

Christian Stewardship

The Pounds and Talents

*“Let a man so
account of us, as of
the ministers of
Christ, and
stewards of the
mysteries of God.*

*Moreover it is
required in
stewards, that a
man be found
faithful.”*

*—I Corinthians
4:1,2*

A DEDICATED FOLLOWER

of the Master is one who has committed all that he has and is to the service of the Lord, to be used in keeping with the divine will. This includes time, strength, talents, influence, money—everything. The Lord does not take these away all at once, but leaves them in the custody of the giver to be

used as indicated by his sanctified judgment until completely consumed on the altar of sacrifice. Thus every true disciple is a steward over his own assets.

However, our text is speaking of another phase of Christian stewardship. Paul explains that as “ministers of Christ” we are “stewards of the mysteries of God.” These “mysteries of God” are

not what we give to the Lord, but what he gives to us. Briefly stated, these mysteries are the Truth as revealed to us by God's Holy Spirit. Jesus also identifies these, using the expression, "mysteries of the kingdom of God."—Luke 8:10

TWO PARABLES

Jesus related two parables which illustrate our privileges and responsibilities as stewards of the truth. One is the parable of the pounds, found in Luke 19:11-27, and the other is the parable of the talents, recorded in Matthew 25:14-30. In the parable of the pounds, Jesus likens himself to a "nobleman," and in the parable of the talents, to a "man." In both lessons, after delivering to his servants the "pounds" and "his goods," Jesus represents himself as going away and returning at a later time.

In the two parables, when the Master returns there is a reckoning with his servants based upon the use they have made of that which was entrusted to them. In the case of the pounds, only one is delivered to each servant, but rewards in differing amounts are administered to the faithful. In the other parable, varying numbers of talents are distributed to the servants, but at the time of reckoning, all the faithful receive the same reward.

It is evident that both parables refer to the work of the Lord in the earth throughout the Gospel Age, and to the fact that it is accomplished by servants who are faithful to their stewardship over that which is entrusted to them for this purpose. The differences in the two parables are not contradictory, but illustrative of two important facets

of the manner in which the work of God throughout the present age is accomplished.

It is important to notice that in these two lessons, that which was distributed to the servants was not previously theirs. The “pounds” belonged to the “nobleman,” and the “talents” to the “man.” The parables related by Jesus are merely illustrations of truths which are elsewhere set forth in the Bible in straightforward language. Indeed, the Scriptures reveal just what it was that Jesus gave to his disciples, his servants, at the beginning of the Gospel Age in order that they might be properly equipped to go forth in the divine service.

When Jesus appeared to his disciples before his ascension—his “going away” according to the parables—he said to them, “Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) Previously, he had promised to send the Holy Spirit, which, he said, would “guide” his disciples “into all truth.”—John 16:12-15

Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as “the Spirit of truth,” and very properly so. We cannot receive the Truth contained in the Scriptures into our hearts and be guided and strengthened by it without the aid of the Holy Spirit, nor can we possess the Holy Spirit apart from the Truth. Thus, when the gift of the Holy Spirit was bestowed upon the waiting disciples at Pentecost it enabled them to know the Truth—to understand the marvelous teachings of Jesus which previously they could not “bear.” It was through this gift of the Holy Spirit that the

“mysteries of God” became theirs to know and to use as the Lord’s stewards.

There is a close relationship between the use of our own abilities in the Lord’s service and our stewardship of the mysteries of God. Indeed, it is the Spirit of the Truth, the Holy Spirit, which energizes, or quickens us to perform faithful and acceptable service as ambassadors of Christ. It is by faithfulness in the use of the Truth that the work of the Lord during the Gospel Age is carried forward.

THE SAME TO ALL

In the parable of the pounds—a pound being a sum of money—each servant received the same amount, which was one “pound.” This represents those blessings received from the Lord which are common to all his servants, and which enable them to render acceptable service in his cause.

It seems evident that the pound represents something which the Scriptures teach is actually furnished by the Lord to his people. First, we were drawn to the Lord and to the point of full consecration by the power of the Truth. After making a full consecration to do God’s will, we received the begetting and anointing of the Holy Spirit. It is the anointing of the Holy Spirit which, in particular, authorizes us to be partners in the work of the Lord. To assure us that our labors would be acceptable, despite the imperfections of our flesh, we also received the robe of Christ’s righteousness for our justification.

It is through the proclamation of the Truth that God’s work during the Gospel Age is accomplished in the earth. Paul wrote, concerning that work:

“God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then [because of this] we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.”—II Cor. 5:19,20

THE TALENTS

The parable of the talents presents a different viewpoint—another aspect of Christian stewardship. The number of talents given to each servant varied. Jesus said, “The kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey.”—Matt. 25:14,15

The word “several” in verse 15 is translated from the Greek word *idios*, and has the meaning of “self” or “own.” In addition, the word “ability” in this passage, translated from the Greek word *dunamis*, means “force” or “miraculous power.” The *Emphatic Diaglott* literal translation of this portion of the verse reads, “. . . to each according to the own power.”

In the New Testament, this same Greek word, *dunamis*, is translated “miracles” eight times and “miracle” once. In many other usages, miraculous power or authority is implied. For example, Peter wrote concerning the Master’s followers that they are “kept by the power [*dunamis*] of God through faith unto salvation.” (I Pet. 1:5) Jesus said to his disciples, “Ye shall receive power

[*dunamis*], after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you.”—Acts. 1:8

Based upon the general use of the Greek word *dunamis* in the New Testament, and the literal translation of the Greek in the Diaglott—“the own power”—we suggest that the expression, “according to” refers to the exercise of the power and authority of the “man” of the parable in the distribution of his own “goods,” rather than the power of the servants. This does not relieve the servants in the parable of the responsibility to use their own natural endowments in the service of the Master, but emphasizes that the “goods” distributed by the Lord quicken and energize these to make their use effective and acceptable in his sight.

This suggestion is in keeping with II Peter 1:2,3, which reads, “Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, According as his divine power [*dunamis*] hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue.” Here we are reminded that “all things” pertaining to our service for the Lord and our relationship with him are gifts distributed in accordance with, and by, divine power. This would include the “talents” of the parable.

This distribution of gifts to Jesus’ followers is said to be “through the knowledge” of the Lord—in other words, through the Truth. We receive this knowledge through the revealing power of the Holy Spirit. This is why the expression, “Spirit of truth,” is used by Jesus in promising the disciples the gift of the Holy Spirit.

From one standpoint, as illustrated in the parable of the pounds, the Lord's consecrated people, through the Truth, receive a common endowment which enables them to render acceptable service to God. From another perspective, however, their opportunities and abilities to serve differ, and this is indicated by the parable of the talents.

In Ephesians 4:7,11,12, Paul explains what the impartation of the Holy Spirit means to the disciples of Jesus with respect to the work of the ministry. He wrote, "Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ"—in keeping with the manner in which, by divine authority, Christ distributes the "talents." We read further, "He gave [or made] some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting [*Diaglott*: "complete qualification"] of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."

In I Corinthians 12:4-11, Paul presents a similar thought: "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations [*Diaglott*: "services"], but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these worketh

that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he [the Lord] will.”

The gifts of the Spirit referred to by Paul which were outwardly miraculous in nature were given only to the twelve apostles and certain other individuals in the Early Church to whom the apostles imparted some of these powers. Thus, these special “gifts” were only in operation for a limited period of time—until the apostles and those of that generation “fell asleep” in death.” However, there are many other “diversities of gifts” with which the true followers of the Master in every part of the Gospel Age have been endowed.

In Romans 12:3-8, we read, “I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.”

Paul admonishes further in this account that in the use of these gifts “love” should “be without dissimulation,” that we should “abhor that which is evil,” and “cleave to that which is good.” “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly

love; in honour preferring one another." To this he adds that we be "not slothful," but "fervent in Spirit." (Rom. 12:9-11) Possibly Paul had in mind the unfaithful servant in the parable who was described by Jesus as "wicked and slothful."—Matt. 25:26

The Apostle Peter confirms Paul's view of Christian stewardship, and also exhorts to faithfulness in the use of the gifts with which we have been endowed by the Holy Spirit. He wrote, "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability [Greek: "forcefulness"] which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever."—I Pet. 4:10,11

In this passage, the Greek word which is translated "manifold" means varied, or diversified. We are made stewards of the "diversified" grace of God, manifested in the many spiritual gifts by which we are qualified for the ministry. It is these many and varied gifts given by God, operating through our natural, but imperfect faculties, which seem to be represented by the talents of the parable.

On the other hand, as we have noted, those treasures of the Holy Spirit imparted through the Truth which are received in common by Jesus' true followers may well be represented by the pounds of the other parable. We need both the pounds and the talents, and the spiritual guidance to use them properly, to be acceptable and efficient servants of the Lord.

FAITHFULNESS

Faithfulness to our stewardship of the mysteries of God calls for the dedication and use of all our natural endowments. These we have given to the Lord, and he allows us to keep them to use for him, sacrificing them in the faithful discharge of our stewardship. Our natural abilities play a part in the work of the ministry, and without doubt are taken into consideration by the Lord. However, some of Jesus' own apostles were ignorant and unlearned men according to the standards of this world, yet through the power of the Holy Spirit they were used mightily in the divine service. By contrast, Paul was well equipped with natural talents, and he used them faithfully, sacrificing them in the interests of his stewardship. He wrote, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ."—Phil. 3:7

Though highly talented in many ways, when Paul's vision became impaired, which no doubt hindered him to a degree in his ministry, the Lord did not deem it best to restore his eyesight. In humility, he wrote, "Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations [with which God had blessed him], there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me. . . . For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power [*dunamis*] of Christ may rest upon me."—II Cor. 12:7-9

The power of the Holy Spirit could operate in and through Paul regardless of his infirmities. This is true of all the Lord's consecrated people. In order

for it to be a reality for us, however, we must yield up our all for his use. Only thus can we be faithful in our stewardship of “the mysteries of God.”

THE INCREASE

According to both parables, faithfulness resulted in the increase of the “goods” which were delivered to the servants. The one who was given five talents gained five more, and the one who was given two talents gained an additional two. Each of the servants in the parable of the pounds was given a pound. One gained ten pounds, and another five.

In considering what is represented by these increases, we should at first remember that we cannot expect a parable to fit the intended lesson in every detail. The evident principal purpose of the two parables under consideration was to encourage zeal on the part of the Lord’s people throughout the Gospel Age. They teach that the Lord Jesus was going away, and that he would return to reckon with his servants. The parables further show that to render acceptable service the Lord’s servants would be endowed with gifts from him, and that they would be rewarded for their faithfulness.

These two parables illustrate the partnership of Jesus and his footstep followers in carrying out the divine will. We know that according to God’s plan, his work throughout the earth during the Gospel Age has been that of calling and preparing a “people for his name” to live and reign with Christ. (Acts 15:14) To begin with, these people are of the sin-cursed and dying world. Through the ministry of those who are endowed with the Truth and its Spirit, these are reached and reconciled to God through

their belief in Christ and their full consecration to do the Lord's will. It is thus that they receive the Spirit of sonship, and are authorized to serve as "ambassadors for Christ" in the work of the ministry, conducted through the use of the "word of reconciliation."

The Bible assures us that as a result of the reign of Christ the earth will be filled with a "knowledge of the LORD." (Isa. 11:9) This does not mean that it will be written across the skies. It simply means that the hearts and minds of the people will be filled with that knowledge. Concerning those of the Gospel Age who are endowed with God's Holy Spirit, to the extent that their faithful service contributes to the implanting of the same Spirit of the Truth in the minds and hearts of others, this could be considered an increase.

This thought seems to be further borne out by noting the rewards administered to the faithful ones of the parables. In the parable of the pounds, the one who gained ten pounds was given authority over ten cities, and the one who gained five pounds was given authority over five cities. The rewards given in the parable are those of rulership.

In the parable of the talents, the promise to all the faithful is twofold—they were to be made rulers over many things, and were bidden to enter into "the joy" of the Lord. Thus both rulership and rejoicing are assured to those who faithfully use their talents.

With these rewards in mind, let us note what Paul wrote in his letter to the brethren at Philippi. "Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons

of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights; . . . Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.” (Phil. 2:14-16) Thus Paul indicated that if the brethren at Philippi remained faithful they would be a proof “in the day of Christ” that he had “not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.” This, he explained, would lead to his rejoicing in that day, his “joy of the Lord” promised in the parable.—Matt. 25:21,23

Even more pointed in this connection is Paul’s statement to the Thessalonian brethren. To them he wrote, “What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy.” (I Thess. 2:19,20) Here Paul explains that both his “crown”—representing rulership—and his rejoicing when reckoned with by Jesus at his return would be his because of these faithful brethren to whom he had ministered the Truth. They would be part of the increase, having been endowed with the Spirit of the Truth and proven faithful to their stewardship.

Along the same line, Paul wrote to the brethren at Corinth, “Ye have acknowledged us in part, that we are your rejoicing, even as ye also are ours in the day of the Lord Jesus.” (II Cor. 1:14) Peter, Apollos, and others had also labored in Corinth, and thereby assisted in establishing the Corinthian brethren in the Truth and in the Lord. Likewise, the brethren in Corinth had contributed to some extent to Paul’s own upbuilding in the faith. It was concerning the Lord’s work there that Paul wrote,

“Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man [the gifts pertaining to the ministry]? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour.”—
I Cor. 3:5-8

Thus the increase resulting from our faithful use of the Lord’s goods seems clearly indicated. It is also encouraging to realize that the cooperative efforts of the brethren are also mentioned by Paul in connection with the increase with which the Lord blesses their efforts. There are some who might feel disappointed that the Lord has never used them individually to interest others in the Truth and bring them to the point of full consecration. Yet, it is also true that there are probably few instances in which an interested one has been found and brought to a knowledge of the Truth, except by the cooperation of many of “like precious faith.”

It is because all of his servants work together that the Lord’s work prospers. In this way, all can have a share in it. Not all have received the gift of prophecy—public speaking. Not all are teachers. However, all have, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, been endowed with some talent which can be used in the general ministry of the Truth, the ministry of reconciliation. As quoted earlier, Paul explains that our gifts differ “according to the grace that is given unto us.” All the Lord’s consecrated people have been given the privilege of “ministry”

as one of the gifts of the Spirit. Ministry simply means service, and there are many ways in which we can serve the Lord, the Truth, one another, and all those with whom we come in contact.

Paul also mentions “he that giveth [impart or share],” and “he that sheweth mercy.” (Rom. 12:8) One who is filled with the Spirit would be specially qualified to show mercy, and thus contribute to the building up of those who need to be helped along this line. What a blessing to others are those who are able to “impart” love and sympathy for the comfort of the Lord’s people!

The Holy Spirit energizes those who receive it. Paul says that God has not given us the “spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound [disciplined] mind.” (II Tim. 1:7) The Holy Spirit gives strength to the timid and fearful, enabling them to serve in ways and to an extent that would not be possible if they depended only upon their natural abilities.

The Lord has also given us the Spirit “of love.” Paul wrote that the “love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us.” How worthless would be our ministry if it were not motivated by love. It would be nothing more than “sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.”—Rom. 5:5; I Cor. 13:1

Through the gift of the Spirit we are also enabled to have a “sound,” or disciplined, mind. Such a mind is one that is endowed and regulated by the truth of God’s plan and his character. This gift also is vital to an acceptable and effective service to the Lord. How futile would be our efforts as ministers of reconciliation apart from having the Spirit of a disciplined mind.

THE “WICKED” AND “SLOTHFUL”

The servant who was given one talent and buried it in the ground is described as “wicked and slothful,” and the servant who wrapped his pound in a napkin is described as “wicked.” The practical lesson of both parables is the importance of faithfulness in our stewardship, regardless of how much of the Master’s “goods” he may have entrusted to us. The Scriptures indicate that those who are faithful or unfaithful in things which are “least” will likewise be faithful or unfaithful in “much.”—Luke 16:10

Speaking of his servants, Jesus said, “Ye are the light of the world,” and he admonished them not to put their light under a “bushel.” (Matt. 5:14-16) In the parables, the wrapping of the pound in a napkin and the burying of the talent in the earth seem to suggest the same idea of permitting the Truth to be hidden from others through our unfaithfulness.

The unfaithful servant in both parables speaks of the hardness of their master. This seems to be but an excuse. Jesus explains that if this is what the servants really believed, it should have spurred them on to faithfulness, rather than otherwise. Here we are reminded that the human heart is very deceitful. Let us be watchful lest we be found making excuses for unfaithfulness.

Let us keep before our minds the practical lesson of both parables, which is that “it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.” We have been made “stewards of the mysteries of God.” In whatever way, or ways, we have been endowed by the Holy Spirit to minister the Truth and its blessings to others, let us do so with diligence, for this is

the great project upon which we have embarked. With the Lord's blessing, we know that his eternal purpose can and will succeed. God's work will be accomplished, and through our own faithfulness we can share in his joy. ■