

Am I My Brother's Keeper?

Stewardship and the Body of Christ

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We are going to pick up our study on being a good steward today, and we are going to double click on one of those areas of stewardship.

As God creates man in His image back in Genesis 1:28, He immediately assigns a role, and that role is to be stewards, to manage, grow, multiply what God created here on earth. And to this day, that is our primary role, to be good stewards over everything God has placed into our care. Reading now, we get a little more instruction here on being a good steward.

Genesis 2:15 Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.

To tend means simply to work or serve, and to keep, that is *Strong's* #H8104 *shamar*, which means "to hedge, guard, protect, keep, preserve." The underlying definition of stewardship we find here is to tend and keep, work and serve, guard and protect, to multiply everything put into our care.

Please turn to Luke 12. (We will get there in just a minute.) Now as a brief recap here, a steward is a temporary delegated role to oversee an owner's possessions. It usually starts with some basic responsibility over something small, and after time, after demonstrated success, the steward is gradually promoted into a larger role, a larger responsibility, eventually perhaps even over an entire kingdom. A steward does not get to choose what is put into their care. The master does that. A steward does not get to set forth the rules. The master sets forth the guidelines by which the steward must manage everything in their care. And a steward must carefully tend and manage the master's possessions to increase everything put into their care. That is how the master measures success of the steward; the increase, the return on investment, we could say.

Now we are reminded in Deuteronomy 8, that our Master brought us out of slavery and is elevated into a position of stewardship. And we are warned, we tend to be a bit forgetful as things go well for us as stewards, we sometimes forget these are not our own possessions. We sometimes forget everything belongs to God. We sometimes forget and maybe stop keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes, and He warns us that will not go well. We must always manage everything put into our care according to His law, according to His will. And we must always remember everything we have belongs to God, up to and including our very life. He bought it. He owns it. We could jot down Psalm 24:1, "The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness."

So He assigns us as mere stewards over what He chooses to put into our care, and we know faithfulness and stewardship are linked. We are in that temporary role of a steward to tend, that is, work and serve and keep, guard and protect everything in our care in order to grow and multiply it for our Master, God the Father.

Luke 12:42-44 And the Lord said, "Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all he has."

Let us pause there. So we see the reward for the faithful steward. He is given more responsibility up to everything the master has.

Luke 12:46 "The master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers."

We are reading here now the penalty to the unfaithful steward. And if we pick up at verse 48,

Luke 12:48 "For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required [this is at the end]; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask more."

So we see here some very interesting things about being a steward. There is a great reward, an eternal reward to being a faithful steward. And then there is a terrible reward for being unfaithful in anything that God places into our care.

Over four chapters now, let us go to Luke 16 and pick up again Jesus Christ's instruction here on being a good steward.

Luke 16:1-2 He also said to His disciples, "There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. So he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.'

We are not going to read the rest of this one, but I think the key point I wanted to call out here is, in the end, the steward is brought before the master, and we have to give an account for how we have handled everything he has placed into our care.

Luke 16:10-12 "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own?"

So the faithful and wise steward here knows the role is temporary. They are carrying out their master's will diligently, working every day to guard, protect, multiply the master's possessions. They are always ready for the

master's return. That faithful steward is rewarded with even more accountability and eternal life, but the lazy steward is literally destroyed, cut in two. They earn eternal death. To whom much is given, much is required.

God, the Master, expects a return on investment from His stewards, and He has invested a lot in each and every one of us. He has invested His Son Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for us. That was His investment for our salvation. There is no bigger investment, no bigger sacrifice that could ever be made.

We must prioritize the spiritual, of course, but we can never be lazy and unfaithful stewards over the physical. We must use the physical, Jesus tells us, to bring glory to God and build up His Family. We know the master is watching carefully. He is watching carefully to see if we are going to be faithful stewards over the little things and thereby to see if we are worthy of more responsibility, like eventually, eternal life.

We are all stewards over many things, brethren. Everything we have is God's. It is temporarily put into our care, but by far the most important thing that we are stewards over is our relationships—our relationship, first and foremost, with God the Father and our relationship with God's Family.

So first and foremost is our relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ our Savior. This *must* be at the very top of our stewardship hierarchy. Jesus Christ sacrificed, cleansed us of our sins, and brought us into that relationship with God. Our job as a steward over that relationship is what? It is to tend, to work, and serve according to His will, and it is to guard and protect, to cleave onto that relationship because that is the most important relationship, the most important thing that we have. Our relationship with God, our obedience to His law, and His enabling Spirit must underpin our stewardship over everything else. That has to come first, just like that burnt offering.

Now next in our stewardship hierarchy, and we are going to spend some time on this one today, is our relationship with God's most prized possession on earth. Do you know what it is? It is not a trick question. It is the Body of

Christ. It is all of us. We are His most prized possession on earth. And we have an accountability as stewards, we must carefully tend, work, serve and keep, guard and protect to build up God's Family.

You know, we could say the B.L.O.T. of the entire Bible is this, the entirety of God's plan is all about building, expanding, and growing His Family. This is what is most important to Him, our relationship with Him and our relationship in the Body of Christ. Everything God does aligns to this one overarching purpose of expanding and growing the God Family. Let that sink in. And if we want to be like God, then we too must become faithful stewards and carefully tend, work and serve and keep, guard and protect, to bring glory to God and build up the Body of Christ.

We are going to pick back up in I Peter 4. And as you are turning and getting there, I am going to set some context by reading the lead-in verse here in verse 7. "But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers," Peter says. So this is to grab our attention here.

I Peter 4:8 And above all things have fervent love one for another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins."

He says *above all things*, not above some things, but above all things, have this fervent love for one another. Now this is an intentional, sacrificial, selfless, and Christ-like love. Why is this so important in being a good steward over the Body of Christ? Well, because without it, without God's Spirit in us, we cannot properly work and serve, guard and protect His Family. He has to create that capability in us and we get it through our relationship with Him.

Remember, each of us is a God-given gift to each of us. God the Father has hand selected each and every one of us in the greater church of God to be right here, so that we could do what? So that we could grow together and mature together into the very image of our great God. How awesome is that! Each of us has an opportunity to learn and build together. But here is the problem, we are all different. Different backgrounds, different gifts, different idiosyncrasies. (I mean, believe it or not, we actually have a Cleveland Browns fan among us.)

We have different strengths and weaknesses; introverts, extroverts, shy and reserved, energetic and outgoing. We all give and receive love in different ways. We have been raised different ways, and some of us are more secure than others because of that. And inevitably all these differences do what? Create friction, create tension. We get irritated with each other because they are doing something different than I think they should do or they are not behaving like I think they should behave or they are not responding the way I want them to respond.

And yes, we inevitably hurt feelings because of our differences. We do not mean to, but we do. We all make mistakes, we are all sinners, and it is very easy for us to see each other's mistakes, but we are often blinded to our own. Peter is telling us "above all things," because the only way we can overlook all the warts and blemishes, our collective faults is if we have God's Spirit within us, we can see past those issues and see what God sees in us, the diamond in the rough, so to speak, spiritually. The only way we do that is through His Spirit; and how do we get His Spirit? Through our relationship, first and foremost with Him, and then He enables us to be effective at being a good steward over the Body of Christ. This does not come naturally, brethren. It does not come naturally.

I Peter 4:9 Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.

Be hospitable without grumbling. There is a caveat there. We have got to both be hospitable and we cannot complain about it. Wow, high demands. It turns out things probably were not too different back then in Peter's day. They were busy, probably busier than us. They did not have the conveniences of running water and electricity, dishwashers, tractors, you name it. Everyone was busy; and entertaining, being hospitable, takes a lot of effort, takes a lot of work on top of our normal day job, does it not? Many of us are so consumed with the workweek, the last thing we want to even think about doing is having people over and entertaining, especially a bunch of imperfect people. I am kidding, we are all imperfect. We just want to come home, relax, and veg out sometimes.

But we see the admonition to be hospitable here because it is in our best interest. Everything written, every instruction from God is written because it is in our best interest. Every law of God is in our best interest. We do it not

just because He says to do it, we do it because it is actually what is best for us and being hospitable, being together, entertaining is good for us. It creates an opportunity for us to learn from each other to get over the friction, right? To see past that and to grow in God's Spirit. You can jot down a few. I Timothy 3:2, be given a hospitality. Titus 1:8, a lover of hospitality. Romans 12:13, distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.

Remember, we are all different, with different gifts. Some of us have more space and capability to entertain and therefore, we have got more accountability. We can be hospitable right here. Right? We can be hospitable through fellowship, through service by bringing a snack after services. Us extroverts tend to be a bit more wired to entertaining and being amongst a group of people, but we all have to work at this, even our introverts.

And as stewards, we have an accountability to be hospitable, and we must do it without grumbling. We cannot worry about who entertained the last time. We cannot feel resentment about the fact that we are the one always doing the inviting. Remember, we are mere stewards overseeing what belongs to our Master, not what belongs to us. The only question is, in the Master's eyes, are we a faithful steward? Are we tending, working and serving and keeping, guarding and protecting to build up His Family?

I Peter 4:10 As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

Now, the underlying Greek word translated 'gift' here has a very broad meaning, basically anything put into our care that could be beneficial to someone else. It includes all spiritual and physical gifts that we can contribute to build up, encourage, and support others. Our homes, our possessions, our money, our time, our words, our ability to sing, whatever it is. All of these things can be used to build up the Body of Christ. And as stewards, everything put in our care should be used for the Master's purpose, which is to build up His Family.

Now we see here a good steward by definition ministers to one another. This is not preaching, alright? We are not all called to be preachers. The Greek word here translated 'minister' is actually translated 'serve' many times as well. It is found here in verses 10 and 11. It has a much broader usage. It

Strong's #1247 diakoneó. It is a Greek verb describing the action of working and serving as an attendant, a host, a waiter in hospitality (we just read about that), or a deacon. It describes the action of a steward, tending and keeping. A steward who uses everything in their care to serve and build up the church of God.

Hold your finger here and let us flip to Luke 22. We are going to the dispute among the disciples: Who is going to be the greatest in the Kingdom, they want to know. And they are arguing amongst each other and Jesus overhears this. So here in Luke 22, this dispute over who is going to be the greatest, Jesus responds with something like, do not be like the carnal rulers who are seeking power for themselves. To be greatest in the Kingdom, you must humble yourself. And then picking up verse 26, He uses the same word, *diakoneó*, twice.

Luke 22:26 "But not so among you; on the contrary, he was greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves."

Normally, the older person or the elected ruler holds the authority and the power, but Jesus says the greatest in the Kingdom is he who *diakoneó*, serves, tends, and keeps.

Luke 22:27 "For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves [*diakoneó*]."

As the epitome of a faithful steward, Jesus Christ uses the same word in Matthew 20 and Mark 10, the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, to serve, and give His life a ransom for many.

Back to I Peter 4.

I Peter 4:11 If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers [same word here, *diakoneó*], let him do it as

with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

As a good steward over all of our relationships in the church, we must only speak words inspired by God's Spirit of love; note, which *He* supplies, and we use it to tend and keep, to work, to serve, to guard, protect, and to build up so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. So we will be held accountable to every word we speak. We know this. It is a scary thought, brethren. Did we speak from God's Spirit of love and humility to build up and produce good, peaceable fruit, or did we let Satan get the better of us this time and speak words that tear down and accuse? Satan has used a deceitful tactic from the very beginning of time to inflate our ego, to try to assume a broader role, a larger role, to assume God has given us the ability to think for ourselves and make our own decisions that we know best, to think we have the ability to judge and that we need to be out here correcting everyone else.

Let us go all the way back to the beginning, to the beginning of human relationships where we see Satan's tactic being used in Genesis 4.

Genesis 4:1 Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, "I have acquired a man from the Lord."

The wording here, "acquired a man from God" suggests Eve thought Cain was the fulfillment of God's Messianic prophecy found in Genesis 3:15. There is further evidence that she could have had this on her mind in Genesis 4:25, which records the birth of Seth when she states, "for God has appointed another seed for me." So it appears there is a good chance Cain was raised with a bit of a messiah complex and saw himself as far superior to his little brother. And we could recall Christ's words in Luke 22:26, "Who was greater in the kingdom? Let him be as the younger." It is kind of an interesting tie-in. And if we tied into Jude 11,

Jude 11 Woe to them, for they have gone the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.

We get a sense here of the underlying prideful, self-serve, self-centered, and rebellious attitude of Cain. Cain wanted to worship on his own terms. As David [Grabbe] points out in a *CGG Weekly*, "Cain's Assumption" (I think it may be a two-parter to warn you, not positive on that.), God's instructions and lesson of the burnt offering and meal offerings make it abundantly clear.

We cannot be truly devoted to our brother without first being fully devoted to God. The burnt offering always preceded the meal offering, but the two always went hand-in-hand, one on top of the other. Cain's offering was rejected because it skipped the necessary steps of atonement and devotion to God before devotion to man.

We could tie into Hebrews 11:4, "By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice," and see that Cain's sacrifice lacked the essential quality of faith and obedience to God's instruction. Picking up now, Genesis 4:5 as we build on the story.

Genesis 4:5-7 But He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. So the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it."

So God accepted Abel's offering. He rejected Cain's, and this led to Cain being furious. The underlying Hebrew here makes it clear he was not just angry. He blazed up. He was hot in jealousy. Cain's messiah complex could not accept that his younger brother had done something better than him. He simply could not take correction of any kind. God sees Cain's heart, and He warns, "Sin is at [your] door."

And this is the first biblical example of human conflict. We see the underlying attitude that drives conflict between two people: prideful jealousy, envy, and self-seeking. If in our heart and mind we have any ill will towards anyone else in the church, the root is Satan's spirit of envy, pride, and jealousy. Behind every single thought or negative word spoken about someone else is a desire to elevate ourselves. We want more position, we want more recognition, we want more possessions.

Genesis 4:8 Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; . . .

Sounds pretty nice. They had a little casual chat. But let us pause here. He is not talking to his brother: Yo, hey, bro, how you doing? No, the underlying word translated 'talk' means "to boast oneself, to challenge, to charge, to speak against with the underlying attitude of envy and prideful jealousy." Cain is now boasting and challenging his brother, saying something probably like, "You know, my offering took a lot more work than yours, but for some reason, God like yours better. That's not fair."

Genesis 4:8 . . . and it came to pass when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and killed him.

And we see here, as we examined a few weeks back, our words, our thoughts, our actions simply mirror what is in our hearts. When we speak against or do something against a brother or sister in the church, it is because of what is in our hearts. Evil, just like Cain. In there is an underlying prideful jealousy or envy. When we speak negative words, we are murdering our brother or sister. That is the complete opposite of working, serving, guarding, protecting, to build up.

Now we are going to tie this directly into our responsibility as stewards now. Picking up verse 9.

Genesis 4:9 Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?"

Imagine we are standing before God right now, and He is asking us the same question about anyone that we have murdered with our thoughts or words in the past. The righteous Judge is looking in our heart and asking us to give account for our stewardship accountability for what He has put into our care. The thing that He cares the most about, His prized possession, the Body of Christ. Maybe someone said or did something they should not have done. We retaliated. We attacked their character with murderous words. Maybe, just like Cain, deep down we are envious of success or recognition, friends, possessions. But regardless of why we thought or said negative things, the righteous Judge is asking us, "Where is so-and-so, your brother or sister?"

Why have you alienated them? Why have you murdered them with your thoughts and your words?"

As we examine Cain's flippant response, "Am I my brother's keeper?" we find that exact same word we looked at earlier in Genesis 2:15 as God assigns Adam and Eve as stewards to tend and keep everything He places into their care. Keep, *shamar*, hedge, guard, protect, preserve, save, watch over. Cain's response reveals what was in his heart. He did not acknowledge any accountability for watching over his younger brother. He did not acknowledge that he truly was a steward, his brother's keeper, and he failed. He failed at being a faithful steward over that relationship.

Please turn to Matthew 25 as we start to conclude. Got a little bit left to go though, I warn you. God has assigned us to be faithful stewards to tend, to work and serve and keep, guard and protect and build up all of His possessions. And God's most precious possession on earth is the Body of Christ, His future eternal Family, each and every one of us are precious to God. He tells us this in so many scriptures. He has called us to be stewards over all, *every* relationship that we have in the greater church of God. Each and every one of us is a gift to each and every one of us. Are we as faithful stewards using every gift, every action, every word to build up His church? Are we our brother's keeper? Are we guarding, protecting, serving each other?

What sets the end time parable in Matthew 25 apart is that Jesus specifically focuses on works of service regarding our relationships with our brethren. As we summarize Matthew 25:31-36: Then the King will say to those on His right hand, "Come, you blessed of My Father, and inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For when I was in need, you were a faithful servant to tend and keep Me. And as much as you did it to one of the least of these, My brethren, you did it to Me."

But after hearing their punishment for being unfaithful stewards, the goats on the left respond in verse 44: When did we see You in need and not minister to You, they ask. And here we find that same word in this end time judgment that we looked into earlier, *diakoneó*, which Paul uses to define a faithful steward who carefully uses all God-given gifts to serve one another. It is the same word Jesus uses to describe who will be greatest in the Kingdom of

God in Luke 22:26-27. It is the same word Jesus uses to describe Himself over and over in Matthew 20:10 when He says, "I came to serve, not to be served."

Matthew 25:45-46 "Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it [*diakoneó*] to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

We are called to tend and keep, that is, work and serve, guard and protect, to build up God's Family. Our faithful stewardship, our work of service to build up our brethren in all circumstances, is the true sign of God's Spirit, and this is at the center of judgment and the reward of eternal life in the Kingdom. Our acts of service or lack thereof to our brethren are equivalent here to acts of service or lack thereof to Jesus Christ Himself.

A steward does not get to choose what is placed into their care. The master does that. Jesus states clearly, "Inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these [My people], you did not do it to Me." Just one person that we neglect. One person, when we are an unfaithful steward, brethren, leads to a very bad judgment here. If we are neglecting anyone in God's church, God is calling to us, "Where is so-and-so right now? Why have you alienated them? Why have you murdered them with your thoughts and your words?"

And as we learn from this parable, what God is really asking us is, "Why have you alienated Me? Why have you murdered Me with your words? Why have you not serviced Me in my time of need?"

In the end we will all give account for our stewardship over the Body of Christ, His most prized possession. We must remember it all starts with our relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ through prayer, Bible study, fasting, and obedience. We gain love, God's love, through the Spirit of God, which is poured into our hearts by and through His Holy Spirit. And when we have it, just like God the Father and Jesus Christ, through their enabling Spirit, we can always be tending, working and servicing, guarding and keeping, protecting and building up the Body of Christ.