

Christian Stewardship

Part 1

The traditional Christian definition of stewardship is considered to be the handling of our own finances and how much we gave to the church for its work in spreading the gospel message.

Typically, stewardship is a campaign for funds and an attempt to get people to devote service to the church.

But to say that stewardship exists only to facilitate the mission of the church is a woefully inadequate statement.

The mission is that which God calls us to do, because we are stewards.

Our very Christian identity is that of a steward.

To present tithing as a legal requirement usually destroys the spirit of gratitude and replaces it with a cold calculating mathematical formula.

In the Christian Bible a steward is depicted as a person who is given the responsibility of managing something that belongs to someone else.

The steward is always responsible to the owner, and is his full representative, but is still a servant.

Stewardship is a complete lifestyle, the same way that Christianity is a lifestyle.

Stewardship is a total accountability and responsibility before God who is the Creator and Owner of every thing, including every human being.

Deuteronomy 10:14 [NIV] *“To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it.”*

Everything that is created in the universe belongs to God its Creator.

Haggai 2:8 [NIV] *“‘The silver is mine and the gold is mine,’ declares the LORD Almighty.”*

All wealth that we create is owned by God who gave us life, talents and opportunity to produce wealth.

Psalms 24:1 [NIV] *“The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;”*

The Creator God owns every human being who has ever existed.

It is absolutely imperative that we understand that God owns everything, we own nothing.

We are **only** stewards of God’s property.

We own nothing, **not** even our own lives.

A key point in being a steward is to have a clear sense of God’s purpose for giving us life as human beings.

Without purpose there is only confusion and despair.

Luke 7:31-32 [NIV] *“To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? They are like children sitting in the market-place and calling out to each other: ‘‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not cry.’’’*

What Jesus is describing is children playing who cannot agree with one another about what game to play.

All of us act this way at times, disputes expressing narrow self-interests, leading to confusion.

Many times such arguments have certain things in common.

God is ignored, not listened to, left out of the equation.

We are failing to recognise that God owns everything in the universe, by right of creation, and sustaining.

Note the context of the above parable.

Luke 7:29-30 [NIV] *“All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus’ words, acknowledged that God’s way was right, because they had been baptised by John. But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God’s purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptised by John.”*

Having rejected the purpose of their Creator God, the Pharisees rejected the messenger of God, Jesus Christ, who was introducing the New Covenant, the only way we can be reconciled to our Creator.

Genesis 2:8 [NIV] *“Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed.”*

Human beings are part of the original physical creation.

Genesis 2:15-17 [NIV] *“The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the LORD God commanded the man, ‘‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.’’’*

Human beings were to be stewards of God’s physical creation according to the directive of the owner, responsibilities with plainly stated limits.

Genesis 3:23 [NIV] *“So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken.”*

After failing proper stewardship in the garden, Adam and Eve were banished from this garden to become stewards over a relatively unproductive property.

Genesis 3:17-19 [NIV] *“To Adam he said, ‘‘Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’ ‘‘Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.’’’*

The work of survival would be harder but Adam and Eve still remained stewards.

This theme of stewardship is repeated in the New Testament, as part of the New Covenant between God and human beings.

Matthew 25:14-15 [NIV] *“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.”*

This parable is depicting Jesus the Son of God as the owner giving stewardship of His property to three human beings.

Matthew 25:16-18 [NIV] *“The man who had received the five talents went at once and **put his money to work and gained five more.** So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.”*

Two of these stewards immediately went to work gaining increase, the third steward ignored the purpose of his stewardship.

Matthew 25:19-23 [NIV] *“After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.’ **“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’** “The man with the two talents also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.’ **“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’**“*

The two faithful stewards received their reward at their master’s return.

Matthew 25:24-30 [NIV] *“Then the man who had received the one talent came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’ **“His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. “‘Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’**“*

The third steward was negative minded, even accusing the owner of dishonesty.

Think about this.

It is ridiculous, God is the owner of everything, how can God steal what He owns?

God expects increase from all His creation.

Genesis 9:1 [NIV] *“Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, **“Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth.”***

God expects humans to be fruitful to increase what He gives us.

This refers to physical increase, but under the New Covenant we are expected to mature and produce in our lives the “fruits” of the Holy Spirit, a spiritual increase.

Galatians 5:22 [NIV] *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,”*

These are the very characteristics of the Creator God.

To increase in these “fruits” is the very purpose of God creating human beings.

Genesis 1:26 [NIV] *“Then God said, **“Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”**”*

The original purpose of God is stated in this scripture.

Two different Hebrew words are used to describe this two-part creation.

“Image” – Hebrew “*Tsâlal*” meaning a shadow of the real thing.

“Likeness” – Hebrew “*demûwth*” meaning resemblance, model, son, manner, referring to character.

Genesis 1:27-28 [NIV] *“So God created man in his own **image, in the image** of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, **“Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”**”*

Note the first creation was only in the “image” **not** the “likeness.”

Also notice that stewardship was mentioned in both of these scriptures.

There are serious requirements for a steward.

Colossians 1:16-17 [NIV] *“For by him [Jesus Christ, see context] **all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.** He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”*

All things were created by Jesus Christ for His own use, as owner of everything He created.

1 Corinthians 4:1 [NIV] *“So then, men ought to regard us as **servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God.**”*

We are servants [stewards] of Jesus Christ, entrusted with the knowledge of why human beings exist and what God has planned for us.

How did Jesus Christ as the Son of Man, a human being like us, give us an example of this stewardship?

Philippians 2:5-8 [NIV] *“**Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but **made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.** And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross!**”*

Although Jesus was the Creator of all that exists, He took on the nature of a servant, a steward, thus humbling Himself as an example for us to follow.

We **cannot** become stewards of God’s creation unless we humble ourselves, by emptying our minds and lives of the thoughts of being masters of our own lives. When in fact we are **only** stewards for the limited period of our human existence.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 [NIV] *“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? **You are not your own; you were bought at a price.** Therefore honour God with your body.”*

Once we have accepted the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as a substitute for our own deserved death, due to our rebellious sin against God’s love, we do not own our own lives.

Knowing who we are, who we belong to, and knowing that God has a purpose for our lives, will inspire us because His purpose will become our purpose.

The journey of a Christian as a steward of God, informed by God of our purpose in His plan, leads us to a hope-filled life.

Why?

Because God is ready to provide the talent and the resources we need to carry out His purposes for us as His steward.