the Lord had placed gifts and abilities in their lives, they were not to boast. They had received all they had from the Lord, so all glory should go to the Lord. We want to model this attitude of humility so our physical and spiritual children also have an example to follow in their own lives.

To help the Corinthians understand, Paul spoke the kind of the false praise they wanted from others to help them realize that such praise means nothing. 1 Corinthians 4:8 says, “You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us--and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you!” They were full, but they were full of pride. They acted like they were very mature spiritually, when in actuality Paul had said in chapter three that they were spiritual toddlers. They were rich, but they measured their success in worldly riches instead of spiritual riches.

They wanted to reign like kings so that they could boast about their power. Christ had spoken to this very attitude when He had answered the request of James and John to sit on his right hand and his left hand in His glory in Mark 10:35-45. He told them in verses 43-45, “Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” Paul did desire for himself and the Corinthians that they would reign with Christ. However, he wanted to reign with Christ as the bondservant of Christ so that Christ would receive all of the glory. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your physical and spiritual children by your example that you also want to reign with Christ as one of His bondservants so that Christ receives all of the glory.