

OUR STEWARDSHIP

BIBLE TEXT : I Corinthians 4:1-21; 9:16-27; II Corinthians 5:17-21; 6:1-10.

LESSON 391 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (I Corinthians 4:2)

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

1 Corinthians 4:1-21

¹ Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.

² Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.

³ But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self.

⁴ For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord.

⁵ Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

⁶ And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think *of men* above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another.

⁷ For who maketh thee to differ *from another*? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive *it*, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received *it*?

⁸ Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us: and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you.

⁹ For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men.

BIBLE REFERENCES:

I Stewardship

1. Stewards are required to be faithful and are accountable to God, I Corinthians 4:1-5;

Luke 12:41-48

⁴¹ Then Peter said unto him, Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all?

⁴² And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom *his* lord shall make ruler over his household, to give *them their* portion of meat in due season?

⁴³ Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.

⁴⁴ Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath.

⁴⁵ But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken;

⁴⁶ The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for *him*, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.

⁴⁷ And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not *himself*, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.

⁴⁸ But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.

Romans 14:12

¹² So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

Romans 2:4

⁴ Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?

Titus 1:7-9

⁷ For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre;

⁸ But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate;

⁹ Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.

Hebrews 13:17

¹⁷ Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you.

2. Stewards are to fulfil their calling humbly no matter what the consequences in this present life may be, I Corinthians 4:6-21;

John 16:33

³³ These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

Romans 12:3

³ For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God

¹⁰ We *are* fools for Christ's sake, but ye *are* wise in Christ; we *are* weak, but ye *are* strong; ye *are* honourable, but we *are* despised.

¹¹ Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace;

¹² And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it:

¹³ Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, *and are* the offscouring of all things unto this day.

¹⁴ I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn *you*.

¹⁵ For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet *have ye* not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.

¹⁶ Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me.

¹⁷ For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church.

¹⁸ Now some are puffed up, as though I would not come to you.

¹⁹ But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power.

²⁰ For the kingdom of God *is* not in word, but in power.

²¹ What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and *in* the spirit of meekness?

1 Corinthians 9:16-27

¹⁶ For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!

¹⁷ For if I do this thing willingly, I

hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

1 Peter 4:10

¹⁰ As every man hath received the gift, *even* so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

3. The call to stewardship is from God, and if answered willingly with wholehearted endeavour will bring eternal reward, I Corinthians 9:16-27;

1 Peter 5:2

² Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;

II Ambassadorship

1. An ambassador for Christ must first be a "partaker of the fruits," a new creature in Christ, II Corinthians 5:17-20;

Ephesians 6:20

²⁰ For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

2 Timothy 2:6

⁶ The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits.

2. Christ suffered for our sins, II Corinthians 5:21;

Isaiah 53:5

⁵ But he *was* wounded for our transgressions, *he was* bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace *was* upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

Hebrews 2:9

⁹ But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

1 Peter 2:24

²⁴ Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.

1 Peter 3:18

¹⁸ For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:

3. Ambassadors for Christ are to be soul winners, II Corinthians 6:1, 2;

Acts 26:16-18

¹⁶ But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee;

¹⁷ Delivering thee from the people, and *from* the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee,

¹⁸ To open their eyes, *and* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

Daniel 12:3

³ And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.

Matthew 4:19

¹⁹ And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

4. Ambassadors are to live blameless lives even under severe tests, II Corinthians 6:3-10; 4:1, 2, 8-11;

Philippians 2:15

¹⁵ That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world;

1 Timothy 3:2-4

² A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality,

have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation *of the gospel* is committed unto me.

¹⁸ What is my reward then? *Verily* that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel.

¹⁹ For though I be free from all *men*, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.

²⁰ And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law;

²¹ To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law.

²² To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some.

²³ And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with *you*.

²⁴ Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.

²⁵ And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

²⁶ I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:

²⁷ But I keep under my body, and bring *it* into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

¹⁷ Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

¹⁸ And all things *are* of God, who

apt to teach;

³ Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;

⁴ One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;

NOTES:

Mystery of the Gospel

Paul the Apostle told Timothy, "Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory" (I Timothy 3:16). These were truly profound words and this mystery has been confounding the wisest of earthly scholars down through the ages. But these profound truths need not remain a mystery to the honest heart. Jesus said to His disciples, "It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them [the unbelievers] it is not given" (Matthew 13:11).

Paul explained this mystery to the Colossians, "Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:26, 27). To have Christ in one's heart, to be born into the family of God and made a new creature in Christ Jesus, is truly a mystery to the unbelievers. To the believers this spiritual experience becomes the very turning point of their life and completely changes the eternal destiny of their soul.

Gospel Stewardship

Inasmuch as the miraculous transforming power of the Gospel of Christ coming into the human heart produces this most profound experience, what then would be the responsibility of one who is called to be a minister of this Gospel, or, as the text says, "stewards of the mysteries of God"? There can be no higher calling, no more profitable vocation, no greater responsibility than of stewardship in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Considering the importance of such a calling, is it any wonder that Paul says it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful? Upon his faithfulness to proclaim the truth under the anointing and unction of the Spirit, his fidelity in living a holy and consistent Christian life, hinges the destiny of human souls. It is his responsibility not only to tell people about Jesus and His power to save but also to be a living example of the transforming grace there is in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. (**Romans 10:14** ¹⁴ How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?)

This stewardship is not a profession secured by educational study or college degree, but is a divine and holy calling. The true minister of the Gospel stands between the living and the dead as a representative of eternal, immortal, just, but merciful and ever-loving God. It is his responsibility to point men to Christ even if it may seem that he is only an unheeded voice in the wilderness. He is to reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine. To do this the minister must be "first partaker of the fruits," and he must demonstrate and prove that fact by his personal conduct, his holiness and godliness, his prayer life, and his unselfish service to God and man.

Stewards' Accountability

Because this calling of stewardship is of God, a minister is responsible directly to God. Paul says, "He that judgeth me is the Lord." However, this fact does not become a licence for a minister to lord it over God's heritage or to become a tyrant.

hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;

¹⁹ To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

²⁰ Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech *you* by us: we pray *you* in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

²¹ For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

2 Corinthians 6:1-10

¹ We then, *as* workers together *with him*, beseech *you* also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.

² (For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now *is* the accepted time; behold, now *is* the day of salvation.)

³ Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed:

⁴ But in all *things* approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses,

⁵ In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings;

⁶ By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned,

⁷ By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left,

⁸ By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and *yet* true;

⁹ As unknown, and *yet* well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed;

¹⁰ As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making

Ministers are to walk humbly with God — extremely so — because they are the stewards of the mysteries of God, and God will hold them accountable for the administration of their office.

Paul also warns that being a minister of the Gospel places one in an extremely exposed position. He said, "For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake." Because they were preaching this mystery, they would be often misunderstood and their motive misconstrued, and they would be subject to great persecution; but this was not to move them. They were to hold fast to the truth and walk humbly with their God.

What has been said here in regard to ministers of the Gospel, as being stewards, may be said of Christians. Every Christian has some gifts and some particular call to which God will hold him responsible to fulfil faithfully. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance."

Jesus spoke a parable about giving talents to His own servants: "And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability." The Lord knew the ability of each one and did not expect more from him than he was capable of doing. Two of these servants earnestly worked at their responsibility and doubled their talents; and when the Lord returned to reckon with them, the one outstanding commendation they received was that they had been **faithful**. One servant failed to gain anything with his talent, because he had buried it in the earth. He brought back the original talent all right; it was well preserved, but he had not worked to develop and increase it. The result was that this one talent was taken from him, and he was cast into outer darkness where there was weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 25:14-30).

It is not optional whether a Christian work for the Lord: He is commanded to do so. "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain."

Jesus is the greatest of all stewards and His example is the most outstanding. He is the chief Shepherd. He came not to build an empire of His own, but He was in complete submission to His heavenly Father. He said He came not to do His own will, but the will of Him that sent Him. His concern was for the welfares of the people to whom He came to minister. He healed the sick; He bound up the broken-hearted; He loved the sinners and gave deliverance to the captive. He brought light to those in darkness, and finally laid down His own life for His sheep.

Ambassadors for Christ

The dictionary definition of an ambassador is: "A minister of the highest rank accredited to a foreign government or sovereign, as the official representative of his own government or sovereign." An Ambassador is the highest official position any citizen can have in a foreign country; in fact he acts in the capacity of the highest official of his own government. Just so is every Christian. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." He becomes a new creation. He has a new citizenship. Heaven is his home. While he is here on earth he is but a pilgrim, a representative of his true Homeland, which is Heaven.

The Work of an Ambassador

To be a true ambassador for Christ one must first be reconciled to God by Jesus Christ; brought back into the favour and fellowship of God that was lost through sin. Being a new

many rich; as having nothing, and *yet* possessing all things.

creature and having his citizenship in Heaven, his interest centres in things above; but while here on earth the true ambassador is not only to be a good representative of his own country, but also to be a worker together with Christ in winning souls for the heavenly Kingdom. He, as an ambassador, acts in behalf of God, beseeching men to be reconciled to God.

The Apostle Paul, as a good example of an ambassador, brings to bear the strongest possible reason for reconciliation. He said that Christ who knew no sin was made to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. Jesus Christ Himself became our Paschal Lamb; He became our substitute. On the cruel cross of Calvary He suffered and died, not for His own sins — for He was the sinless Son of God — but He took our sins upon Himself and paid the awful penalty in full.

The Apostle also sets the pattern as to when a sinner should be pressed to turn to this ever-loving Saviour; it is **now**, for “now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” He well knew that there is no promise for tomorrow.

What could be a higher calling than to spend the few years of time one has while on this earth as a true ambassador for God? What could be a more noble endeavour than to labour to win souls from the doom of a lost eternity and see them planted on the highway of holiness that leads to Heaven? Oh, that more people would answer the call to the highest of all callings! Jesus said: “The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest” (Matthew 9:37, 38).

QUESTIONS

1. In what manner is a Christian a steward of God?
2. Why is it required of stewards that they be found faithful?
3. To whom are stewards accountable?
4. Name some talents that the Lord might use in our stewardship.
5. What did Paul mean when he said he became all things to all men?
6. Quote the definition of a Christian that is given in our text.
7. Explain how a Christian is likened to an ambassador.
8. By what means can a sinner become reconciled to God?
9. When is the proper time to get salvation?