

Biblical Principles

PRIN'CIPLĒ, n [L. *principium*, beginning]; a truth; that which supports an assertion; an action, or a series of actions; a law comprehending many subordinate truths.

ONE IN A SERIES

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Stewardship

Stew'ward n. [G. *stube*] room; [Sax. *werdian*] ward. A servant, keeper, protector, defender of the room or Hall. A chamberlain or butler charged with the management of the house. A minister of Christ whose duty it is to dispense the provisions of the Gospel, to preach its doctrines and administer its ordinances (Webster, 1828).

Stew-ard'ship \ st(y)urd-ship \ n. The duties of a servant, the responsibility to manage the life and property assigned to one in obedience to God's requirements. A good steward is one who faithfully serves the Lord in all things.

The Biblical Principle

God is the Creator: All things were made by Him and by Him all things consist (Colossians 1:16-17). To the Creator belongs that which is created. "For every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the mountains: And the wild beasts of the field are Mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for the world is Mine, and all its fullness" (Psalm 50:10-12).

God has placed man on earth to be His steward, His caretaker over that which He created and owns (has title to). "God took the man [Adam], and put him in the garden of Eden to tend [cultivate] and keep it" (Genesis 2:15). As God's steward, man is the manager, the executor, of that portion of God's estate placed in his care. Man is accountable to God for the manner in which he attends to his stewardship responsibilities—how he uses God's property to serve and obey Him. Joseph R. McAuliffe reminds us that "Biblical stewardship is also characterized by three related traits:

1. Faithfulness—'Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful' [trustworthy] (1 Corinthians 4:2);

2. Fruitfulness (parable of talents, Matthew 25:14-30); and
3. Accountability—'give an account of your stewardship'—Luke 16:2)." 1

A good and faithful steward acknowledges God's sovereign ownership and is obedient to His requirements. As God's steward, each individual is to be a productive manager and developer of that which God has entrusted to his care (both his internal and external properties—his mind, his muscle, his skills and talents as well as his material estate).

A person's internal stewardship (the internal property) will determine the stewardship he exercises over his external property. (Note: See "Property," one of the twelve Biblical Principles included in this series.)

Applying the Principle of Stewardship

The principle of stewardship is too often viewed as pertaining only to the management of physical possessions: money, real estate, "tangible assets," etc. To do that is to shortchange the Lord; it is to curtail His sovereignty and confine His Lordship in our lives. We are not our own ("For

you were bought at a price . . ."): we belong to God, and all our possessions and wealth are a trust from Him. ". . . [T]herefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:20).

Stewardship must not be applied merely to earthly goods or physical possessions; it includes all that we are (our internal properties—mind, heart, spirit, conscience, etc.) as well as all that is entrusted to our care (our external/physical properties). Consider a few of the areas of life in which we may relate the principle of stewardship today.

In Heart and Mind

Each of us is to be a faithful steward of heart and mind. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7a).

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10). "I have purposed that my mouth shall not transgress" (Psalm 17:3c). "This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men" (Acts 24:16).

We are to exercise good stewardship over every thought we think, every word we utter. "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my redeemer" (Psalm 19:14; see also Psalm 34:13; Proverbs 6:16-19; Matthew 5:28; Ephesians 4:29; James 1:26; 1 Peter 3:10).

Body and Soul

A consecrated Christian seeks to be a good and faithful steward in all that he is and does, in every area, in every aspect of life, in every endeavor. In

Some Key Scriptures

- "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:3; see also Genesis 1:1).
- "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth" (Genesis 1:26).
- "Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth'" (Genesis 1:28).
- "The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein" (Psalm 24:1).
- "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone" (Matthew 23:23).
- "Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces" (Matthew 7:6).
- "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing" (Matthew 24:45-46).
- "Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful" (1 Corinthians 4:2).
- "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Colossians 3:17).
- "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4:10).

(See also Luke 19:17ff; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:23; 1 Timothy 6:17-19.)

the words of that great old hymn, "My life I give henceforth to live, O Christ, for Thee alone!"

If we are faithful stewards of our heart and mind, we will then be stewards of our "self" (our physical body). "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are" (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1). "But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified" (1 Corinthians 9:27).

The faithful steward focuses mind, actions and purpose not on the things of this world but on the things of the Lord and the truth of His Word. His "delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night" (Psalm 1:2). "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be" (Romans 8:7). "Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance" (1 Peter 1:13-14).

Thus, because we belong to Him, as His stewards we are to care for the health of our minds, our hearts and our bodies, shunning the evil or unseemly whether it be food for the body (meat and drink) or food for the mind (books or films or music).

Our Time

We are to be faithful stewards of the time the Lord has given us as sojourners in the here and now. "See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:15-17).

We are, in other words, to make every moment count in the service of our King. We are to live in the Word, by the Word, and for the Word. In such a manner the faithful steward may say, as did Paul, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21).

Stewards of His Word

We who are His are to be the stewards of God's Word—as Noah Webster wrote, "to dispense the provisions of the Gospel, to preach its doctrine" (ref. Matthew 28:19-20).

It is given to us to contend for the faith even as did the saints of old and our fathers before us. We are, of course, to keep His word, to strive to obey it. "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You. . . . I will meditate on Your precepts, and contemplate Your ways" (Psalm 119:11, 15). Also, as His servants, we are to proclaim, publish, promote, preserve, and defend His Word—knowing that His Word shall never pass away, but, nevertheless, being zealous to defend and maintain the "the purities of the Gospel" (2 Peter 3:1-8).

Liberty

Freedom is one of God's precious gifts to man who is made in His image. If we are to stand fast in that liberty wherein He has made us free, we must be thoughtful, wise, and faithful stewards of individual liberty (administrators and protectors, rightly making the distinction between liberty and license).

To fail in this, to acquiesce when earthly powers legitimize the immoral or seek to usurp the sovereignty of God is to abdicate an important part of our stewardship responsibilities. Too often the victims of such sins of omission are the young and the innocent.

Civil Government

As His stewards, we are to uphold, to exercise dominion over, the institution of civil government He has ordained—to insist that it conform to His statutes and serve those purposes He has established (Romans 13:1-4). We are to be keepers of that

institution which He has entrusted to His people.

For those particular functions and services of civil government as set forth in His Word, we are to pay tribute (Romans 13:6). But, as His stewards, we are charged with the responsibility of electing godly individuals to public office (Exodus 18:20–22; Deuteronomy 13–17). We are also to insist that those civil magistrates properly and faithfully govern according to God's laws and stay within His parameters of civil governance.

In that regard, we are to insist on the proper stewardship of those who hold office. Since the taxes we pay are part of the property God has entrusted to us, it is our duty as stewards to require that the value of our money not be eroded or diluted and that our funds be spent wisely and only for proper and righteous purposes.

And, as faithful stewards, it is our duty to oppose such expenditures as funding murder (abortion), subsidizing those who can but will not work, financing an education establishment which usurps the duties of the parent and denies the truth of God, and supporting foreign governments which persecute God's people and seek to control or destroy Christ's church.

Economics

Stewardship is the only true basis for Christian economics; it is the proper use of His property to glorify Him and to cultivate, improve, and replenish the earth as He has commanded. Stewardship includes not only the development, but also the prudent care and protection of the environment (spiritual, cultural, social and physical).

The fruits of conscientious stewardship will provide His servants with the substance to proclaim the Gospel, to advance His kingdom, and to serve Him by serving others.

Consider those early Puritans who settled New England (and the Puritan "work ethic," which is another term for "stewardship"). The investments they made of their labors, time, and resources produced returns which, after their tithes, they plowed back into additional enterprises which further increased their fruitfulness. This "beneficent cycle" of stewardship proved the principle of returns (sowing and

reaping). This fruitage made it possible for them to found the Christian colleges and universities, the hospitals, the rescue missions, the orphanages, the "old folks homes," etc., thus to perform "the fast" that pleases the Lord (Isaiah 58:6–12; Matthew 25:31–46).

The opposite of stewardship is either

- (a) socialism/communism which serves and deifies and glorifies the state, or
- (b) unrestrained individualism/humanism which idolizes unregenerate man and makes gods of him and his wealth.

Free individual enterprise (stewardship) based upon and embracing the Christian ethic (Matthew 7:12) produces economic freedom. The end result of enterprise devoid of Christ—whether it be slothfulness on the one hand or avarice on the other—is economic slavery.

IN SUM

"God demands that man be a steward, to glorify God by using and developing His world and himself in terms of the revealed Law or Word of God."²

The faithful steward, then, has no Master but Jesus, no system but God's. All that is entrusted to him—his mind, his body, his time, his governance, his earthly material possessions—he administers in obedience and service to the Lord. "No one can serve two masters . . . You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24).

All Scripture is from the New King James Version.

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1. Joseph R. McAuliffe, "Masters of Biblical Administration," *Chalcedon Report*, October 1988, p. 14.
2. R. J. Rushdoony, *Tithing and Dominion*, (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1979), p. 9.