

## Stewardship

The Biblical Meaning

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If you keep up with what the evangelicals are doing you know that the subject of stewardship is one of their favorite topics, and it has been for maybe five years now. They have books that you can get in the local Bible bookstore. And as Protestants do, they have made this concept very Protestant—that is, they have made it a fairly sappy, sweet, and sentimental Christian idea.

For those of us in the churches of God, the idea of stewardship is well known. However we do not usually call it "stewardship." We tend to shy away from Protestant terminology just because it is, well, Protestant. Most of us instead would use the terms "responsibility," or "accountability" for what we have been given. Occasionally we will call it stewardship, but most of the time we will talk about being responsible and accountable for what God has given us. And really in the end, we use another term, "fulfilling our calling," because this is really what good stewardship is.

Today we are going to take a look at what the Bible says about being stewards of God. We will look at good stewards and bad. We will look at what God expects of us, and how we can become even better stewards.

The logical place to start is to ask, "What is a steward?" The word, steward, has an interesting etymology. It literally means, "sty-ward"—the manager of the pigsty. Pretty high quality, huh? In the original Anglo-Saxon, it is a pig keeper. Later, it was applied to the person who managed the activities in a nobleman's hall. He was the ward, or manager, of that place where the king or a nobleman would welcome guests, hear requests, make judgments, hold feasts, and other sorts of things. He was in charge of making sure that there was plenty of food for everybody, and that the guests were introduced and dismissed at the proper times, and so forth.

But over time, a steward's responsibilities expanded to include the management of the entire estate of the nobleman, or other rich men. If he had a business, then a steward would be the chief manager of that business for him. He would supervise servants or employees. Depending on the sort of business that it happened to be, he would collect rents, or payments; he would keep the books; he would order provisions and supplies making sure that the storeroom was kept well stocked. And, he did many other things that the boss either could not do, or did not need to be bothered with.

The word manager has replaced this term. We do not use steward very much anymore. We have even dropped the term for the stewards and stewardesses on passenger planes; they are now flight attendants. So really, it is a word that just about only has its theological meanings left to it in our everyday life, such as in the Parable of the Unjust Steward.

Stewardship, then, is the conducting, supervising, or managing of something. And it usually means, "The careful and responsible management of something that has been entrusted into your care." We use it like, "The nation is responsible for the stewardship of its natural resources."

Or, you have been given a sum of money in trust (a trustee); you would be a steward of that money. For example, in terms of money, the Church of the Great God expects our accountant, who handles our investments we have for a "rainy day," to be a responsible steward of that money held in trust for us.

The Bible's use of the term "steward" is very similar to the dictionary definition of the term. The Old Testament uses a phrase that means, "One who is over a house," just like Joseph was a steward over the household of Potiphar. Another word is the Hebrew *shofet*, which means basically the same thing, but it has a more governmental connotation to it. It is an officer responsible for the king's house. We would probably use the term "treasurer," or "chamberlain" instead of steward, but it is the same idea. He is the chief officer of a royal court. And in Isaiah 22:15, there was Shebna who was called the treasurer of the court, and he was replaced because he was not being responsible.

If you remember the book, *The Lord of the Rings*, there was a city called Minas Tirith that had lost its king, and the stewards who were regents over that city ruled that city-state for hundreds of years. And when the king returned, as faithful stewards should be, they turned the city back over to the king.

Other words translated "steward" in the Bible may specifically mean "leader," "officer," "commander," or "overseer." The New Testament only uses two words for this idea. The Greek words *epitropos* and *oikonomos*. *Epitropos* means "One to whose care something is committed." Sounds like steward to me. It is translated as steward, guardian, and even tutor. The verb form, *epotropae*, means "to turn over to," like a rich man will turn over his estate to his steward while he is gone. It is used in a situation with the apostle Paul, in a negative light, when he was "commissioned" by the priests in Jerusalem to go to Damascus and put into prison true believers of the way. He was commissioned—made a steward—of this task, and sent to Damascus to carry it out. This word is also found in Matthew 20:8; Luke 8:3; and Galatians 4:2. They are used

generally where so and so is a steward, and that sort of thing.

Now, *oikonomos* literally means "house arranger; one who arranges the household." It is also defined as house manager, steward, governor, treasurer, and chamberlain.

You probably noticed that all these definitions are very much the same, both in our usage of the word, the Old Testament usage of the word, and the New Testament usage too. It is very clear throughout the whole Bible that a steward is one who manages something entrusted to him by another, more often by a superior who entrusts things to him. He is accountable to guard, maintain, and even enhance what has been entrusted to him. A steward is always under authority of another, and must report his progress to his superior on occasion. A businessman would not expect to have a steward and not be told what is going on. It is part of his duties. He must report his progress to his superior.

Let us see how it is used in the Bible, and watch these ideas surface.

**Genesis 15:1-2** After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward." But Abram said, "Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"

The word "heir" in the *New King James Version* is "steward" in the *King James Version*. But, the New King James has it correct. This word does not mean steward—one who has charge over—but it means heir—one who shall possess. Turn to chapter 24 and we will see that Eliezer was at the time, his heir, the one to whom the possessions of Abraham would go if he had no other natural heir.

**Genesis 24:2** So Abraham said to the oldest servant of his house, who ruled over all that he had, "Please, put your hand under my thigh,

And they went through this certain ritual. Eliezer was indeed Abraham's steward, one who rules over another's goods. We have seen in past sermons where Eliezer went and brought back a bride for Isaac. That was a tremendous responsibility that Abraham sent Eliezer to accomplish. Abraham had no control over what Eliezer was going to do. He told him, and gave him his parameters for the mission, but after that it was in God's and Eliezer's hands.

We can see if we had read all this that he discharged his duties with great skill and faith. And that was his most laudable and memorable quality—that he asked God to help him, and God did, He followed through. So this man, Eliezer, the oldest servant in Abram's house is a good example of a steward who is faithful and dedicated to the one he serves.

Just think about what he was doing—here he was, the heir of all that Abraham had, which according to Genesis 13 was exceedingly more than Abraham needed for his own life. Abraham was very rich in gold and silver, and livestock; and as a faithful steward, here Eliezer was in his duties making possible for Isaac himself to have an heir, totally freezing himself out of an inheritance. He was a very selfless man, because he was faithful to the one he served.

Turn to Genesis 39 and the story of Joseph in Potiphar's house.

**Genesis 39:2-6** The LOORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. And his master saw that the LOORD was with him and that the LOORD made all he did to prosper in his hand. So Joseph found favor in his sight, and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all that he had he put under his authority. So it was, from the time that he had made him overseer of his house and all that he had, that the LOORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the LOORD was on all that he had in the house and in the field. Thus he left all that he had in Joseph's hand, and he did not know what he had except for the bread which he ate.

The word overseer in verse 4 means "One who looks after," and literally means, "One who counts." He was an accountant in our own modern lingo. He was one who counted. From the description of what Potiphar gave regarding Joseph in his duties, we can see that he was actually acting as Potiphar's steward. And Joseph, of all the examples in the Bible, is the premier example of a good and faithful steward. He served willingly, though he was a slave; he was successful because God prospered everything that had been put in his care. He was trustworthy. Potiphar did not seem to care up to this point about what Joseph did because he knew that he would follow through wonderfully and produce profit for him.

Joseph in Hebrews means adding, and as a steward, he managed his master's estate and goods, and they added to his wealth. And that is what a steward is supposed to do—take what has been given to him, guard it, maintain it, and enhance it.

Turn to Genesis 43, and we will see one of his rewards for his faithfulness.

**Genesis 43:15-16** So the men took that present and Benjamin, and they took double money in their hand, and arose and went down to Egypt; and they stood before Joseph. When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house. . .

Not only was Joseph a premier example of a steward in the Bible, but just a few chapters later, he has a steward of his own as part of the blessing of God for discharging his duties faithfully.

**Genesis 43:16** . . . he said to the steward of his house, "Take these men to my home, and slaughter an animal and make ready; for these men will dine with me at noon."

So now, we are going to talk a bit about Joseph's steward.

**Genesis 43:17-24** Then the man did as Joseph ordered, and the man brought the men into Joseph's house. Now the men were afraid because they were brought into Joseph's house; and they said, "It is because of the money, which was returned in our sacks the first time, that we are brought in, so that he may make a case against us and fall upon us, to take us as slaves with our donkeys." When they drew near to the steward of Joseph's house, they talked with him at the door of the house, and said, "O sir, we indeed came down the first time to buy food; but it happened, when we came to the encampment, that we opened our sacks, and there, each man's money was in the mouth of his sack, our money in full weight; so we have brought it back in our hand. And we have brought down other money in our hands to buy food. We do not know who put our money in our sacks." But he said, "Peace be with you, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks; I had your money." Then he brought Simeon out to them. So the man brought the men into Joseph's house and gave them water, and they washed their feet; and he gave their donkeys feed.

Though the steward goes unnamed, he is another very fine example of a steward. He may have been an Egyptian, but we do not know, and it does not say. But, did you notice how he served Joseph's brothers? Remember, they were foreigners. And if,

indeed, he was an Egyptian—remember what Joseph said about how Egyptians felt about foreigners, especially those with flocks? It was disgusting to them. They were pariahs to the Egyptians. Within the caste system of Egypt, they were the lowest of the low, somebody to be put off at a far corner of the land so that you do not have to be bothered with them.

Did you notice what this man did? He calmed them; he did not make them fear anymore, and then he brought them into the house, and made sure their feet were washed, and fed them, and he even made sure the donkeys were fed and watered—a very selfless individual who did his master's bidding. He was willing to put himself under these crude men from Canaan, coming off their week's long journey, giving them what they needed.

**I Chronicles 28:1** Now David assembled at Jerusalem all the leaders of Israel: the officers of the tribes and the captains of the divisions who served the king, the captains over thousands and captains over hundreds, and the stewards over all the substance and possessions of the king and of his sons, with the officials, the valiant men, and all the mighty men of valor.

Now, this is a steward of a different color. These stewards were considered leaders of Israel. And I should say so! They had in their charge all the riches that David possessed, as well as the possessions of his sons. Notice that it is "stewards," plural. They needed many money managers to look after all David's family's substance. They were extremely trustworthy men to have all this money in their hands to do with as they would, and as David directed them. And, there is no indication that they fell down on the job, because David was able to lay up an incredible amount of materials—gold and silver, precious gems, wood and stone—all for building the Temple in Jerusalem. These men did a good job. They were worthy of the trust that David put into them.

Now, this idea of managing money is the main understanding that the Protestants have of stewardship. And, if you read any of their articles on stewardship, you will find that they mostly key in on stewardship of the ministry over the church's funds. That is good and right, and should be considered. However, even though they seemed to be aware of the more spiritual meanings, not just for the ministry but for the lay members as well, most of their discussions of stewardship seems to end with the using of one's tithes, and church finances. This is not wrong. But it is only the most rudimentary of the applications of the idea of stewardship. It is incomplete.

Turn to Daniel 1. This example has an interesting point of character that many of us who

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are more conservative tend to shy away from. Remember the story here: Daniel and his friends wanted only vegetables rather than the king's "royal dainties," in order to remain pure and clean under the law.

**Daniel 1:11-16** So Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, "Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king's delicacies; and as you see fit, so deal with your servants." So he consented with them in this matter, and tested them ten days. And at the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king's delicacies. Thus the steward took away their portion of delicacies and the wine that they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.

Now this particular steward was more in line with the guardian or tutor, than an estate manager. He was under the chief of the eunuchs. But, he seemed to be one who had a great deal of authority in this case. And, he provides us another lesson in stewardship. His outstanding quality, the one that God highlights here, was that he was not afraid to try something new, because he was told by superiors to get these young men into shape to be servants of the kingdom. And, when Daniel presented this alternative, he mulled it over, and thought it will not hurt to try. "I'll try this for these 10 days, and we'll see if it works."

I want to make a distinction here that this is never something *wrong* to do. It was just another method to reach the same goal. The Babylonians used delicacies from the king's table, and wine, to get the loyalty of these young men to get them to feel special—to fatten them up, and make them "healthy" and fit for service. But when Daniel made his request, this steward was not too reticent to test this other way.

Think about that in your own personal life. Let us say you have a particular problem—a sin that has been nagging at you for years. And, the method that you have been using to overcome this sin has not worked. And maybe somebody, one of the brethren, comes up to you, and says, "Look. I've noticed that you have a problem. And, I had this problem, too, in time past. And, I've found that if I set myself up on this particular regimen or that if I did these certain things, it helps to take my mind off that, and I was able to overcome it."

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Now, this steward, had the good sense to say, "Well, okay. We'll see if this works. It doesn't go beyond the realm of my responsibility to try this new thing." It is all in trying to produce the same result. So we will try it. And if it works, then it was a good thing for us. And it will help us in our overcoming and growing toward the Kingdom.

Understand that I am not saying to try every new fad. But rather, try every sensible new or different idea. Do not be afraid to try an alternative method that is still within the bounds of goodness and righteousness if it will help. Do not get stuck in a rut that does not work. Do not be afraid to do whatever is necessary to overcome and grow.

So, the steward was flexible without compromising the end result. His end result was to produce fit servants for the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar. And, he was going to make sure that these four Jews at the end of their trial period would also fit the parameters that he was given, or they would return to the king's delicacies and wine. God made sure that this trial period ended in a success, and so the steward accepted it. And he continued to use that method because it was good, and produced even the best results. So, he did not insist on the old method when a newer one worked just as well, or even better.

Moving on toward the New Testament, Jesus' use of stewards are basically examples found in the various parables. The Parable of the Faithful and Unfaithful Stewards leads up to the first example, "To whom much is given, much is required." It is very interesting that the two main usages of stewards lead up to these memorable statements. The second one in the Parable of The Unjust Steward ends with Jesus saying, "You cannot serve God and mammon." Stewardship is an important subject with God.

**Luke 12:35-40** "Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning; and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them. And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

What is immediately interesting to me is that Jesus Christ puts this idea of watching,



being a faithful steward of the Master, in an end-time context. He talks about His return, and His second coming. So, that means now!

Let us continue in verse 41 because Peter had a question after Christ was finished with his statement.

**Luke 12:41** Then Peter said to Him, "Lord, do You speak this parable only to us, or to all people?"

And then Christ, in typical fashion, does not answer him directly. (I think that this is neat how Christ does that. I wish I could be so wise to do something like that. It shows you how I compare to Him.)

**Luke 12:42-48** 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 that he has. But if that servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, 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. And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.

Specifically, to answer Peter's question, I think that Jesus' words are aimed primarily at the ministry. Remember, as part of his question, it was "Do you speak to us, or to everyone?" And Christ does not answer the question directly. It does apply specifically to the ministry, yet on the other hand, it also applies to every one of us. We have all been entrusted with many things of God—His gifts, His Holy Spirit, His Word, plus any talents and abilities that He has given us to do certain things within His body, as well as the calling we have been given. We have been entrusted with this hope, and the inheritance that we have before us. So, we all need to be faithful and wise stewards over what God has given us.

I think it is interesting that when Jesus answered them here, He did not answer who He was speaking to, and who should be prepared—remember that is what He was talking about in the first few verses, about being prepared for His second coming—He did not answer who should be getting ready, but how they should be getting ready. Because if you know that you should be getting ready, then that point is worthless. You know that you should be getting ready. To Jesus, it is more important to know how, because you already know that you should be getting ready. So, He tells them a more important thing.

For His disciples to be good and faithful stewards, He says their part is to prepare and give meat in due season. Another duty of a steward we find in ready history and archeology, is to supervise the preparation and serving of meals for his master's family. Remember in the parable, at the very end of Matthew 13, about the householder? One of his chief jobs was to give meat in due season. And that is what Jesus is talking about here. Obviously we see a spiritual meaning there of the ministry giving the messages that are needed for the times.

Turn to II Timothy 4. Here, Paul is giving Timothy some advice. Paul is soon to be martyred, and was leaving this particular church in Timothy's hand. So, he repeated some of those things that he needed to know to keep the church together.

**II Timothy 4:1-5** I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful. . .

Ah ha! Remember what Jesus said? He said that a faithful steward whom His Master has entrusted many things into his care must watch for His coming.

**II Timothy 4:5** But you be watchful in all things, [Regard everything, process everything as it pertains to this commission.] endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. ["Do what God has given you to do in serving the brethren."]

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First of all, he says here that a faithful steward of God, a minister, must be ready to teach at any time, in season, and out of season. And he must also give what is needful at the time. If a controversy about Christmas arises in July, then the minister must give an answer in July. The wording gives the impression that a minister should not let any of these doctrinal disputes fester. And if they arise at an inopportune time, they must still be answered in a godly way as soon as possible. Stop it before it can expand.

Notice that Paul mentions being watchful, just as Christ mentioned it in Luke 12. This is a major responsibility of a steward. A steward must watch over the other servants, or employees. He must watch the finances. He must watch the supplies and foodstuffs. He must watch over the crops and products being produced. He must watch out for the minister, or the boss so that he can fulfill his needs. When the boss walks in, it is the steward's job to be at his beck and call, to give him what he needs at any time. He must be constantly watching what is going on so as to be on top of it, and manage it, according to his master's dictates. He must be instant.

In type, this is a major part of a minister's duty. Watch! We must watch over you, and be able to help in time of need. He must watch the finances that are entrusted into his care. He must watch the supplies and foodstuffs so that you will receive what you need. Like I mentioned in the Parable of the Householder, both old and new, fresh and stored away, so that you get a proper balance of the old traditional understanding, and new insights that should help us in overcoming and growing, moving toward the Kingdom of God.

A church member has his own impressive things to watch over and manage. First of all, you must watch your family—your wife and children—making sure that their needs are taken care of, and not just physical ones, but their spiritual ones, their emotional ones. Of course, though speaking to the husband, here, but also the wife must watch over her husband, and make sure that he has what he needs so that he can fulfill his duties in the family. And the children, even, should watch for their parents and help them. It is never too early to learn to be a good steward, because everyone has a responsibility to one another.

We all have responsibilities to watch our home, and our yard, to make sure that it shows proper care. We have our jobs to watch over. That is a responsibility that has been put into our trust. More importantly, maybe, is that we must watch over our relationships with our neighbors, friends, and acquaintances to see that it glorifies God.

We should know what is going on in the world so we can discern the signs of the times, so we will not be yelled at by our Master, "Did you not know? It was your duty to watch!"

Of course, we must watch our relationships with each other in the church, and help each other, moving each other toward the Kingdom of God. And, the most important part of our responsibility that we must watch is our relationship with God Himself. "Blessed is that servant whom His Master finds so doing when He comes."

Did you notice here in Luke 12 the other side of the coin—the one that is distasteful, the one that we would rather not do? If the steward fails to watch the times, to do those things that he has been given, and he abuses what has been put into his care, the punishment is terrible. It is almost unthinkable. Jesus says that the steward will be cut in two. It is rather gruesome to think about. That servant will be cut in two and appointed his portion with the unbelievers. That is being totally thrust out of the Kingdom of God. You will be considered an unbeliever, totally faithless. That means eternal death, not eternal life. This is a very important job to be a steward. We pass, or we fail.

**Luke 12:48** "But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.

This is in a way very encouraging. In His judgment, Jesus says, He will take the extent of our understanding into consideration. If we have been given much, then we will have a lot to answer for. But if we have been given little, then He will see to it that we are not judged quite so harshly because of our ignorance. But as comforting as this may be, I think most of us are past this point.

What have we been given? It is sobering to think of all the knowledge and experiences that we have been given. It says in Acts 20 where Paul is talking to the Ephesians elders, he told them that he preached to them the whole counsel of God. And he never stopped preaching to them with tears, telling them everything that God required of them. Have we been given any less? These great and weighty matters have been placed into our hands. So what will be our judgment when that time comes? What excuses will we come up with before the Son? Can we really say, "I didn't know"? I do not think that we are very ignorant. Many of us have been in the church of God for decades.

I would like to do a thing that we do every once in a while at the Feast of Tabernacles to show how responsible we are. As I call out the numbers, if you have not attended the Feast of Tabernacles for that long, then lower your hand. Everyone raise their hands who have attended the feast for at least five years—ten years—fifteen years—twenty years—twenty-five years—thirty years—thirty-five years—forty years!

So, how responsible are we really, brethren? Many of us have had a lifetime of education and experiences in God's church. Many of us have had half a lifetime. Some have had less, but I think you get the point. God has been very merciful.

Turn to Luke 16 and take another look at the other side of the coin, as well as some very interesting lessons.

**Luke 16:1-13** 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.' Then the steward said within himself, 'What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg. I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.' So he called every one of his master's debtors to him, and said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' So he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' So he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light. And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home. 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? No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

First of all, do not get the impression that Jesus was condoning what this unjust steward did. But rather, He is going to draw some lessons from it.

He is simply showing just how far some people will go to get what they want. The unjust steward, even when things were going bad for him, tried to make the best of his situation. Now, he did not go about it in a good manner. He was crooked, and was acting illegally to make the best for himself.

But what Jesus is asking is, "Why are My disciples not as shrewd as this unjust steward? Why are they not as creative or zealous as this unjust steward? But, doing these things toward the good, and not toward the evil.

There are four lessons here that Christ spells out between verses 8 and 13. I will just go through them quickly.

**Luke 16:8** "So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light.

(1) The people of the world are more eager, ingenious, and resourceful in their pursuit of riches than His own people are in their pursuit of His ways.

What this means is that most of us tend to be pretty lazy in our pursuit of His way; that we have a tendency to be somewhat Laodicean in attitude about our pursuit of His Kingdom and His righteousness. But if you want to be a faithful steward, then you have to put your all into it. It is not something to be done halfway. And when things start getting bad, we have to learn to come out of it as well as we can. So, we should think deeply about what we have been given, and make plans for all contingencies. Work out solutions to difficult problems. And then, please our Master in how we produce so much with so little.

This unjust steward's life was about to go into the tank, but he used his resourcefulness and made the best of the situation. And Jesus said, "Oh, if only My people would be as resourceful in a good way to produce righteousness."

**Luke 16:9** And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home.

(2) To put it in a nutshell, He says, "Use your wealth and influence wisely. All your actions, including how you spend your money, should be done with eternity in mind, not for the next six months, not just to get you by, not for the next year, not even for your retirement. Everything that you do should have the Kingdom of God, God's righteousness, and all the rest of eternity in mind—forever."

We should want to make a good and lasting impression on the people that you meet, on

the people who you deal with. Everyone you come in contact with so that in the end, when everything is said and done we can all be together in the Kingdom of God. Maybe it was just your example in picking up the trash, or letting someone go through the door ahead of you, or being courteous in one way or another, showing love for another in need, it does the trick for that person, and helps him in his calling, and eventually into the Kingdom of God, so you will receive them into eternal habitations, and they will receive you also. They may be unrighteous mammon right now, but what can God do through you for them? So, make sure that everything you do has the stamp on it that says, "Made in heaven."

**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?"

(3) What we do with what God entrusts to us now will determine our reward in the Kingdom of God. If we show faithfulness in the small matters, then will God will reward us with a tremendous amount more when we inherit the Kingdom of God.

So these three verses here are a prod to you to do well now with what you have been given because this is the time when it counts. This is our day of salvation and what we do today will determine what we do tomorrow, and for eternity. Be good stewards of those things.

**Luke 16:13** "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

(4) This basically says that you cannot serve God part-time. God is the most exclusive Master in all the universe. He demands total loyalty, or none at all. Check out the Laodicean church. He says, "You guys are lukewarm. I would rather you were hot, or cold. I don't like this middle of the road stuff. Make sure you're on My side totally, or get out of the way totally."

A steward must be loyal to his master, or the job just will not get done. Being a steward demands total devotion. Nothing less will do. And God demands it. It says so right here. There is a lot to a good and faithful steward, is there not?

Turn to Titus 1, another one of Paul's letters to a junior minister before he died, talking about a minister, a steward, but mostly aimed at himself, or perhaps the ministry.

**Titus 1:7** For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money.

So we see here that this is the primary qualification to be an elder or pastor in the church of God. Turn to I Corinthians 4, and we will see another usage. This comes in the middle of his defense of his apostleship, and also Apollos' ministry, because as we have heard at this year's Feast of Tabernacles, they were having problems in Corinth. And, they were split among several ministers, and Paul thought it good to defend himself and Apollos and what they were doing.

**I Corinthians 4:1-5** Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.

Basically, Paul is telling the Corinthians that Christ has put them under his charge. And he, as a faithful steward, will discharge his duties as he saw fit, because he was not accountable to them, but only to God. Paul lays it on heavily here. We have to remember that this was a church in great distress. He had to come to them with authority. He was confident, though, that he was doing things right and properly. God would back his actions 100% because he needed to get this church straightened out. And he would do whatever it took within the parameters of his office to put that church back on track, so that they would grow from being carnal to being spiritual.

Verse five is saying, "Just stick with me for awhile, and get through this rough part, and we'll see that things will work out for the best in the end. Just let me do my job." This is not easy to hear at times like this. In this day and age under the present circumstances in the church of God, many people do not like to see such things in the Bible, but they are there, and always have been.



Paul came with authority at this time because as the disciples and children of God, as it says in Matthew 13:52, Paul knew the bounds of his authority, and he would not pull any punches in this case, because they needed it hard, and fast, because he was looking toward their eternal life—watching to make sure that they made it.

Now, in other churches such as the one at Philippi, Paul did not need to take such drastic measures, because they were always supportive of him. They always seemed to be very humble. They had their problems, but he never had to come down on them very hard. But in Corinth, it was a different matter, because they were right in the thick of first century paganism, and they needed it right between the eyes.

**I Corinthians 4:21** What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?

"It is up to you. You're going to dictate how I act toward you, whether you need it hard, or whether I can come to you more softly." Because, he would actually prefer that he not have to strongly correct them to drive home the message.

You may want to read for yourself later Colossians 1:24-29 where Paul uses this in the sense of administering the Word of God. It is the minister's responsibility to teach and explain the mysteries of God that He has revealed. And, he says that the goal and stewardship of an apostle and minister is to present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

Do you see how great that responsibility is? This is the same sort of thing that he said to the Ephesians, that the ministry was given as a gift to the church of God for the perfecting of the saints into a very high quality. If a minister is truly a good steward of God, he will take every measure to make sure that you make it. That is his job.

A faithful steward of God is a tall order. Its work is never done. There are always more people to help into the Kingdom of God. Paul says in I Corinthians 4:9-13, however, that his job is not an easy one, it is like he is being dragged through the streets of Rome, as captives, as a condemned man, but he does not care because his job has been given to him by Christ, and he will do it until the very end. His present reward may be his place to suffer, but the faithful steward shrugs off those things, because of what his work produces in others and what his ultimate reward is from God.

Let us conclude with a general admonition from the apostle Peter in I Peter 4. I think this section perhaps summarizes what I have said today:

Stewardship by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

**I Peter 4:7-11** But the end of all things is at hand [Jesus said that too about being watchful and being a good steward]; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers [Peter must have remembered what He said about being a good steward]. And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins." Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, 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 the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Notice that as we approach the time of the end, being watchful, being good stewards, and serving one another—they are all wrapped up together in us, right now. He speaks directly to us.

Why do we need to take such care? To give God the glory through Jesus Christ. A good and faithful steward of God's gifts will fill your column, make use of your abilities, and you will glorify God.