

Discipleship: Faith and Stewardship

Luke 16:1–17:10

16:1–13 Men's Love for the Father Is Contrasted with Riches

Jesus used the parable of the shrewd steward (16:1–8) to make a comparison between the handling of earthly and spiritual affairs. These verses are closely linked with the three parables in Luke 15. Luke 15 concerned Jesus' response to the Pharisees' criticism of his welcoming sinners (15:1). God's love for sinners caused him to seek them out as the three parables in Luke 15 demonstrate. In Luke 16 Jesus brings his lesson home to the Pharisees. The parable concerns a servant who does everything he can to smooth his way with potential masters. Jesus encouraged his listeners to work just as hard to keep the way smooth with their heavenly Master. But because of the Pharisees' love for money (16:13–14), they were, in reality, the same as the sinners they condemned in 15:2. But the Pharisees, like everyone else, were sought after by the loving Father and would also have to conform to all of God's unchangeable law (16:16). The master commended the steward, not

for his dishonesty, but for his wise foresight in preparing for the future (16:8). Similarly, the believer is to make wise use of material resources so that they will bring eternal benefit and reward. Jesus also warned his listeners that they needed to recognize the danger of money becoming the master and God taking second place (16:13). The transition from 16:13 to 16:14 shows that the following section also concerns the use of money.

Reason for Stewardship

Instead of needing our gifts, God gives us the things necessary for life—life itself, breath, and every material thing. True, the Bible teaches the stewardship of life and substance. However, God is not within Himself dependent on such. Stewardship is designed to develop His people, whose very gifts are a recognition that all belongs to Him and comes from Him.



Stewardship

Opportunities

1 Cor. 16:5-9

“Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:15–16, niv). Paul was as careful in his use of time as he was in his use of money. Someone has said that killing time is the chief occupation of modern society, but no Christian can afford to kill time or waste opportunities.

Paul informed his friends at Corinth of his plans for future travel and ministry. It is worth noting that his statements were very tentative: “It may be suitable ... it may be ... wherever I go ... but I trust.” Of course, the entire plan was dependent on God's providential leading: “if the Lord permit.” Paul's attitude toward his future plans agreed with the injunctions in James 4:13–17.

Paul was at Ephesus when he wrote this letter. His plan

was to travel to Macedonia for a time of ministry (*pass through* in 1 Cor. 16:5 means “travel in a systematic ministry”), winter at Corinth, and then go to Judea with the collection. From November to February, it was impossible to travel by ship; so it would have been convenient for Paul to stay at Corinth and be with his friends. There were some problems to solve in the church and Paul had promised to come to help the leaders (1 Cor. 11:34).

However, various circumstances forced Paul to revise his plans at least twice. His “Plan B” was to visit Corinth, then travel through Macedonia, passing through Corinth a second time on his way to Judea (2 Cor. 1:15–16). Instead of one long visit, he planned two shorter visits; but even this plan did not materialize. “Plan C” turned out to be a quick and painful visit to Corinth, after which he returned to Ephe-

sus. He then went to Troas to wait for Titus (who had been sent to Corinth, 2 Cor. 2:12–13; 7:5ff), visited Macedonia, and then went to Judea. He did not spend as much time at Corinth as he had hoped or as they had expected.

The stewardship of glory

Luke 21:1-4

SUPPORTING

IDEA: *Stewardship is judged on what you have left, not what you give.*

21:1. In the temple, teaching as usual during these final days, Jesus noticed the rich dropping their offerings into the temple coffers. The way they did it, one could hardly fail to notice them. They did this as they prayed (20:47) for show, to be seen by others.

21:2. Jesus did not focus on the rich. He zeroed in on a poor widow. She had two lepta, each worth about one one-hundredth of a denarius, the coin used for a day laborer's daily wage. Thus, her contribution to the temple was tiny in terms of monetary value.

21:3. But her two lepta had spiritual power. They form the subject for teaching Christian stewardship to this day. Why

are they so important? Jesus valued these “worthless” coins as worth more than all the rich people had put in.

21:4. Jesus' reasoning is simple. The rich gave from their abundance, leaving much more for themselves. The widow gave from abject poverty, leaving nothing for herself. They gave out of discretionary funds. She gave her bread money. Giving is judged by the degree of sacrifice.

Freeing truths

2 Cor. 8:1-9

While Paul did not manipulate, he did not hesitate to teach truths which release Christians from fear and from bondage to the material. Like Paul we might remind others of God's great gift in Christ. We might emphasize God's commitment to us, and affirm that we cannot outgive a God who is able to make all grace abound to us. We might also teach that the person who gives sparingly will reap sparingly, and that giving generates many spiritual benefits.

These are principles we need to implement in our churches. But before we apply them to stewardship in the church, we can apply them in our own lives. As we take to

heart the truths Paul taught here, we experience both freedom and release. We are freed from compulsion in our Christian lives. And, through growing trust in God, we are released from our bondage to possessions and enabled to respond freely, and generously, to meet others' needs.

Definition

stewardship—Human responsibility to manage resources that God has placed in one's care

The Christian Life

A second area of concern in Luke-Acts involves possessions. No other books in the NT are as concerned about the Christian's relationship to material possessions. Within Luke's writings are several passages that appear to teach the need for Christians to renounce all personal possessions. For example we read, “Sell your possessions” (12:33), or, “Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple” (14:33). Luke quoted Jesus' words to the rich ruler found in Mark but intensified the demands by adding “everything”: “You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.

And come, follow me” (18:22). Elsewhere we find in Luke an emphasis on generosity and the giving of alms.⁸² The danger of possessions is emphasized (12:13–21; 16:10–13, 19–31) because a primary reason for the choking of God's word is riches (8:14). Disciples should use possessions to obtain treasure in heaven (12:33–34; 16:9; 18:22). “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35); and the generosity of Tabitha (Acts 9:36), Cornelius (Acts 10:2, 4, 31), the centurion (Luke 7:5), the good Samaritan (10:34–35), and the women who followed Jesus (8:3) are held up to the reader as exemplary.

Meaning Of Stewardship

A man doesn't decide to become a steward after he has been saved, nor after he begins to make good money. He *is* a steward—good or bad—when he becomes a Christian. Stewardship in the Christian life demands that a man take good care of his financial affairs because he has been commissioned by Christ to manage those affairs for the Lord.