

Stewards of the Gospel

Introduction

There was a landowner who set out on a long journey. He called his servant to him and set him over his entire household. The master took care to provide his servant with all the necessary tools. As they toured the shop, the master pointed out hand tools, power tools, machinery and equipment, all of which were to be devoted to the care of the master's kingdom.

After a long time the master returned. This is what he found. His fields were overgrown with weeds. His home was in shambles, needing paint and repairs. His livestock had died or run away. His workers had found other employment.

He searched for his steward and found him in the shop. This was a different story. The shop was immaculate, clean and orderly. Every tool and piece of machinery looked like new, perfectly tuned and well-oiled. The steward was proud of his work. He was confident he had managed the tools well.

What had the steward missed? He had managed the tools instead of the kingdom. This error of parabolic proportions points to a particular difficulty in the way that "stewardship" is generally taught in our circles. It is not uncommon to hear a "stewardship" pitch built on the proposition that Christians should think of themselves as stewards of their time, talents and treasures. While the alliteration is appealing, the Scriptural support is thin.

The thesis of this presentation is that the engine that drives the economy of God is nothing other than the Gospel of Jesus. Time, talents, and treasure are gifts of God, to be sure. But they are the tools that God gives to His Church on earth, to manage the Gospel. Seeking to manage the tools for their own sake confuses the Church and will ultimately lead to a mismanagement of the Gospel.

I. Stewards manage the proclamation of the Gospel.

The evidence for a proper understanding of the term "stewardship" is fairly easy to manage. The term "οικονομια" and its cognates are only used 20 times in the New Testament. (See appendices). The feminine form of the noun, generally referring to the office is used 9 times. The masculine, referring to the person filling the office is used 10 times. The verb is used only once. A careful examination of these texts leads to the conclusion that God has given His Church a precious gift in the form of the Gospel, and He expects the Church to manage its proclamation.

A. Jesus gives the Church a precious gift.

Seven of the twenty uses of the stewardship family of words appear in the Luke 16 parable of the dishonest steward. The parable gives a clear picture of the secular use of the word during the first century. A steward was a slave who was given much authority within the household, generally governing other slaves as well. It appears that a steward was thought of as the highest rank of servitude. A steward managed the household on behalf of his master. However, the point of this parable, for the purposes of this study is found in the conclusion that

Jesus reaches in 16:11, *“If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?”* What are the true riches that are entrusted to faithful stewards to manage on behalf of the master?

Although the term “stewardship” is not used in the Matthew 25 parable, about three servants expected to invest their master’s property while he is away, this end times parable establishes a “big picture” of the expectations of Jesus upon His return. The servants do not all receive the same amount of property, but they all have the same goal. They are to manage the master’s property so that his kingdom grows by the time he returns. This parable should at least provoke a question as to the identity of the gift given to the Church.

The negative manner in which Jesus consistently refers to “unrighteous wealth” ought to be an obvious hint that Jesus does not consider treasure, or money, to be something that the Church should be managing. There is no Scriptural indication that Jesus, upon His return, will query the Church regarding its bottom line. No audit will be performed to determine the effectiveness of the Church’s financial acumen. It is an abuse of this parable, and of the teaching of parables in general, to suggest that Jesus is here speaking about the proper management of money. The parable teaches that Jesus has given His Church a precious gift which He expects to be invested so that He might see a return. What are the true riches entrusted to faithful stewards?

B. The gift is the Gospel.

The confusion over the identification of this treasure is nothing new. The Roman Catholic Church has long claimed that the treasure of the Church consisted of the merits of Christ and other saints, doled out at the hand of the Pope. While discussing this “Treasury of Merits”, Martin Luther notes, in his 62nd of 95 Theses that, “The true treasure of the Church is the holy Gospel of the glory and grace of God.” He then offers a dire warning, and an explanation as to why this paper may be necessary, saying, “This treasure, however, is deservedly most hateful because it causes the first to be last.” If Luther’s insight proves true, it is no wonder that the Church is intent on stewarding anything other than the Gospel.

The premise that God has gifted the Church with something precious is the foundation for interpreting the remaining texts using the term “stewardship.” There is no text that says, in so many words, the Church is to steward the Gospel. However, when one asks, “What is that most precious gift God has given to the Church?” the Gospel, is an easy answer. The succeeding texts serve to bolster this interpretation.

In I Corinthians 4:1 and Ephesians 3:9 Paul speaks of stewarding the mysteries of God. Paul uses the word “mystery” in various ways. It refers to the union of Christ and His Church as manifest in husband and wife in Ephesians 5, to the salvation of the Gentiles in Romans 11, and to the lawlessness at the end of the age in II Thessalonians 2. But when referring to the plan, and the actions of God, the mystery of the New Testament is God’s work for salvation through Jesus Christ, that is, the Gospel.

In Ephesians 6:19 the equation is undeniable, *“...that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel...”* Likewise, Romans 16:2, *“Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages...”*

demonstrates that Paul understood the Gospel to be incomprehensible to the sinful human mind.

If the Church is given a stewardship of the mysteries of God, chief among them is the mystery of the Gospel. This mystery takes precedence over all the other referents because it is the most comprehensive and summarizes God's will. Perhaps Paul is saying the same thing in a very general way in Ephesians 3:2 when he says that God had given him, Paul, a stewardship of God's grace for the sake of the Church.

C. He commands that the Gospel to be invested.

The Gospel is not to be buried in such a way that it has no impact on the kingdom of God. Instead, it is to be invested. (Mt. 25) It is to be distributed. (Lk 12:42) It is to be proclaimed. (Mark 3:14) It is to be stewarded. (I Cor. 4:1) It is to be believed. (Romans 10:14) But how are they to believe unless someone is sent? This line of reasoning requires someone to be given the responsibility of overseeing the management of the Gospel. While it is true that the gift of the Gospel is given to the Church, who, within the Church is responsible to make sure the job is done?

II. Pastors are Stewards of the Gospel.

Much has been written about the Office of the Public Ministry. The majority of the discussion centers on the scope and nature of the office. What is often missing, however, is a development of the picture of the Pastor as a steward of the Gospel.

A. Someone must oversee the investment of the Gospel.

In Luke 12:35-40 Jesus tells a parable about the return of a master from a journey, (a theme that has been visited twice already in this presentation). Jesus tells the disciples that they should be ready when the Son of Man returns. Then Peter asks a question that suggests the dawning of an understanding of the office into which they are being thrust. Peter says, *"Lord, are you telling this parable for us, or for all?"* Jesus' answer should not be construed to suggest that the Gospel has been given to the Office of the Public Ministry apart from the Church. We shall later see that this is not true. Rather, the answer should be understood as detailing the office of Pastor as a steward of the Gospel. Here is what Jesus says, "Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time?"

Jesus is well known for a rhetorical style that places a premium on the Gospel. By asking the answer as a question Jesus teaches the disciples, and us, that He is the chief steward. He distributes the food we need at the proper time. At the same time, it is impossible to miss the implication that He is speaking to men who, in His stead, are in an office that is responsible for the distribution of the food that all men need, the Gospel. As men receive the Gospel that works faith in their hearts the kingdom of God grows, according to His will. But not "all" are called to the office of the ministry as stewards of the Gospel.

B. Pastors are Stewards of the Gospel.

The path of a steward is well-worn by Paul, who accounts for eleven of the twenty New Testament uses of the word. In a display of didactic self-awareness Paul describes his work in terms of stewardship. *"This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God."* (I Cor. 4:1) This text is not about the laity. It is written to the laity by one in the office. Apostles, and Pastors who follow in their train, are stewards of the Gospel. Paul doubles down on this description when he writes to a young Pastor, Titus. "For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach." (Titus 1:7) Pastors who steward the Gospel must be above reproach, lest the proclamation of the Gospel come into disrepute.

C. They distribute the Word and Sacraments at the proper time.

Pastors steward the Gospel by investing it, or proclaiming it into the lives of their hearers. This is the heart of the work of the Office of the Public ministry. It requires great wisdom. Every human being in the world needs to hear the Gospel. No Pastor is capable of assuming this universal task, so God places men over congregations. In a local congregation the scope of the work is manageable. Even then, within congregations, it takes a faithful and wise steward to distribute the food of the Gospel at the proper time.

When taught in the framework of stewarding the Gospel, it becomes apparent that the Pastoral responsibility is not limited to formal settings. Everything that the Pastor does, and every word that he speaks, can be understood as part of his management of the Gospel. (James 3:1) The distribution of the Gospel is most obvious in the formal setting of the Divine Service. There, Word and Sacrament feed those who receive them in faith with food that endures to eternal life.

The Pastor's management of the Gospel does not end with the Divine Service. In his daily life, within and outside of the congregation, the Pastor will find many opportunities to distribute the food of eternal life, that is, the Gospel of Jesus. In word and in deed, in his family, congregation and community the Pastor is a steward. No one needs to hear the Pastor's opinions or attitudes. Everyone needs to hear the Gospel. Sometimes, like the generous sower of the seed, he broadcasts the Gospel willy-nilly so that people have an opportunity to hear it. Sometimes, as wise as a serpent, he refuses to cast those pearls before the swine. Always, always, he is managing the mystery of the Gospel so that the kingdom may grow.

D. The distribution of the Gospel is a service.

This is no easy job. In fact, it is no job at all. It is a life of service. Like all forms of service there is a sense in which it is costly. The servant is not free to do as he chooses. He is not free to throw off the mantle of stewardship. In the freedom of the Gospel he joyously works for a loving master. Still, it is a servant's life. Here is how Paul describes a steward's life. *"For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship. What then is my reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel."* (I Cor. 9:16-18)

This is why in Titus 1:7 Paul says that the Pastor as steward must be above reproach. When a moral failure is apparent in the life of a servant of the Gospel it will reflect on the Gospel itself. Living in a glass house is a form of service that many men reject. Privacy, a much

cherished right of American civil life, may have snuck into our current understanding of the Pastoral office. It is not guaranteed to a steward. The accounts of a steward are always open.

III. Stewards are slaves to a Master.

Due to the clash of cultures it is absolutely necessary, at this point, to locate the concept of stewardship in the context in which the word would have been used in the first century. That context is slavery. Stewards are slaves.

A. On being a slave.

The notion of servitude is repulsive to twenty-first century Americans; the concept of slavery, an abomination. Man's inhumanity to man is not the only motivation here. Individual rights and freedom are held in the highest regard in our culture. They are considered to be the hallmark of civilized societies. So highly is freedom cherished that other virtues, such as responsibility, community and respect, suffer under its reign.

As a result of the value placed on freedom, Americans look with disdain upon those cultures where servitude is acceptable. The New Testament culture is no exception. When the concept of servitude or slavery is chanced upon in a study of the Bible, it is generally accorded the attitude one might have toward a demented uncle, "We don't talk about that." If the issue is forced, it is usually expressed with confusion, "Why doesn't the Bible speak out against slavery?" The answer is usually a placating platitude, "Slavery was acceptable in the first century Roman culture, and the New Testament writers were accommodating the culture even though they knew slavery could be abused." Rarely is the truth expressed, that slavery is a correct exhibition of one aspect of the Christian's relationship to God the Father.

There are at least eleven terms used in the New Testament to describe positions of service. The use of these terms appears to portray a spectrum of responsibility, if not authority. From the lowly under-rower, (υπηρετης, I Cor. 4:1), chained to the lower tier of oars in a warship, to the steward, (οικονομος, I Cor. 4:1), overseeing other slaves, the New Testament knows a lively hierarchy of forms of service. Two characteristics, however, are common. A slave is not his own. He is the possession of someone else, the master. Secondly, a slave does not act on his own will. He does what his master tells him to do.

As difficult as it may be to grasp, for Pastors who have never observed slavery, let alone experienced it, our understanding of stewarding the Gospel must be from within the context of slavery. We are not our own. We belong to our Heavenly Father. We have not the luxury of acting on our own will or word. We do and speak as He tells us. Thus, Paul writes in I Corinthians 9:17, *"For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship."* And Jesus, when describing the expectations placed on slaves, concludes that they are bound only to serve, *"So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'"* (Luke 17:10)

B. We serve God.

Our master is none other than our Heavenly Father. It is He who has given us the stewardship. *"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is*

lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known." (Col 1:25) The steward serves the one from whom his stewardship is given. In an objective sense then, we serve God alone. He tells us how we should behave. He gives us the Word that we are to speak.

C. We serve the Gospel.

Nonetheless, in a subjective sense it may also be said that we serve the Gospel. This treasure, given to the Church to manage, must be spoken. Although God could speak the Word of the Gospel into the hearts and minds of all men, He has chosen to use means of proclamation. He uses His people, and specifically at this juncture in the presentation, He uses Pastors. Thus, due to the limits God has placed on Himself we can say the Word of the Gospel must be spoken by someone. *"And how are they to hear without someone preaching?"* (Romans 10:14)

In this sense Pastors serve the Gospel. As stewards of it, they are responsible to determine when, where, and how the Gospel is to be proclaimed. It is essential, however, to understand this subjective service in two ways. Not only do we serve the Gospel by managing the manner in which it is proclaimed, but we also serve its content. In other words, a stewardship of the Gospel requires that the steward remain faithful to the content of the Gospel. (Cor. 4:2) The when, where and how of the stewardship must never impinge on the what of the Gospel. The steward dare not speak something other than what has been given. More will be said on this later.

D. We serve the Church and world.

There is a second subject of our service, people. Pastors also serve their hearers. On the one hand, the stewardship of the Gospel is given to Pastors to serve the Church, *"...assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you..."* (Eph 3:2), and *"...of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you..."* (Col 1:25, Emphases added.) God appointed Paul and all Pastors to manage the Gospel for the sake of the Church.

On the other hand, the stewardship of the Gospel is given to Pastors to serve the world. Paul recognizes his stewardship entails the proclamation of the Gospel to the world. *"To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God."* (Eph 3:8-9, Emphasis added.) By this stewardship God plans to bring everyone to Himself. *"...making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth."* (Eph 1:9-10, Emphasis added.)

Believers and unbelievers alike need to hear the Gospel. It is the power of God to salvation. Without it they are lost. The parable of the servants who were enjoined to invest the Gospel is clarified by this subjective sense of service. God does not invest the Gospel into the world in general. The Gospel cannot be invested into the air. It can only be invested, or proclaimed into the hearts of people. So the steward does just that, by managing the Gospel in

such a way that it can be heard by people, people who need to be saved from the damnation that follows in the absence of faith.

IV. The Gospel must be managed within a specific context.

The stewardship of the Gospel calls for great wisdom. Those who are stewards recognize that their sufficiency is not their own, but that it comes from God. Nonetheless, it is no easy task, in fact it is a noble task. The management of the Gospel calls for many difficult decisions to be made. Strong and faithful leadership skills are required. Each of the preceding propositions are founded on the premise that the Gospel must be managed within a specific context.

If this were not so then what would be the point of the office of local Pastor? Couldn't the Church be more efficient if there were fewer Pastors? In fact, in today's world of instant communication, why not just have one Pastor who preached to all the people who could listen in a given language? No, God created the office of Pastor so that someone could steward the proclamation of the Gospel in contexts specific enough that the Word of God would be applied to the lives of the hearers.

A. The Word of God remains the same.

Let us be careful to distinguish between context and message. Here is the most delicate duty a steward undertakes. It is one reason that God created the office of Pastor and the Church invented the office of supervision. The Word of God must be applied to the lives of the hearers in such a way that the Gospel is clear. There is one eternal Word. *"All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever." And this word is the good news that was preached to you.*" (1 Pet 1:24-25)

As the steward goes about the task of managing the Word of the Gospel he must be careful that all he says and does is congruent with the Word of God. *"Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy."* (1 Co 4:2) The Scripture is full of commands to proclaim the one true Word. *"Teach and urge these things. If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing."* (1 Ti 6:2-4) The first duty of the steward is to ensure a faithful proclamation of the Gospel.

B. The contexts in which it is proclaimed are different.

The Word of God is one and it is eternal. But the contexts in which that Word is proclaimed can differ widely. These varying contexts are due to the sin in men, and to the crafty deceit of satan. satan is too wise to use the same methods in every time and every place. Because certain sins dominate the landscape from time to time, and because the tactics of satan vary, the management of the Gospel must be sensitive to context. This is what stewards do. They manage the Gospel so that it can be applied in context.

Jesus may have been recognizing this aspect of stewardship when He told His disciples, *"Who then is the faithful and wise manager, (steward) whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time?"* (Lk 12:42) Notice that the

steward must be both faithful and wise. Take note also of the directions to give the servants their portion in the proper time. The implication is that the ration of food as well as the timing could be improper. Stewards must be faithful to the Word, and wise to the context.

Paul also asks for wisdom. He enjoins the Ephesians to pray for all the saints, *“and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.”* (Eph. 6:19-20) It seems that Paul may have an eye on the context in which he is proclaiming when he asks that effective words might be given to him and that he might be enabled to speak in the way that is necessary.

Even apart from the obvious contexts of ethnicity and language I submit that Pastors are constantly stewarding the Gospel in various contexts, too often without even realizing it. For example, proclaiming the Gospel to the elderly widow in her home soon after the death of her husband is a far different context than proclaiming it at the funeral that follows, where unbelievers are present. In this situation the faithful steward will carefully craft the proclamation of the same Gospel in two different ways due to the context. Likewise, proclaiming the Gospel to 5th grade catechism students in the Church, will require a different presentation than the steward will make to undergraduates in their campus student union. Again, it is the same Gospel but diverse contexts.

The list of examples is endless, and Pastors are constantly engaged in this aspect of stewardship. A problem may arise, however, if this becomes an unconscious task. In other words if the steward refuses to admit, or fails to recognize that he is being sensitive to context, he is far more apt to allow context to alter the Word of the Gospel than if he is conscious of contextualizing. It is a healthier practice for the steward to take the time to examine what criteria he uses to place the Gospel into context. In faithfulness and wisdom the steward manages the Gospel so that it remains true and can be heard by the listeners.

C. Stewards may disagree regarding the specifics of managing the Gospel.

It will come as no surprise that stewards often reach differing conclusions about the best tactics for managing the Gospel. If Pastors as stewards of the Gospel are responsible for making decisions within varying congregational contexts, a course for conflict has been set. It is true that in some cases contextualization is used as an excuse to compromise the Gospel. This is to be avoided at all costs. One of the aims of this paper is to unmask this circumstance as given to false doctrine. Another aim is to examine how stewards may follow divergent approaches to managing the Gospel. It is also true, then, that the freedom of the Gospel allows some room for conflicting tactics without sin.

Perhaps a couple of test cases may benefit the argument. Two Pastors are discussing how best to manage the Gospel during the Halloween season. One Pastor concludes that his people are too much influenced by the occult already. He encourages his people to ignore or to go on the offense against anything associated with Halloween. The other Pastor, sensing a pietistic attitude rising in his congregation, decides that the best way to invest the Gospel is to teach that satan has been defeated and that his people can use Halloween to mock the power of satan by making fun of him. Assuming both Pastors are sincere in their desire to manage the Gospel properly, is it necessary to declare that one or the other has reached the correct conclusion? Is it possible for stewards to disagree and still love and respect each other?

One Pastor recognizes an unhealthy isolation of his congregation from other Christians. He determines that a program of cooperating in externals with other Christians in order to accomplish services of mercy would be beneficial. Another Pastor, desiring to protect his people from the influence of heterodox teaching, resolves to avoid such programs. Is it possible for two such stewards, even when living within close proximity to each other to love and respect the stewardship of the Gospel that the other has set forth? How might stewards handle such differences?

This is not rocket science. Stewardship is the answer. The way of Americanized freedom will lead all parties to reject the others, declare themselves justified, while excoriating all those who disagree, and follow a path of isolationism. This method is alive and well in the Church today.

The way of stewardship is to confess our slavery to the Father, while seeking to build each other up in love. Stewards will boldly debate their management decisions, pursuing not the victory for a position, but the victory of faithful and wise investment of the Gospel message in the lives of its hearers. Stewards will also keep in mind that their management decisions may have deleterious effects on the stewardship of their neighbors. It is the proclamation of the Gospel that suffers when stewards fail to have these kinds of conversations.

V. Stewardship of the Gospel involves every aspect of Christian lives.

One more implication of this teaching on stewardship is left to us. The texts are ample describing the Pastor as a steward and calling him to manage the proclamation of the Gospel for the sake of the world and the Church. What about the rest of the Church? What role do the lay people play in stewardship?

A. Pastors are examples of stewardship to their people.

It is true that Pastors have the chief and public responsibility of managing the proclamation of the Gospel. However, certain aspects of the public life of the Pastor are to be imitated in the private lives of his members. Peter recognizes that Pastors are given the responsibility of oversight. He also says that Pastors are models of behavior for their people. *"...shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock."* (1 Pe 5:2-3, Emphasis added.)

Because of who they are, not because of what they do, Christians are all stewards of the Gospel. Earlier in this same Epistle, Peter had reminded the saints that God has made Christians be something they were not, prior to receiving faith in Jesus. *"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."* (1 Pe 2:9) Please note that all Christians are enjoined to proclaim the Gospel.

These two verses provide context for the use of the word "steward" by the Apostle Peter. This is the only New Testament text that unambiguously applies the concept of stewardship to lay people. As such it deserves some attention. *"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace."* (1 Pe 4:10) Because God has created new life in them through faith in Jesus, the people of God follow the example of

their Pastors in their personal stewardship of the Gospel. This text emphasizes again that no two believers are gifted in the same way. So, the decisions they make about managing their proclamation of the Gospel are dependent on God's varied grace.

B. God's gifts are given for the sake of the Gospel.

Since the Gospel is given to every Christian through faith in Jesus, each believer becomes a steward of that precious gift. Of course, this is not the only gift that God has given to His people. Everything that we are, and everything that we have is a gift of God. How are we to think of these gifts? This concept of stewardship instructs us that all of God's gifts are given as tools for the sake of managing the proclamation of the Gospel. Immediately after Peter tells the saints that they are stewards of God's varied grace he reminds them of the goal for which those gifts are given. *"...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."* (1 Pe 4:11)

God's gifts are to be used "in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ." When the Gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed, God is glorified. God's gifts are given for the sake of the Gospel.

God gives gifts to people. The skills, talents, abilities, interests, personality, etc. of each individual are all gifts. By God's varied grace the composite of all these gifts add up to our "station in life". That is, who we are, where we are, and what we do are all gifts of God given for the sake of managing the Gospel. These gifts are not given for our personal pleasure. They all serve in some way to ensure that the Gospel is proclaimed into every nook and cranny of this sin-cratered world. Stations in life are means by which Christians live for the sake of the Gospel and for the love of their neighbor.

In addition to station in life, God gives another more specific gift that normally goes by the name of vocation. Vocations have clear callings of God associated with them. For example, there is no Word of God that says Johann Schmidt must be a butcher. But if God gives him a wife and children, God has placed a clear calling, (vocation), on his life as husband and father. There are specific Scripture texts that define how the vocations of husband/wife, parent/child, employer/employee, etc, are to be lived out. Vocations are gifts of God, and each vocation is also given for the sake of the Gospel. From within their vocations, Christians live out love for their neighbor through his physical and spiritual well-being.

If this thesis holds true a radical reorientation may be in order for much of our lives. Stewards may legitimately ask, "How am I to use the skills, talents, abilities, interests and personality that God has given me to manage the Gospel? How am I to use my station life, my location and job to invest the Gospel in the lives of others? How do I manage the Gospel in the vocation of father, mother, son, or daughter?"

C. Stewardship puts every aspect of the Christian's life into a Gospel context.

Is being a steward too great a burden, always managing, always making important decisions? Certainly the unjust steward of Luke 16 thought so. Likewise, the least gifted servant of Matthew 25 sought to shirk the duty. They were without faith! The stewardship of the other two servants of Matthew 25 appears to be a joyful service. So it is that the stewardship of the Gospel is itself a gift where God is at work. Stewards are never alone. God

is at work through the gifts He has given, through our stations in life, through our vocations. God uses His people to invest the Gospel in the world.

This gift of stewardship gives meaning and purpose to every aspect of our lives. On the one hand, it can be powerful tool for examination. Piercing and difficult questions are part of the steward's life. "As a steward of the Gospel do I really want to spend four hours a day watching television? Do I want to spend \$2,000 building a deck on my house? Did my harshness with my children last night harm their ability to hear the Gospel?" Yes, this is law. It is deadly. God may use His law to lead to His Gospel, so as to kill sin in His stewards, for the purpose of directing them into more productive service. (John 15:2)

At the same time, this stewardship will bring every aspect of our lives into a joyful context of service. A selfish attitude of freedom falls flat when it comes to supplying meaning. But stewardship places our entire lives into its context. For example, a faithful laymen may take up the duty of shoveling the snow off the sidewalks at Church. He may work for years thinking that his job is to prevent a sidewalk-slip lawsuit. What if, instead, his work was put into the context of removing obstacles, that is, making it easier for people to hear the Gospel proclaimed? Then he could see his gifts as part of his stewardship of the Gospel.

The members of the Lady's Aid spend countless hours making anonymous sandwiches always hoping that no one will go away hungry from the funeral reception. That may turn out to be a thin motive for a thankless duty. What if they were taught that their hospitality were a gift of God that helped create a comfortable and welcoming setting for the hearing of the Gospel? The context that the stewardship of the Gospel provides is an invaluable gift.

That context can and should be applied to every aspect of our lives. Why do I have the job that I have? It is God's gift so that the Gospel may be applied in that setting by my words and actions. Why do I rest, and recreate? It is God's gift so that my body and mind may be well prepared to speak and live the Gospel. Why exercise; to maintain my health for proclamation. Why mow the lawn and trim the bushes; to avoid an offense that may harm my proclamation. Why take my family camping; to help them see the wonders of God's creation in the context of His new creation in Jesus. In short, there is nothing that a Christian does, (apart from sin), that cannot be understood as a means of stewarding the Gospel. This is a blessed gift.

Conclusion

The dominant teaching of the concept of stewardship in the Church today is not supported by Scripture. It is confusing, and provides opportunity for the mismanagement of the Gospel. The Church, for example, may end up managing money in the same way the world does. What good will a substantial bank account afford the Church when Jesus returns? There must be a higher good than managing tools for the sake of the tools.

A proper understanding of stewardship points God's people to the Gospel. Here is a treasure worth managing. Here is a Word worth investing in the lives of people. Understanding stewardship as the management of the Gospel is a blessing that offers meaning, purpose and joy to the steward's life.

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Montana District Pastor's Conference

10/18/12

S.D.G.

Appendices:

I. Stewardship- Greek

οἰκονόμος (10)

noun, accusative

οἰκονόμον (3), οἰκονόμους (2)

Luke 16:1

Ἔλεγεν δὲ καὶ πρὸς τοὺς μαθητάς· ἄνθρωπός τις ἦν πλούσιος ὃς εἶχεν **οἰκονόμον**, καὶ οὗτος διεβλήθη αὐτῷ ὡς διασκορπίζων τὰ ὑπάρχοντα αὐτοῦ.

Luke 16:8

καὶ ἐπῆνεσεν ὁ κύριος τὸν **οἰκονόμον** τῆς ἀδικίας ὅτι φρονίμως ἐποίησεν· ὅτι οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου φρονημώτεροι ὑπὲρ τοὺς υἱοὺς τοῦ φωτός εἰς τὴν γενεάν τὴν ἐαυτῶν εἰσιν.

1 Cor 4:1

Οὕτως ἡμᾶς λογιζέσθω ἄνθρωπος ὡς ὑπηρέτας Χριστοῦ καὶ **οἰκονόμους** μυστηρίων θεοῦ.

Gal 4:2

ἀλλὰ ὑπὸ ἐπιτρόπους ἐστὶν καὶ **οἰκονόμους** ἄχρι τῆς προθεσμίας τοῦ πατρὸς.

Titus 1:7

δεῖ γὰρ τὸν ἐπίσκοπον ἀνέγκλητον εἶναι ὡς θεοῦ **οἰκονόμον**, μὴ αὐθάδη, μὴ ὀργίλον, μὴ πάροινον, μὴ πλήκτην, μὴ αἰσχροκερδῆ,

noun, dative

οἰκονόμοις

1 Cor 4:2

ὧδε λοιπὸν ζητεῖται ἐν τοῖς **οἰκονόμοις**, ἵνα πιστός τις εὐρεθῆ.

noun, nominative

οἰκονόμοι, οἰκονόμος (3)

Luke 12:42

καὶ εἶπεν ὁ κύριος· τίς ἄρα ἐστὶν ὁ πιστός **οἰκονόμος** ὁ φρόνιμος, ὃν καταστήσει ὁ κύριος ἐπὶ τῆς θεραπείας αὐτοῦ τοῦ διδόναι ἐν καιρῷ [τὸ] σιτομέτριον;

Luke 16:3

εἶπεν δὲ ἐν ἑαυτῷ ὁ **οἰκονόμος**· τί ποιήσω, ὅτι ὁ κύριός μου ἀφαιρεῖται τὴν οἰκονομίαν ἀπ' ἐμοῦ; σκάπτειν οὐκ ἰσχύω, ἐπαιτεῖν αἰσχύνομαι.

Rom 16:23

ἀσπάζεται ὑμᾶς Γάϊος ὁ ξένος μου καὶ ὅλης τῆς ἐκκλησίας. ἀσπάζεται ὑμᾶς Ἔραστος ὁ **οἰκονόμος** τῆς πόλεως καὶ Κούαρτος ὁ ἀδελφός.

1 Pet 4:10

ἕκαστος καθὼς ἔλαβεν χάρισμα εἰς ἑαυτοὺς αὐτὸ διακονοῦντες ὡς καλοὶ **οἰκονόμοι** ποικίλης χάριτος θεοῦ.

οἰκονομέω (1)

verb, present, active, infinitive

οἰκονομεῖν

Luke 16:2

καὶ φωνήσας αὐτὸν εἶπεν αὐτῷ· τί τοῦτο ἀκούω περὶ σοῦ; ἀπόδος τὸν λόγον τῆς οἰκονομίας σου, οὐ γὰρ δύνη ἔτι **οἰκονομεῖν**.

οἰκονομία (9)

noun, accusative

οἰκονομίαν (6)

Luke 16:3

εἶπεν δὲ ἐν ἑαυτῷ ὁ οἰκονόμος· τί ποιήσω, ὅτι ὁ κύριός μου ἀφαιρεῖται τὴν **οἰκονομίαν** ἀπ' ἐμοῦ; σκάπτειν οὐκ ἰσχύω, ἐπαιτεῖν αἰσχύνομαι.

1 Cor 9:17

εἰ γὰρ ἐκὼν τοῦτο πράσσω, μισθὸν ἔχω· εἰ δὲ ἄκων, **οἰκονομίαν** πεπίστευμαι·

Eph 1:10

εἰς **οἰκονομίαν** τοῦ πληρώματος τῶν καιρῶν, ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ, τὰ ἐπὶ τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἐν αὐτῷ.

Eph 3:2

- εἴ γε ἠκούσατε τὴν **οἰκονομίαν** τῆς χάριτος τοῦ θεοῦ τῆς δοθείσης μοι εἰς ὑμᾶς,

Col 1:25

ἧς ἐγενόμην ἐγὼ διάκονος κατὰ τὴν **οἰκονομίαν** τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν δοθεῖσάν μοι εἰς ὑμᾶς πληρῶσαι τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ,

1 Tim 1:4

μηδὲ προσέχειν μύθοις καὶ γενεαλογίαις ἀπεράντοις, αἵτινες ἐκζητήσεις παρέχουσιν μάλλον ἢ **οἰκονομίαν** θεοῦ τὴν ἐν πίστει.

noun, genitive

οἰκονομίας (2)

Luke 16:2

καὶ φωνήσας αὐτὸν εἶπεν αὐτῷ· τί τοῦτο ἀκούω περὶ σοῦ; ἀπόδος τὸν λόγον τῆς **οἰκονομίας** σου, οὐ γὰρ δύνη ἔτι οἰκονομεῖν.

Luke 16:4

ἔγνω τὴν ποιήσω, ἵνα ὅταν μετασταθῶ ἐκ τῆς **οἰκονομίας** δέξωνταί με εἰς τοὺς οἴκους αὐτῶν.

noun, nominative

οἰκονομία

Eph 3:9

καὶ φωτίσαι [πάντας] τίς ἡ **οἰκονομία** τοῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ ἀποκεκρυμμένου ἀπὸ τῶν αἰώνων ἐν τῷ θεῷ τῷ τὰ πάντα κτίσαντι

II. Stewardship- English

Noun, masculine- Steward (10)

Luke 12:42 “Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time?”

Luke 16:1 He also said to the disciples, “There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions.

Luke 16:3 And the manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me?’

Luke 16:8 The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness.

Romans 16:23 Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you.

I Cor 4:1 This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

I Cor 4:2 Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.

Gal 4:2 but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father.

Titus 1:7 For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach.

I Peter 4:10 As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace:

Verb, infinitive (1)

Luke 16:2 Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.

Noun, feminine- Stewardship (9)

Luke 16:2 Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.

Luke 16:3 And the manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me?’

Luke 16:4 I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.

I Cor 9:17 For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship.

Eph 1:10 according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

Eph 3:2 assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you,

Eph 3:9 and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God

Col 1:25 of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known

I Tim 1:4 to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.

All English Scripture Texts: *The Holy Bible : English Standard Version*. Wheaton : Standard Bible Society, 2001, S.

All Greek Scripture Texts: Aland, Barbara ; Aland, Kurt ; Black, Matthew ; Martini, Carlo M. ; Metzger, Bruce M. ; Wikgren, Allen: *The Greek New Testament*. 4th ed. Federal Republic of Germany : United Bible Societies, 1993, c1979.