

The Stewardship of the Apostle Paul
By Rev. John Blount

Scripture Focus:

1 Corinthians 3:1 – 4:5

Key text:

1 Corinthians 4:1-2 Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. (2) In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.

TDM Competency:

Live Biblically: Understand and apply biblical principles to all areas of life.

Theme:

Every believer has been entrusted by God with “all things”; has been enabled by God to accomplish God-glorifying uses of those things; and is responsible to God for how those things are used. That responsibility is biblical stewardship, and every believer is a steward.

Desired Learner Response:

The goal of this lesson is that the students rightly understand, embrace and apply the principles of stewardship described by, and applied in the life of, the Apostle Paul. This response is a fulfillment of the *TDM Competency of Biblical Living*.

Stewardship Dictionary: The following four terms must be clearly defined in order to accurately communicate this TDM Stewardship series. Many definitions for these terms exist, but the definitions provided below are intended whenever the four words are used in this series. The pastor will also use the definitions for each word as he preaches. Take time to make your class very familiar with these terms and definitions.

Generosity: Eagerly giving myself to others for God’s glory.

Stewardship: Utilizing all God has entrusted to me, in accord with God’s Word, and for His glory.

Tithe: Returning 10% of my monetary increase to God, through my church, as an expression of worship.

Offering: The expression of a generous heart, beyond the tithe.

Outline:

- I. The grounds for stewardship (3:5-9)
 - A. *A right view of men*
 - B. *A right view of God*
- II. The gifts to be stewarded (3:21-22)
 - A. *The gift of people*
 - B. *The gift of the world*
 - C. *The gift of life*
 - D. *The gift of death*
 - E. *The gift of the present*
 - F. *The gift of the future*
- III. The enabling of the steward (3:23a)
- IV. The glorious purpose of the steward (3:23b)
- V. The requirement of the steward (4:1-2)

Background:

Paul is writing to the church he planted in Corinth after having received communication from them about some problems they were experiencing in their fellowship. The Corinthians had written Paul to inform him of issues in the church and to ask him questions that needed clarification. In Paul's response, there were numerous serious matters to be dealt with, not the least of which was his response to the attacks upon his Apostleship, his rightful leadership of the church, and his spiritual authority. In his addressing of these (and other) issues, Paul also teaches his readers some vital lessons about stewardship.

Early on in the letter, it is apparent that Paul was intent on communicating clearly the role and responsibility of stewardship in the life of a believer. In Chapter 3 he is dealing with the issue of favoritism and man-centered worship, which he referred to at the beginning of his letter (starting at 1:11). This problem came to Paul's attention as a result of a report from Chloe's people to Paul. You will recall that there had arisen divisions in the Corinthian church concerning leadership. Some preferred Paul, some Apollos, some Peter, and others held only to Christ. Paul corrected the error by clarifying that no man should be favored over Christ and that no brother was better than another brother; that each brother is merely a man, assigned a unique role by God in building the Kingdom of God, and each is equally dependent on God for any good in him.

In addressing the problem of man-centeredness at Corinth, Paul provides a powerful explanation of the stewardship every believer in Christ has.

Lesson:

Paul implores his readers to get a right view of men and a right view of God. His point is that all men are subservient to God; they are servants of God, and God works through them. “Fellow workers” communicates the equality of believers; none is better than another, all are fellow (co-) workers in God’s service. It is not the servant who is to receive glory; it is God!

Paul’s instruction here provides the fundamental lesson in stewardship: A faithful steward must have a right understanding of himself and others before God. The believer in Christ is a sinner, rescued from hell by the grace of God, transformed and made righteous by Jesus Christ, indwelt by God’s Holy Spirit for sanctification and glorification; this is all the work of God...alone! We, who are the recipients of God’s grace, have no grounds for self-centered boasting, but we have abundant grounds for God-exalting worship and God-glorifying living. This is the mind of the good and faithful steward: He (God) must increase and I (self / man-centeredness) must decrease (John 3:30). We are all servants of God, and as such we desire Him to be glorified, not ourselves.

Continuing his thoughts concerning Christian stewardship, Paul deepens and expounds the lesson:

1 Corinthians 3:21-4:2 So then let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you, (22) whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, (23) and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God. (4:1) Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. (2) In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.

This is a magnificent explanation of the role and responsibility of the steward and of the gifts that have been given to the steward (to all Christians) to be managed. To enable the students to fully understand their role and responsibility as a steward of God and the assets that they have been given, a thorough examination of this passage will be helpful.

“All things belong to you”:

In 1 Timothy 6:17, Paul instructed Timothy to teach...“those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.” God has given us all things to enjoy...they are all His, He has pronounced them good and He has given them to us to enjoy; but, there is a danger. How often the gifts of God to us are forgotten or taken for granted, or go unrecognized and unappreciated, or are pursued as ends in themselves and they become gods in our lives. In our text Paul goes to great lengths to explain to, and remind his readers of, the generosity of God to them and the purpose of His gifts.

According to Paul, what are these things that belong to us? (based on our text)

These things include the gift of people ((21b) *all things belong to you, (22) whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas*): by extension, these “people gifts” also include all fellow Christians. The Apostles, the early Church Fathers, Pastors, Preachers, Missionaries, Sunday School Teachers, our local body of believers we call FBC JAX, saved family members and friends...in short, the entire Church...God’s Church throughout the world and from its inception have been given to us. They are all ours, for our benefit and for God’s glory. Because they are gifts given to us by God, we are to steward (manage, make profitable use of) them by listening to them, reading them, learning from them, loving them, encouraging them, growing through them and growing with them. God has given us the people in our life (and before our life) to be beneficial gifts to us and to be used for our good and God’s glory. But, there is a warning; be careful not to boast in them. Believers are only to boast in God, for His gift of people to us. When we make people the epitome of our praise or love or devotion, we have lost sight of the gift that they are from God.

Apply:

As good stewards of God's gift of people, we must praise God for them and make good use of them, for His glory, not for theirs.

Ask & Discuss

1. **What would be a God-glorifying way to honor or thank a person (preacher, pastor, teacher, singer, friend, mate, etc.) for being used of God in your life?**
2. **What would not be a God-glorifying way to thank or honor that person?**

In addition to human gifts, **God has given believers the world**, the kosmos, the arrangement of the created universe. Believers are to use the world as a steward uses his master's assets to accomplish his master's will. All of creation is telling something about the glory of God. As good stewards of the material universe, believers must use that gift to enhance their understanding of God, to inform their truthful worship of Him and to make Him known in the world.

Apply:

Rather than just listening to the news, stewards listen for truths about God in what they hear from the world in the news. Rather than getting caught up in the hectic pace of life, stewards take some time to observe the glory of a fiery sunset, or the brilliance of the late night heavens, or the immensity of the ocean, to see the nature of God on display. Rather than hoarding and consuming God's material assets (the stuff of the world), stewards use those assets for the furtherance of God's Kingdom. Food, clothing, language, art, medicine, the internet, technology, technical skills, business, land, money, compound interest, stocks, and financial markets...are just a few of the "world gifts" of God to you...and they are all to be used for His purposes...for His glory!

Ask & Discuss:

1. **Keeping in mind that God has given us "the world" (think: all of its materials and systems and powers and possibilities), what are some ways that the world can be used for Kingdom purposes?**
2. **What would be some examples of poor personal (your own) stewardship of God's created world?**

In addition to gifts of people and of the world, **God has given life to us**. He has provided each of us a breathing, thinking, speaking, reasoning, emotive, willfully acting body to be employed in His service, for His glory and for our joy. *Your life is not your own, it has been bought with a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's (1 Corinthians 6:20).*

Apply:

For God-glorifying reasons, we have been given wonderful, miraculous bodies. Thus, there is a stewardship of our body. All believers are to steward themselves... *"to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Romans 12:1).* We are not merely spiritual beings, we are physical, mental, emotional, relational, working, willful, active people. God has given life to us. We are responsible for stewarding it wisely.

Ask & Discuss:

1. **In what ways is a body to be stewarded (managed and used for) for God's glory?**
2. **Describe what a living sacrifice might look like.**

Not only has God given us life, **God has given us death**. This seems to be not a gift. Because life is such a wonderful and delightful gift, we tend to think that the loss of it (our physical presence in this world) is a great loss and a tragedy. But for Paul, death was a great gift: “*For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain*” (Philippians 1:21). The Psalmist, too, expresses the preciousness of death: “*Precious in the eyes of God is the death of His saints*” (Psalm 116:15). Believers are given the gift of death and are to steward that gift. What a strange idea this is. To understand it we have to look at Paul’s larger argument in Philippians (1:20-21): “*according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. (21) For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.*”

Paul saw his death as a means to glorify God. He was not afraid of death; rather, he saw death as an opportunity to display the worth of God to the world. In his dying, Paul intended to display the infinite glory of God by showing to all that He was worth more than life itself, that God was sweeter, more delightful, more intriguing, more satisfying, more exhilarating, than life could ever be. Paul determined that in his delighting in God in death, he would make the greatest use of it as a means to magnify and display God to people.

Apply:

Think this way about your own death: if you are in Christ, at the time of your death you are going to meet your Lord, your Savior, your glorious King, your loving Father; you are going to see Him face to face, in all of His glory; you are going to experience His infinite wonder for an eternity of ages; you are going to be perfectly united to Him. Can you see that your death is a great blessing; a gift from God to you and a means of displaying God’s ability to satisfy you such that life cannot compare to Him? Steward your death as you steward your life, for the glory of God!

Ask & Discuss

- 1. How can a right view of death (as gain) radically change a person’s life?**

God has given us people, the world, life and death...and **God has given us the present**...things that are in our life NOW. Every believer is richly lavished by God now. We are not to live just a “by and by, someday in the sky” kind of life We not only have hope for the future (heaven), we have NOW and are to LIVE IN THE NOW. Right now we have God’s Holy Spirit dwelling in us; God’s Son, on His throne, seated next to God the Father making intercessory prayer about us (individually) to the Father; we have the Word of God given to us; we have the authority of God enabling us and authorizing us to act on His behalf until the end of the age (Matthew 28:18); we have the freedom to carry on God’s work without governmental prohibition; and we are given relationships, encounters, experiences and opportunities every day so that we can magnify God to the lost, so we can shine in the darkness, so that the world will see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:16).

Apply:

You are given the present moments of your life for a purpose that is far greater than your own pleasure. You are given now in order to display God to others. Believers are to steward their NOW, each and every minute they are given. NOW is a gift from God to you. It is to be used to its highest purpose, which is the glory of God. Steward your NOW wisely.

Ask & Discuss

- 1. If you knew you were going to die in the next 24 hours, what would you do differently?**
- 2. What would you wish you had done differently in your life thus far?**

Last in Paul's list is... **God's gift of things to come**...the future that is beyond this world. Already, God has given us future gifts, such as: an eternity of ages in which to delight in Him, learn about Him, be overwhelmed in His goodness, and be astounded at His beauty; the promise of a perfect body enabled to look upon God in His fullness and not be fearful or consumed, but rather to be enraptured, gladdened, and awed by His glorious nature, character, infinitude, perfection and Holy Being. God has given us the promise of His presence, and of perfect fellowship and of full knowledge of Him. As children of God and citizens of His Kingdom, all these future things are ours in Christ; Jesus says so: *"The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; (23) I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. (24) "Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world (John 17:22-24).*

Apply:

In Christ, these future things are your inheritance, promised to you by God Himself. Therefore, you are to steward your glorious future by living in light of the certainty of it; by placing your hope in God and seeking first His righteousness and His Kingdom (Matthew 6:33) rather than seeking the stuff of this world, which is passing away (1 Corinthians 7:31); and by telling others of the sure promises of God that can be theirs also in Jesus Christ. Living in light of your glorious future, already given to you by God, you are empowered to live a life of daring boldness and faith, being a living sacrifice of worship to God, exuberantly displaying your gladness in God, and abundantly giving your love to others...because you are going to see God and know Him even as you have been known. *"For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known"* (1 Corinthians 13:12). You have a glorious future; steward it by living like you already have it...because you do!

Ask & Discuss

- 1. What might living your life in light of your glorious future inheritance in Christ look like?**
- 2. How might a right understanding of the future affect how a Believer stewards their money today?**

God has given every believer marvelous gifts to be used, managed, leveraged, stewarded for His good purposes, which is His glory. We are each responsible for how we handle and use those gifts. This is the meaning of stewardship. But if we are honest, we will each have to admit that we are not sufficient for the right stewarding of these precious gifts. Paul would agree. That is why he continues in his explanation of stewardship. Further down, underneath the gifting of all good things to us, Paul sees a more vital reality undergirding God's gifts to us, and our responsibility for managing them well... he sees the gifting of us to Christ.

*1 Corinthians 3:23... **"And you belong to Christ"**:*

In Paul's day, the servant and the steward were enslaved; they were slave-class people, belonging to a master. As such, they had no rights, no liberties, no freedoms to do what they wanted, when they wanted or how they wanted. Rather, they were compelled to carry out their master's will in accordance with their master's commands, instructions and intentions. These people were not their own...they were owned. To the 21st Century American mind, this slave-class life is inconceivable. Yet spiritually, for the believer, it is essential to understand and to embrace this idea of ownership and servitude. In order to get at this idea we must ask some questions...

Why do you belong to Christ?

He has created you:

Isaiah 43:5-7 "Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, And gather you from the west. (6) "I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' And to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring My sons from afar And My daughters from the ends of the earth, (7) Everyone who is called by My name, And whom I have created for My glory, Whom I have formed, even whom I have made."

He has redeemed you:

Galatians 3:13-14 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us--for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE"-- (14) in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

He has adopted you

Ephesians 1:5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.

He has called you

Acts 2:38-39 Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (39) "For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself."

God has given you to Him

John 10:27-29 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; (28) and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. (29) "My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

Ask & Discuss

- 1. Based on God's actions toward you, does He have the right to own you?**
- 2. Apart from Christ, do you have a right to God?**

This leads us to a second key question...

Why should you embrace belonging to (being owned by) Christ?

Unless you are "owned by Christ," you are lost and the wrath of God rests upon you. But in Christ, you have all of the promises of God for you.

John 3:36 "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

2 Corinthians 1:20 For as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes; therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us.

Belonging to Christ means that you lack no good thing and there is nothing God requires of you, His steward, that you are not able to accomplish...in His power...by His Son. So many people fear the demands of stewardship on their life. They think that they cannot do what God demands. Yet, this thinking could not be further from the truth. The truth is that you cannot do what God demands...you never could...and you never will. God has done what you could not, and He will do in you, and through you, all that He requires of you. The only way to please God is by faith...embracing all that Christ is for you and relying on Him to do what is required of you. Faithfully seeking to serve Him, by His power, is

the only means of being a faithful servant. *"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing (John 15:5).*

Belonging to Christ is the greatest, loftiest, most powerful place to be, in all of God's created universe!

Apply:

Using our key text, demonstrate how our abiding faith in Christ accomplishes the stewarding God requires of us...

- **Steward the gift of people**, for the glory of God...by asking Christ to make the most of each encounter; to enable you to love, forgive, bear with, learn from (etc.) others
- **Steward the gift of material assets** (possessions, skills, resources...and yes... money), for the glory of God...by trusting Jesus to supply your needs, as you invest God's assets generously
- **Steward your body, and the life it contains**, for the glory of God...by calling on the power of Christ to work in you to enable you to fight against bodily temptations to sin and to pursue (and delight in) giving yourself away in generous service to God and His people
- **Steward your death**, for the glory of God...by relying on Christ to escort you into the glorious presence of His Heavenly Father, as death is swallowed up in victory so that the world sees God as the all satisfying desire of your life
- **Steward every moment of your NOW**, for the glory of God by centering your thoughts, motives and desires on Christ and the abundant life He has secured for you; exploiting opportunities to make inroads against the "Gates of Hell"; thereby displaying the presence and authority of God to the world
- **Steward your future**, for the glory of God...by looking unto Jesus, *"the author and perfecter of your faith, who, for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, and is set down at the right hand of the Father, waiting until His enemies are made a foot stool"*; and trusting Him for all your life based on the promises He has made to you

We belong to Christ, and God has given us all good things that exist...how wonderful this is! Yet, Paul sees something even larger and more wonderful underneath God's giving...

*1 Corinthians 3:23a ... **and Christ belongs to God.***

The bedrock foundation of the life of a faithful steward is the fact that Christ is God's...and He is God. Christ, in obedience to His Father's will humbled Himself and became a servant by taking on the form of a man and enduring death. This was God the Father's will...carried out by God the Son. Our being rescued from the wrath of God, by the wrath of God being poured out on God, was God's idea. This act was God displaying His glory in the most glorious manner possible. **If God has done this for His glory, will He not also display His glory in the life of those He has saved?**

Romans 8:28-32 *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. (29) For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (30) And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. (31) What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? (32) He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*

Conclusion/Application:

Because Christ is God's, and you are Christ's, God has graciously given you all things. You have been caught up into God's glorious display of His own glory...for His glory. This is the essential understanding every steward must have. You have been given all things in Christ. With this giving, there is a stewardship, a responsibility for faithful use and management of all that God has entrusted to you...for His glory. You have received people, the world, life, death, the present, and the future...in order to show forth the glory of God. To whom much is given, much is required.

Each one of us (who claims Christ as Savior) is required to be a good and faithful steward of all that God entrusts to us, all the while acknowledging that we can only be good stewards by the power of Christ in us, working according to the will of God the Father.

The question every believer must answer is...*Am I being a faithful, trustworthy steward?*

Paul states the issue this way...

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.

It is an awesome thing to know that we are (individually) accountable to God for our stewardship. Because of this, every believer should judge himself/herself to see if he/she is being trustworthy as a steward of God.

Child of God...are you being a faithful steward...in the way Paul has explained stewardship?