

OUR STEWARDSHIP.

"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." – 1 Cor. 4:1,2.

WE HAVE heretofore called attention to the fact that every member of the anointed body, the Church of Christ, is anointed to preach the gospel, the good tidings of the Kingdom of peace. See our commission as recorded by Isaiah (61:1-3) and quoted by our Lord in partial application to himself, the Head of the anointed body. (Luke 4:16-21.) Paul, in the above text, points to the same thing, having special reference to himself and Apollos and Cephas (Peter), and a general reference to all who are Christ's. (1 Cor. 3:21-23.) He would have us each remember that we are the divinely commissioned and ordained ministers (servants) of Christ, as Jesus also taught, saying to all who are branches in the true Vine, – "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit." (John 15:16.) He also said, "Ye are the light of the world" and "the salt of the earth." [R2157 : page 152]

The presence of this anointed body in the world is therefore for a purpose, a benevolent purpose toward, and in the interest of, the world, even in the present life, tho their great and most successful ministry will be in the age to come, when exalted to power and great glory as kings and priests unto God. Tho the world at present knows not God and is not subject to the law of God, nevertheless, God in his abounding grace so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son to redeem them, and by and by, under the righteous reign of his Millennial Kingdom, he will restore and bless them, and the good news of this redemption and the coming Kingdom he would have testified to them even now, as he says, – "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end [of this age] come" (Matt. 24:14); and in the coming age the fruit of this testimony will

appear. The same testimony also serves the further ordained purpose of gathering out of the world a people for his name (Acts 15:14), to be associated with Christ in the great work of the Kingdom, of restoring "all things" and blessing "all the families of the earth." Being anointed with the holy spirit, and ordained as ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God, it is not merely our mission to live harmless lives – simply to abstain from violence, dishonesty, slander, etc. – so that men can say of us that we never abused or cheated or ill-used them. This negative goodness is, of course, one side of a righteous character, and one without which no man is righteous; but more, much more, than this is required of a steward of God. There must be a positive, as well as a negative, goodness. This we find exemplified in the case of our Lord Jesus, who was not only "holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners," but who also "went about *doing good*" and was abundant in good works. – Acts 10:38; 2:22.

It is this positive element of character and the recognized obligation to activity that are specially implied in the term "steward," while the appointment by the Lord to such an office is also a recognition by him of those elements of a righteous character without which no one is eligible to the office. A steward, therefore, is not a person of merely harmless character, or one who is contented carefully to fold away in a napkin the talents entrusted to his care, so that the Lord, on his return, may find his own just as he left it, but he is one who makes a diligent and business-like appropriation of his one or many talents in the Master's service, so that, at the time of reckoning, the Lord may not only find his own, but also as large an increase as possible, in evidence of the zeal and faithfulness of his appointed steward.

The Apostle also says, "Moreover, it is *required* in stewards that a man be found faithful. Thus we see that the entire body of Christ is called, not to indolent, self-complacent ease, but to diligent and enterprising activity; and not in the spirit of a hireling, with eye-service as men pleasers, but with the intelligent, loving interest and zeal of sons and heirs of God, of ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries

of God. It is indeed "*required*" of stewards to be thus active in the divine service, and the Lord will not count us faithful if we simply *be* good and make little or no effort to *do* good; and even he who has only one talent is not excusable in folding that one talent away in a napkin, or in hiding it in the earth. (Matt. 25:24-28; Luke 19:20-24.) It is, therefore, most important for every one to consider what are his talents, how they are employed, and whether his course of service is day by day approved of God as faithful.

In thus endeavoring to view ourselves as God views us, it is important that we remember that not only the great talents, such as large ability, mental or physical, large opportunities of time and circumstance, or command of means, are noted by the Lord, but also that the small things are never overlooked by him. Call to mind the Lord's teaching that even a cup of cold water given to a disciple because he is a disciple shall not lose its reward; that the poor widow's two mites were more highly esteemed than the larger offerings of the rich; and when we thus perceive that the Lord is judging according to the thoughts and intents of the heart, the humblest saint can see ample opportunities to prove himself a faithful steward.

This also calls to mind the statement of the Apostle Paul (1 Cor. 12:22,17-19), "Those members of the body which seem to be more feeble are necessary." How true! As in the illustration, by far the larger proportion of the members are such; and their office in the body is just as necessary as that of the more notable members, for, "If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members, every one of them, in the body, *as it hath pleased him*. And if they were all one member, where were the body?"

What a blessed thought to every one who realizes himself a member of the body of Christ, that he has a place and an office in the body to which God himself has wisely appointed him, and that that place and office belong to no one else. It may now seem a humble place,

but it is nevertheless an important, a necessary place; and in filling that place as a wise and faithful steward he is approved of God, and by and by will be exalted to his Kingdom and glory.

We know of some of these dear saints in the obscure places of the Lord's vineyard, quietly and lovingly doing with their might what their hands or heads or hearts find to do, and doing it so bravely, so nobly and so well; and yet in their humility they are apparently all unconscious of the halo of that beauty of holiness they are shedding around them to the honor of him whose name they bear. Praise God for all these evidences of his grace and these fruits of his training and discipline! They are lights in dark places, tho generally, as in the case of our Lord, the darkness comprehends it not. Yet, nevertheless, there is produced by these lights an effect which men feel and which God will not overlook.

M. F. RUSSELL.
