

# ***Sabbath School Today***

## **With the 1888 Message Dynamic**

### ***Stewardship: Motives of the Heart***

#### **Lesson 6. The Marks of a Steward**

The sovereignty of God means that He owns everything. Humans are only entrusted with what God has provided. The primary trait of stewards is they clearly understand this, and consistently act accordingly. This is a simple concept, but human pride has perverted it almost beyond recognition to most people living today. Regardless of what we think of God's sovereignty, He *is* sovereign and our perceptions don't change that. We can understand God at some level, but we have to turn to His word and leave our preconceived ideas about Him.

It is easy to fall into the self-centered trap that comes naturally to humans. We always want to possess, whether it be material things or intangibles such as power and influence. Striving to have anything belonging to this world brings us to the point where God's gifts now take the place of God. The mark of a good steward is that he or she never forgets that nothing can take the place of God.

"Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For ... whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it. For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?'" (Matt. 16:24-26, *New American Standard Bible*). This is where most nonbelievers err; they think they have something to offer in exchange for their souls.

What does it mean to take up our cross? Many think our cross consists of the various trials that come to us. Often, we hear parents sighing that their cross is something their child is or isn't doing. This unnecessarily causes the child guilt, because it becomes more about the parent controlling the child's behavior. In reality, we have been told to "count it all joy" when trials come because they are God's way of refining our character. Perhaps God is trying to teach the parent that they have only been given stewardship of the child, and He will take care of His children in His way and time. Our cross is the same one that Jesus had. He said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner" (John 5:19). Our cross, like that of Jesus' cross, consists of giving everything to God without reservation.

The person who has completely lost all confidence in the flesh to acquire things of this world understands what it means to be poor, as Jesus used that word. The blessed ones who possess the kingdom are they who have released everything and have come to understand they can possess nothing. They become like a common beggar, who has accepted the fact that he or she has no hope of possessing anything. What a wonderful

place to be, since Jesus has promised to supply all our needs. Stewardship means you aren't expected to be the commander over that which you are the steward. Your only job is to preserve, cherish, and responsibly manage what you have been given.

This applies to the lessons God has led us to and taught us in the past. The most serious responsibility a steward can have is to be given a gospel message that is "most precious," as our church was given "through Elders Waggoner and Jones." [1] We alter, disregard, or despise that message at peril to our souls, especially those who have been given the special opportunity to study the message of righteousness given to our church in 1888. That was many years ago, yet we still hear people who misunderstand the message, and quarrel about whether we should even study it.

James asks, "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? ... You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (4:1, 4).

In our dear church, there are still many sincere folks who are conflicted about the message of righteousness by faith, and they quarrel about what it is, often without adequate study. James says the source of these quarrels and conflicts are "your pleasures that wage war in your members."

In verse 4 he tells what these "pleasures" might be. Adultery can only be committed by persons who are married. If you're not married, you can commit fornication, but not adultery. James is trying to tell believers that they have become part of the bride of Christ, and any friendship with the world is disloyal and unfaithful to her husband. A bride who doesn't cherish her relationship with her Christ-husband is committing spiritual adultery.

A quotation from last week's lesson is also appropriate for this week: "A steward identifies himself with his master. He accepts the responsibilities of a steward, and he must act in his master's stead, doing as his master would do were he presiding. His master's interests become his. The position of a steward is one of dignity because his master trusts him. If in any wise he acts selfishly and turns the advantages gained by trading with his lord's goods to his own advantage, he has perverted the trust reposed in him."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 246." [2]

The people who make up the bride of Christ have all "died in Christ." Waggoner explains this: "Now we see how it is that we are dead to the law. We died in Christ, and were raised in Him. ... Now that the union with Christ has been effected, we serve in newness of spirit and not in the oldness of the letter. In marriage, the woman is to be subject to the husband. So when we were united to sin, we were in all things subject to sin. For a time it was willing service; but when we saw the Lord, and were drawn to Him, the service became irksome. We tried to keep God's law, but were bound, and could not. But now we are set free. Sin no longer restrains us, and our service is freedom. We gladly render to Christ all the service that the law requires of us. We render this service

because of the perfect union between us. His life is ours, since we were raised only by the power of His life. Therefore our obedience is simply His loyalty and faithfulness in us.” [3]

The marks of a steward are loyalty, faithfulness, trustworthiness, and obedience; all things that are impossible without death to self and resurrection in Christ. Our Bridegroom, Jesus, has demonstrated all these traits toward His church and He will give us the same traits if we are willing to receive them.

—Arlene Hill

**Endnotes:**

[1] Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 90.

[2] *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, p. 37.

[3] Ellet J. Waggoner, *Waggoner on Romans*, Glad Tidings ed. (1997), pp. 119, 120.

**Notes:**

Pastor Paul Penno’s video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

[https://youtu.be/0\\_nSpNRSrBE](https://youtu.be/0_nSpNRSrBE)

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