
Stewardship: Its Meaning in Scripture

1 Corinthians 4:1-2; 1 Peter 4:10-11

Introduction We are entering what we call Stewardship Month. As we launch a new ministry year, we want to focus our attention on our responsibility and accountability to God. This month we will be talking about the stewardship of our spiritual gifts, the gospel and our money.

Stewardship is usually thought of in regards to money. This is an important aspect of stewardship, but it is not all that it involves. In fact, Money is just a part, a sphere, a category of stewardship. It is an important aspect and one the New Testament highlights. And yes, we will be talking about money. But it is my aim this morning to set a larger, broader context for stewardship. We will not be considering some aspects. For example, 3 years ago, Michael McDonald helped us think carefully about our stewardship as people who have been bought with a price. This year, we are going to focus on other aspects foundational to stewardship.

The Bible has much to say about stewardship. In the broadest sense, all of our life is a stewardship under God. We are accountable as humans to God, who is the Creator, Owner and Bestower of all. All through the Bible we find God giving responsibilities to people and then holding them accountable for the way they fulfilled that assignment.

Adam was given the responsibility to keep and till the garden and to bring the rest of the earth under his dominion.

Abraham was given the responsibility to enter and mark out the boundaries of the land for the covenant and for his descendents.

Moses was given the responsibility to lead Israel and give the Law.

David was given the responsibility to be the King over Israel and secure the kingdom and its borders.

Isaiah was given the responsibility to prophecy in the midst of spiritual decay and national decline.

These are just a few examples of people who were accountable to God for what they have been given. All that we have in life is from God. We are accountable to God. The word for this in the New Testament is stewardship. What was required of Adam, Abraham, Moses David and Isaiah is *faithfulness*. What is required of stewards is faithfulness.

As we begin our month-long emphasis on stewardship, let's think carefully about how the New Testament helps us understand and apply this important idea to our lives.

An Instruction for Basic Stewardship

Hebrews 3:1-6

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 4:2 that faithfulness and trustworthiness are to mark stewards. This central idea of stewardship shapes how we understand our own responsibilities as stewards. Remember, we are not just talking about money – we are talking about all of our life before the face of God.

Hebrews helps us to locate stewardship in the whole Bible. In showing how Jesus is better than Moses, the author develops their respective stewardships.

Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, ² who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house. ³ For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. ⁴ (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) ⁵ Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, ⁶ but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope. [Hebrews 3:11-16, ESV]

The author of Hebrews is arguing for the superiority of Jesus. He is focusing his attention on the superiority of Jesus over Moses. He does not say that Moses was nothing and Jesus is everything. He asserts that Moses was great but Christ is immanently superior. Verses 2-4 tell us *that* Jesus is superior while verses 5-6 tell us *how* Jesus is superior.

The Shared in both Covenants – Accountability (v.1-4)

In verse 2, Moses and Jesus are alike in that they are both appointed and faithful. The key word to capture this is *accountability*. Both are assigned their responsibility and both are faithful to carry it out. In this case, Moses and Jesus are both given the Word of God, the way to God and the work for God. They are sent on a mission for the sake of the people of God. They each have a unique place in redemptive history. They are given that responsibility by God.

Moses and Jesus were faithful and trustworthy in the appointment. What had been entrusted them they were faithful to carry out. In Hebrews, they were entrusted with 3 major responsibilities. They were entrusted with the Word of God. They were entrusted with the way to God. They were entrusted with the work for God. Each of these had different assignments, expectations, purposes, objectives and standards. The Word of God must be given purity and integrity. The way to God must be set forth with clarity and must be brought about with exact obedience. The work for God must be done within the will of God and also with faithfully applied wisdom.

Further, their responsibilities under each covenant varied even though the area of appointment is the same. Moses wrote down and spoke out the Word. Jesus must speak and live out as the Word. Through all he does in the way to God, Moses pointed to Jesus who is the way to God. Moses defined and described the will and work of God in His time. Jesus fulfilled and inaugurated the will and work of God for our time. What they did was different. Yet, each one was faithful in what he was appointed to do.

Now this means they were accountable to the one who appointed them, who gave them their stewardship. For both Moses and Jesus, this accountability is to God, to the Father. They did not act according to their own ideas. They were measured by God as being faithful. God determined it. God declared it.

Now, verses 3-4 establish the author's argument here. Jesus is worthy of more glory because he is the design/builder of the house, not the house itself. Moses is in and a part of the house itself. So they are both faithful, but Jesus is worthy of more honor and recognition because He is over the house, not in the house. Therefore, we cannot say that equal faithfulness results in equal recognition. The honor that comes for faithfulness is sufficient in itself and may vary depending on what God has purposed and planned.

We will be faithful stewards when we see ourselves as accountable to God who has assigned us our responsibilities.

The Servant in the Old Covenant – Moses (v.5)

The key to Moses' stewardship is servanthood. He was a servant in the house. He was a faithful steward in the house fully discharging all that was committed to his care. But he is not the owner. He is a servant in the house.

This is very important. There is a kind of faithful stewardship that functions as servanthood. It does not own what it is entrusted with. It is humbled and honored. Humility causes the steward to carefully take care of what is given to him. He knows it is not his own. He knows he will have to give an account. He is under the authority of another. But he also is honored by what he is given. Jesus taught that when we are faithful in little we will be entrusted with more. As we grow in faithfulness, God honors us by giving us more responsibility.

Being a steward as a servant also means that we are able to serve well now with the long view in sight. Moses testifies to what was going to be spoken later. As a servant, he was faithful in his responsibility to testify, but that was about things much later and much greater.

We will be faithful stewards when we see ourselves as servants accountable to our master.

The Son in the New Covenant – Jesus (v.6)

The key to Jesus' stewardship is sonship. He is the son over the house. This is what makes Him superior to Moses. He is the son, the heir, not the servant. He is also over the house, the one who governs it. So He has made it and He is over it.

Therefore, there is a kind of faithful stewardship that is like being a son. It is being placed in charge of something and therefore the responsibility is one of governing and ordering. It has the idea of being responsible to manage and oversee what has been put under your care. In this sense there is an important idea of ownership. This is mine as a son, but not ultimately.

Jesus was faithful as a son in overseeing, governing and managing all that the Father put in His hand. He did so recognizing that He was responsible as a son to His father. He may oversee. He may govern. But He does not set the standard per

se. His faithfulness is still being measured by His Father to whom He stands accountable to His stewardship. He is, of course, an imminently successful and faithful steward.

Being a steward then means that sometimes we serve as sons – we do own what is given to us, but not ultimately. We will give an account to the Father. We will stand as sons to give an account for what we have been given.

We will be faithful stewards when we see ourselves as sons accountable to our Father.

The Illustrations of Biblical Stewardship

So, how does this affect the way New Testament writers think and act? Out of many texts, I have chosen two that will illustrate Biblical Stewardship.

Apostles as Stewards of the Gospel 1 Corinthians 4:1-2

This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

² Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.

As Paul is defending his apostleship, he locates his ministry as a steward. He joins being a servant of Christ with being stewards of God's mysteries (New Covenant truths being fully revealed and explained through a Christ-centered lens.) This is the way all true apostles were to be viewing themselves. They are servant-stewards. They have an enormous responsibility to get the gospel right, to unfold the full, bright New Covenant contours that have long lain dim and shadowy in the Old Covenant. This awesome appointment and privilege is not about power or place or position. It is all about humble serving Christ in truth.

So, here are the most prestigious and powerful leaders in the church. But they are to see themselves as stewards, as being held accountable for what they have been entrusted with. Their primary responsibility as stewards is to be faithful. They are to clearly reveal the truth. Imagine what they have been entrusted with. The gospel in all its glories, the unfolding and fulfillment of redemptive history, the very trusts we take for granted were put in their hands to be given to us.

But in all of that, they were to be faithful. Faithfulness involved fidelity to what God had said. It involved standing true when it was being attacked, either by word or deed. It involved courage and conviction and when necessary, a martyrdom. This is what it meant to a servant of Christ and a steward of truth. They served at the pleasure of and for the purpose of their Lord. His approving smile was what they sought.

Faithful stewardship is a requirement of all and particularly those appointed to leadership.

Believers as Stewards of Grace 1 Peter 4:10-11

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: ¹¹ whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

From the faithful apostles with gospel to faithful believers with the grace of God, we are stewards. We have received a gift. It is a responsibility and an ability granted us by God. We are therefore stewards of that gift, of that grace. Here, stewardship is clearly defined.

Faithful stewardship uses spiritual gifts for others.

Faithful stewardship exercises the gift according to the standards set by God.

Faithful stewardship recognizes that all are able for some ministry through the varied grace of God.

Faithful stewardship works, not through the arm of the flesh but through the strength God supplies.

Faithful stewardship aims to glorify God through Jesus Christ.

The “well done” our Lord will speak over servants and sons will come to those who faithfully used the graces God gave in the way God requires for the glory God deserves. All other ways and uses of spiritual gifts is not faithful stewardship. Certainly, the failure to use spiritual gifts at all is a failure in stewardship.

The Implications for Believing Stewardship

So what are some practical implications for us as believers?

All of life is a gift from God requiring faithful stewardship.

Your life, breath, family, property, job, money, church, friends – all are a gift from God. You have a responsibility to manage each of them well by the grace of God for the glory of God. You must manage your time, your relationships, your work, your money –everything as a steward. Do you see your life this way?

All of us are accountable to God for faithful stewardship.

While many of you serving in ministry are accountable to ministry leadership over you, you are ultimately accountable to God. We may err in our oversight and forget to congratulate when doing well or fail to challenge when faltering. But your serving in every area of life is before the face of God. He has His eye on you.

All believers are equipped by grace to serve God faithfully.

Let me state this another way – no believer can say they are exempt from stewardship because they have not received grace for spiritual ministry. You, all of you and each of you, have received grace for ministry to serve the body either in speaking gifts or in serving gifts. Are you a faithful steward of that gift, of that grace?

All faithful stewardship is a matter of delight, not drudgery.

We have just touched on matters of the heart. But hear this, doing exactly what God wants at exactly the right time with a sour spirit is not faithful stewardship. I must joy in my God, delight in the responsibilities He gives, rest in the strengthening grace that enables and serve with sacrificial effort.

I see several significant challenges to faithful stewardship.

Challenges

You believe everything is yours and stewardship only involves what you choose to give to God. Thus you give God the leftovers, the leftovers of your time, talent and treasure instead of the best in your stewardship.

You believe that you have no responsibility to serve in the body because you do not have an ability the body can use. Thus you excuse yourself in your own mind from your stewardship and from seeking creative expressions or avenues for gift.

You believe that stewardship is limited to money, particularly those who have it. Thus you will use what little or much you give as a substitute for the good stewardship of your gifts.

You believe that stewardship does not have a planned, proportional, purposed aspect, particularly in money. Thus, you choose to give less rather than are freed to give more as a faithful steward.

What is needed is repentance: we must humble ourselves before God and repent of our wrong beliefs and wrong desires. We need to so desire the good approval of God that we, as both servants and sons, will be faithful stewards of all that God has entrusted to us.

In conclusion, as we grow and change in regards to stewardship, embrace these principles to become a faithful steward. **Summary**

We will be faithful stewards when we see ourselves as accountable to God who has assigned us our responsibilities.

We will be faithful stewards when we see ourselves as servants accountable to our master.

We will be faithful stewards when we see ourselves as sons accountable to our Father.

Faithful stewardship is a requirement of all and particularly those appointed to leadership.

Finally, here are some practical steps for personal stewardship:

Make a commitment to attend the morning Adult Bible Study hour and the evening Closer Walk hour on Sunday. These services are designed for practical steps of obedience.

Approach a mature Christian in the church to make yourself accountable to in the areas of stewardship you struggle in. They can help you examine your life, encourage your walk and exhort your obedience.

Turn tail to head – that is, take all that you give to God at the end of things and commit to give to God at the beginning. Stop giving God leftovers. Give Him the first fruits.

May we all humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God and become faithful stewards for His glory.