

## FAITHFULNESS IN OUR STEWARDSHIP

**"It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful."  
– 1 COR. 4:2.**

EVERY great business enterprise employs various classes of workers. This does not imply that the firm approves of all the moral qualities of their employees. They may employ some laboring men who are of good moral character and some who are of poor character; for they do not hold the working men responsible in that sense. But the most responsible positions are given to those of recognized good character.

So God makes use of different agencies to do His service. These are sometimes animate, sometimes inanimate. (Isaiah 45:1-4; Jer. 10:13.) But those whom He recognizes as specially His servants are the Church of this Gospel Age – a special class of servants on special terms and agreements. These special servants are also called sons; that is to say, they are adopted, and promised that they will be fully inducted into the Divine family if they are faithful in God's service in the present time.

These servants represent a stewardship – a term common in olden time. The servant did with his master's goods as though they were his own. At the same time, while given this privilege, he was required to give an account to his employer. The master did not give him these goods and say, Use them as you like, and I will call for them when I want them. On the contrary, his stewardship was to be a faithful one, and would be examined later with this end in view – to see if he had been faithful. A faithful steward would be on the lookout for everything that represented the master's interests – would be as careful of these as he would be of his own. He would use his every power for increasing the talent – [R5386 : page 23] represented by the money in his care.

## THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

In the parable of the Talents the Lord represented a man as going into a far country and leaving the talents in the care of his stewards. They were entrusted with these goods in a very special way. Thus it is with us. Each of us is entrusted with certain talents. At the time of consecration we gave our all to God. Having given all that we have and are to the Lord, He accepts our offering and appoints us His stewards over these goods – these things that we had. This would include our *all* – time, influence, various talents – for business, music, or what not. All these are the Master's after we have made consecration. We belong to Christ. He is the Head, He is Lord. But He commits to us as His faithful servants all these talents, to use for Him. And He says, "Occupy till I come."

This parable applies to all the Church all the way down this Age. Each servant is to be diligent in occupying the position of steward until he is released from it. The steward who would use his position merely to glorify himself would not be a faithful steward. The faithful steward would be the one who would desire to so use the talents as to increase the Master's wealth, the Master's glory.

The Lord gave an illustration of the faithful and unfaithful stewards at His Second Coming – before He will deal at all with the subjects of the Kingdom – mankind in general. He showed how He will call these servants to whom He has given the talents; for He has promised them that He will make them rulers with Him in His Kingdom, if they are faithful in the use of their talents. In the parable, the one who received five talents doubled them, and made them ten. The one who had received two talents made them four. But the one who had received one talent gave the excuse that he had buried it in the earth, because afraid. And he was declared to be an unfaithful servant.

This servant was not sent to eternal torment, but the talent was taken from him. It was of his own volition that he became a steward.

Seeing that he had become a steward, he deserved to be punished because he did not use that which his lord had entrusted to him. That talent belonged to his lord.

An unfaithful steward will be punished for his unfaithfulness. Better that we should not enter into the Lord's service at all than that we should enter and then hold back, neglect our opportunities. If the one who had the five talents had held back, his simply doing nothing would have made him responsible. In showing how he dealt with the one who had the one talent, the Lord is emphasizing the matter the more. These talents represent our opportunities for service according to our several abilities. The one who had less ability was given less opportunity than the one who had more ability.

So with us. Some may have handicaps of various kinds. Some have more talents, or abilities; some have less. We cannot use talents we do not possess. It is required of a man that he be found faithful with what he has. This matter of using all the talents calls up the thought of full, complete loyalty of heart devotion. We should not say, I am doing better than somebody else, as the man with five talents might have thought had he used but three or four of them. But the one who is using his talents to the full capacity is specially pleasing to the Lord. Those who have two talents and use them faithfully receive the same commendation as the one who has five talents and uses the five.

### **THE PARABLE OF THE UNJUST STEWARD**

The parable of the unjust steward (Luke 16:1-9), which impresses this same lesson, was primarily addressed to Jesus' disciples, in the presence of the Pharisees and those who sat in Moses' seat, who were the representatives of the Divine order of things in the Jewish Age. In this parable the Lord emphasizes the fact that a wise steward would be alert to his own future welfare. If a debtor could not pay one hundred per cent., but could pay fifty, it would be wise for the steward, in consideration of his own interests,

to keep the future good will of the man, and let him pay half. This steward was commended by his lord for his shrewdness in taking this course, even though he had previously been unfaithful to him.

The Scribes and Pharisees are scored in the parable. Our Lord's words intimated, You know that you are not yourselves able to pay the Divine requirements of the Law – you are not able to pay fifty cents on the dollar, and you ought to feel sympathetic with some of these poor Jews who cannot keep the Law. You should say to them, Cut it down somewhat – keep half the Law, if you cannot keep it all. Can you keep *half*? Yes? Well, go ahead and keep half.

But, said the Lord, you despise all these – you do not want to "brush garments" with them as you pass them in the streets. You know that you cannot keep the Law yourselves. You are in the position of the steward of My parable. You should take the same course as that steward took with his master's debtors. He was about to be dispossessed. So you are near the end of your term. When you get out of office the people will not think much of you. You would better help your case out. You sit in Moses' seat. You should tell your brethren that while they are not keeping the Law in full, they are pretty nice people; and you should encourage them to do the best they can. You should help them along. **[R5386 : page 24]**

After giving this parable respecting the Pharisees, Jesus turned to his disciples, saying, "I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends with the mammon of unrighteousness." That is to say, Applying this to yourselves now, consider that your earthly possessions are an earthly stewardship. Live in harmony with the people as far as justice will permit. Do not in any way exact the last thing possible from them. Be generous in all your affairs – not only in financial matters. Instead of condemning everybody and threatening them with eternal torment, tell them that God is very merciful. Tell them that God has provided a Redeemer for all mankind. Tell them to be of good courage and to do the best they can – that they may be sure

that God through Christ will be very merciful, and that they will have better dealings at His hands when the time of their testing shall come.

By teaching the people thus, we may get the ill-will of the scribe and Pharisee class; but we are getting the good will of the people and of those who are in harmony with God and righteousness. And although we may be excluded from the high functions of the nominal systems, many of the common people are hearing gladly and sympathetically, and are wishing to share their homes with us. And so we have homes all over the world, wherever God's people are; for they have the ear and eye to appreciate the Lord's arrangement. Furthermore the Lord Himself will ultimately receive us into everlasting habitations. We are wise stewards in this respect. We are living so as to use our time and strength to the best of our ability to do good and to instruct others to do good.

## **TWO PARABLES COMPARED**

The parables of the Talents and of the Pounds are much alike, both representing a great householder, or lord, dealing with his servants. In the parable of the Pounds, a certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. This parable is based upon the fact that when an under-king, like King Herod, would hear that a new Emperor had come to the throne of Rome, he would be anxious for a re-appointment to his own kingdom. Knowing that the Emperor had power to reinstate him, he would be desirous to know whether he would receive his kingdom again, or whether someone else would receive the place. So when such under-king went to Rome, it was with the view of returning with his kingdom, or a commission from the new Emperor.

Our Lord in this picture represents Himself as a Nobleman who had been called to a Throne, and who was going to a far country, to Heaven itself, to receive the investiture of His Kingdom. In due time

He was to be the great Messiah; and He must first be invested with the authority, and then return and establish His Kingdom.

In the parable of the Talents, the lord, before leaving, called in his servants and committed unto them his goods, his property. He said, I will make these servants stewards. He gave one talent to one, two talents to another, and five to still another, according to their several ability. They were all remembered. When he returned he called his servants and reckoned with them. The one with two talents came and said, Lord, thou gavest me two talents. Here I make my report. I have gained two other talents. The one with the five talents said, Lord, thou gavest me five talents; lo, I have gained other five! I have doubled the amount and gotten ten! The Lord said to each, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant! Enter thou into the joys of thy Lord. Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things."

Then came the servant with only one talent. Although he returned it, he had failed to use it. He said, I have not lost a penny; here is thine own. His Lord said unto him, Thou art a slothful and wicked servant! The servant was punished because he was unfaithful.

## **OPPORTUNITY MEASURES RESPONSIBILITY**

The Lord gave this parable as an illustration of our experiences now. These talents consist of *opportunities*. To illustrate: We recently had the talent, or opportunity, of speaking the Truth to 5,000 people. Therefore we had a responsibility. But if we do not have such an *opportunity*, [R5387 : page 24] we do not have the *responsibility* of it. This is what the Lord meant, we understand. One may have more opportunities granted him than another. One person might be a good writer; another a good speaker; another a good exhorter; and another may be good at all three of these things. The one good at all three would have thereby three times as much responsibility as the one with only the one ability.

The *talent* in Bible times represented a certain amount of money. According to the most recent figures available (Am. Bib. Soc'y, 1895), the talent mentioned in the Scriptures was either gold or silver. The value in U.S. money of the gold talent is \$32,689, while the silver talent was but \$1,563.37. Our Lord, however, used the talent, not to represent gold or silver, but as well representing the opportunities His people have to do God's will and to serve the brethren; for He says that whoever does good to one of the least of *His* will receive a blessing.

The lesson taught in the parable of the Pounds seems somewhat different. In this the lord gave each of his servants *one pound*, to do what he could with what was given him. One gained *five* pounds, and one gained *ten*. The third gained *nothing*. The Pound (Mina, or Maneh), is equivalent, if *gold*, to \$6,537.80; if silver, \$312.67½.

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF ONE POUND TO EACH**

In the application of the parable, to our understanding, the Pound represents the blessing of justification given to each of God's children. When did He give us the Pound? When He accepted us as His servants. When did He accept us as servants? We were not servants when we first turned from sin. To turn from sin is not to become a servant. The first step toward God is to turn away from sin toward righteousness, and to attempt to draw nigh unto God; for God says, "Draw nigh unto Me and I will draw nigh unto you."

This one is walking in the way to justification, but has not gotten it. He is getting nearer and nearer to the right place in his ideas, etc. Finally he comes to the place where he says, Lord, if Thou wilt accept me, I will give Thee all I have. He offers himself to be God's servant.

One is not yet a servant of the Lord when he turns from sin. We never had a right to do wrong; and in getting away from sin and wrong, we were not serving God. God has no servants in this Age

except those begotten of the Holy Spirit. Others may in some sense be used as servants; for God can use even the wrath of man to serve Him. In a certain sense the Devil may be His servant; for sometimes he does what the Lord wishes to be done. We think the Devil was serving God when he got the Jews stirred up to crucify Jesus. Demons often serve the Lord in bringing tribulation upon His people, for these tribulations are like the turning of the grindstone, that polishes the jewel. God wishes to use some means at the present time to *polish* His *jewel class*.

But the servants referred to in the parables are the [R5387 : page 25] Lord's consecrated people; for it is only those who have reached the point of full consecration to God that He calls His servants. Those who gave up the service of sin and unrighteousness, became their own servants, the servants of self, until they gave up their lives to the Lord. They then said, I have no will but Thine. I will serve Thee faithfully, even unto death. As the Lord accepts these as His servants, He gives each one a *pound*.

What is this pound? It is justification to life – a valuable thing. Now, being justified by faith, and being thus accepted as a servant of God, and begotten of the Holy Spirit, each one has the opportunity to do what he is able as a servant of the Lord. He uses whatever talents the Lord gives him. He must do his best with all that is entrusted to his care, as a faithful steward of the King of kings, and Lord of lords.

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