

STEWARDS OF PERSONALITY

"What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." I Corinthians 6:19-20.

In a recent sermon I pointed out the scriptural truth of God's ownership of all that He created. His ownership of man is based primarily on creation, preservation, providence and redemption. Since God owns us, He should possess and use us. Our wills should be subject to the demands of His perfect will, and our lives should be at His disposal.

In a second sermon I made the observation that the truth of man's stewardship is stamped indelibly on the pages of the Holy Scriptures. The teaching that man is a steward follows logically from the fact of God's ownership. Every person is a steward of everything with which God has entrusted him. As a steward he has charge of two elements -- self and substance, and these always go together. Each steward is required to be faithful to his trust. Whereas unfaithfulness always deprives one of blessings, faithfulness in stewardship brings numerous blessings and guarantees rewards.

Christians must recognize life itself as a sacred trust which they have received from God. The earth, the world, the land, the silver, the gold and the beasts of the field are His, but we too are His. "Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture" (Psalm 100:3). The fact that we are His should constantly grip us. That we are His is declared plainly in these statements: "But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine" (Isaiah 43:1). "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (I Corinthians 6:19-20). "For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's" (Romans 14:8). The price at which we were purchased was the precious blood of Christ. Having been purchased at such a fearful cost, we should acknowledge God's ownership of that which He has purchased.

Life is a trust or charge from its Creator. It is capable of marvelous usefulness or of being marred and ruined. Life is not ours to use as we please and then return to the Creator at our pleasure. Life is ours for management but is to be subject to the will of the Divine Owner. Man is simply the steward of his life.

Personality is one of God's greatest gifts to man. Personality is the total of what one is. One of the highest responsibilities of the Christian is the development of a strong personality. He who dissipates personality by neglect or by doing wrong is guilty of gross sin. Man owes it to God, to others and to himself to develop the best personality possible through training, discipline and the formation of proper attitudes and habits.

Personality is a most precious possession. It is of much greater value than the body, as a man is of greater value than the house in which he lives, as the jewel is of greater value than the case which contains it. The believer's responsibility to God for what he does with his personality is overwhelmingly great. Every man will be held accountable for what he does with himself.

At tremendous cost human personality has been redeemed and it therefore belongs to God. The sincere acknowledgment of this great fact is exceedingly important. Nobody has any right to ignore this claim upon him. The owner of a vineyard certainly has a right to the fruits of it. Just as surely does He, who owns you and me, have a right to all we are and to the fullest and best service which we can render.

A tenant on a farm is under obligation to the owner to cultivate the farm to the highest degree and make it produce the most abundant harvests possible, as well as doing so for his own benefit. Even so the Christian is under obligation to God, to whom he belongs, to make the most of himself for Christ and His service. He is to become the best possible and then put that best into the hands of the Lord for Him to use as He pleases.

When a person recognizes God's ownership of his personality, acknowledges his own stewardship in this realm, makes the very best of it in every way possible, and then gives it back to his Lord for use in His service, he can no longer live in the narrow circle marked by personal selfishness. He can no longer be a so-called spiritual neutral in the affairs of the church, having his name on the roll, but selfishly withholding himself and his substance from participation in its work.

Joseph was a faithful steward for Potiphar because he was a faithful steward of his own personality for God. He treasured and guarded his own character, that is, what he was, even more carefully than he did the affairs of his Egyptian master. He lived under the seeing eye of God more than he did under the eye of Potiphar. For this reason, he nobly and firmly withstood the wicked plottings of Potiphar's wife to ensnare him and cause his downfall. Through her wickedness he was sent to prison, but he had kept himself unspotted. Whether he lived in the prison or in the palace as prime minister, he did not falter in his loyalty to God and the principles of righteousness and truth. He provided us a very fine example of faithfulness in the stewardship of his personality.

Daniel was another outstanding example of the same thing. In the Babylonian court, in the midst of pagan prejudices and practices, he recognized the fact that he was a steward of his own personality. He never betrayed that trust from God. There wasn't anything weak or wishy-washy about Daniel. His faithfulness in stewardship enabled him to face the mouths of lions fearlessly. No threats or decrees of rulers could turn Daniel from the path of duty. Today Christians need the same spirit which he had.

Since your personality includes all that you are, you should remember that it includes four things:

1. Your body -- the physical.

We sometimes find people who seemingly take the attitude, "This is my body, I can do with it what I please." This is not true. When you abuse or misuse your body, you are abusing or misusing what belongs to another. God has given you your body as a trust. To damage it is to violate a sacred trust. Not only does God permit you to live in your body, but He Himself wants to live there in the person of the Holy Spirit. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are" (I Corinthians 3:16-17).

Paul recorded a most timely warning in Romans 6:12-13, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin; but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God." Christians must see to it that their feet do not walk the paths of sin, but the paths of peace, truth and righteousness. Their hands must not be defiled in doing things which are unbecoming to the children of God, but they must be kept busy doing good. Their eyes are not to gaze upon that which is sinful and defiling, but upon the things that are holy. Their tongues are not to be engaged in gossip, slander and evil speaking, but in sharing that which is true and uplifting.

Since there is no compulsion except that of love, Paul tried to constrain Christians to yield themselves to Christ on the grounds of love and gratitude. Out of genuine gratitude to God, we should present our bodies as a living sacrifice to Him, for the purpose of doing His blessed will. Listen to Paul's tender and winsome entreaty: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1).

Your body is the house of your soul. You live in it. You work through it. He made it and loaned it to you for your lifetime, but it is His. He gives you every beat of your

heart and every breath of your lungs. Christ wants your body and He deserves to have it. He wants your feet with which to walk, your hands with which to work, your eyes with which to see, your tongue with which to speak and your mind with which to think. If you yield your body to Him, He will have an instrument through which to work. You are responsible to God for the condition in which you keep your body and the use to which it is put.

Therefore, say with the poet:

"Thou hast no tongue O Christ as once of old
To tell the story of Thy love divine;
The story's still the same, so sweet, so true,
But there is no tongue to tell it out --
But mine.

Thou hast no hands O Christ as once of old
To feed the multitude with bread divine;
Thou hast the living bread, enough for all,
But there is no hand to give it out --
But mine.

Thou hast no feet O Christ as once of old
To go where Thy lost sheep in sorrow pine;
Thy love is still the same, as deep, as true,
But now Thou hast no feet to go --
But mine.

And shall I use these ransomed powers of mine
For things that only minister to me?
Lord take my tongue, my hands, my feet, my heart,
And let me live and love and give for Thee."

2. Your mind -- the intellectual.

What powers God has entrusted to you in giving you your mind! He has given you the powers of imagination, reason, judgment and memory; power to plan, invent and execute; power to dominate or to serve.

How terribly men have failed in the stewardship of their minds! The minds which should have built a peaceful world have built a world of wars and destruction. Minds that should be engaged in building better hospitals and related institutions, for the purpose of conquering those dreadful diseases which are taking a terrible toll of human life, are working day and night to develop more destructive bombs and rockets. Great minds, like those of Napoleon, Hitler and Stalin, were used for selfish purposes to work against the God who created them. These men left the world far worse for their being here, and brought suffering to millions of people in satisfying their own selfish wishes.

Are you willing to let Christ regulate the thoughts of your mind and the food upon which you feed them? "As a man thinketh in his heart so is he." You are responsible for the development and the best use of your mind toward the achievement of God's will on this earth.

3. Your heart -- the emotional.

God has given to you the faculty of feeling or emotions. He has given you the power to fear, to get angry, to hate and to love. These faculties are for the good of man. But, you may abuse these trusts. Instead of loving God and your fellow men, you may love yourself, wealth or that which is sinful. Instead of being angry with injustice and sin, you may become angry with people. Instead of hating evil and injustice, you may hate your neighbor, other people and other races.

Christ wants the first place in your affections and that for your highest good. He rightfully desires to control all your loves and hates, your likes and your dislikes.

4. Your will -- the volitional.

God has endowed you with a will. Your will is a priceless treasure, but it can lead you to disaster. You can take the power and privilege of choice and reach the heights of glorious achievement under God, or you can sink to the depths of ignominious shame. God's will is perfect; therefore, our attitude toward it should be that of glad and unhesitating acceptance.

You are the steward of your personality -- your body, your mind, your heart and your will. Recognize that your personality is a trust from God, and then be a faithful steward in your use of it for His glory and for the benefit of others.