

The Disciplines of a Godly Life: STEWARDSHIP

In¹ 1903, one man with seventeen followers began his attack on the world. His name was Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870-1924). Fourteen years later he overthrew the Russian Government with only 40,000 Party members. By 1925, after his death, his followers met to formulate plans for the conquest of the world. They followed his plan set forth in one of his final addresses in which Lenin said:

“First, we shall take Eastern Europe, then the masses of Asia. After that, we shall surround and undermine the United States which will fall into our hands without a struggle—like an overripe fruit!”

His movement became the fastest growing system in the history of the world. By 1980 his followers controlled almost 4/6^{ths} of the world -- and brutally held on to their power.

Solzhenitsyn² said in the mid-1970's that the salamander, by which he means the prison-camp network, is still alive. In *The Gulag Archipelago* (Vol. II, 1975) he says that the prison camps held up to fifteen million inmates at a time, and he estimated that from the Revolution to 1959 a total of sixty-six million prisoners died.

Communism triumphed largely because of the complete devotion of its followers. Lest you think this is too severe, I close with an excerpt from an actual letter written by a young communist to his fiancée, breaking off their engagement. The girl's pastor sent the letter to Billy Graham, who published it a number of years ago. The communist wrote:

We communists have a high casualty rate. We are the ones who get shot and hung and ridiculed and fired from our jobs and in every other way made as uncomfortable as possible. A certain percentage of us get killed or imprisoned. We live in virtual poverty. We turn back to the party every penny we make above what is absolutely necessary to keep us alive.

¹ William MacDonald, (1975) True Discipleship, Kansas City, Kansas, Walterick Publishers, p. 33.

² Schaeffer, Francis A., *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books) 1985.

We communists do not have the time or the money for many movies, or concerts, or T-bone steaks, or decent homes, or new cars. We have been described as fanatics. We are fanatics. Our lives are dominated by one great overshadowing factor: the struggle for world communism. We communists have a philosophy of life, which no amount of money can buy. We have a cause to fight for, a definite purpose in life. We subordinate our petty personal selves into a great movement of humanity; and if our personal lives seem hard or our egos appear to suffer through subordination to the party, then we are adequately compensated by the thought that each of us in his small way is contributing to something new and true and better for mankind.

There is one thing, which I am in dead earnest about, and that is the communist cause. It is my life, my business, my religion, my hobby, my sweetheart, my wife, my mistress, and my bread and meat. I work at it in the daytime and dream of it at night. Its hold on me grows, not lessens, as time goes on; therefore, I cannot carry on a friendship, a love affair, or even a conversation without relating it to this force which both drives and guides my life. I evaluate people, looks, ideas, and actions according to how they affect the communist cause, and by their attitude toward it. I've already been in jail because of my ideals, and if necessary, I'm ready to go before a firing squad.

That, my friend, is total dedication. And if Communists can be as dedicated as this for their cause, how much more should Christians pour themselves out in loving, glad devotion for their glorious Lord. Surely if the Lord Jesus is worth anything, He is worth everything.

Our text this morning starts in Romans 12.1-2, and concludes in 2nd Corinthians 8.5.

They 1st gave themselves.

- Have you ever done that? If you have the discipline of Scripture you come to this Book and read it with an open heart.
- If you have the Discipline of Spirit Fullness you let the Holy Spirit control. And one way He works is calling us to consecration. Your giving starts with giving yourself back to God!

A life given back to God as an offering is what stewardship is all about. Stewardship is not about money it is about life itself. Time and life are far greater treasures than money and possessions. God wants you 1st and foremost!

A GODLY STEWARD KNOWS THAT GOD OWNS HIM AND EVERYTHING HE HAS.

Romans 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

2 Corinthians 5:15 and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

"When³ we come to Christ, God puts all his resources at our disposal. He also expects us to put all our resources at his disposal. This is what stewardship-and life-is all about."

1. **SO WE HAVE AN UNRIVALED LOVE FOR OUR MASTER.** Matthew 10:37 "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. (NKJV) I like how Randy Alcorn describes this truth. God⁴ wants your heart.
 - He isn't looking just for "donors" for His kingdom, those who stand outside the cause and dispassionately consider acts of philanthropy. He's looking for disciples immersed in the causes they give to.
 - He wants people so filled with a vision for eternity that they wouldn't dream of not investing their money, time, and prayers where they will matter most.
 - Of course, giving isn't the only good thing we can do with money. We need to feed, clothe, house, and transport our families. But when the basics are taken care of, why shouldn't the rest go toward treasures in heaven?

2. **SO OUR MASTER HAS THE RIGHT OF DISPOSAL.** Matthew 19:21 Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." (NKJV)
 - He is the owner, we are only employees. Christ asks that He be above all our treasures on earth be they money or possessions.
 - *I have held many things in my hands and I have lost them all. But whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess.* Martin Luther
 - John Wesley said, "I value all things only by the price they shall gain in eternity."

³ Alcorn, *Money, Possessions, and Eternity*.

⁴ Randy Alcorn, *The Treasure Principle*. Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2001, p.43.

- o Similarly David Livingstone stated, "I place no value on anything I possess except in relation to the kingdom of God."
- o J. H. Jowett once said the true measure of our wealth is how much we would be worth if we lost all our money.

3. **SO WE RESIST THE TEMPTATION TO CHEAT OUR MASTER.** Luke 12:20-21 "But God said to him, `You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' 21 "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God." (NIV) **Jesus teaches us that some hold on to things with grasping clenched fists and lose them.** Stewardship means we are resisting SATAN'S STRATEGY. Since money is one of the essentials of the work of the Kingdom, it is not surprising that the great adversary does all in his power to prevent it from finding its way into God's treasury, and for that he has many tricks in his bag.

- o **BY SPENDING:** He encourages over commitment in buying: purchasing more than one can afford on time payments, so that there is little left over to give to God.
- o **BY UPGRADING:** He plays on our competitive instincts and incites us to constantly upgrade our standard of living, so that increases in income are already committed. When John Wesley was earning 30 British Pounds a year, he lived on 26 British Pounds and gave the rest to God. When his salary was raised to 60 British Pounds, he lived on 26 British Pounds and gave the rest to God.
- o **BY WAITING:** He dries up the fountains of generosity in the heart by suggesting postponement of giving to some future time. The stifling of a generous impulse today makes it easier for us to do the same tomorrow.
- o **BY LEVERAGING:** He so arranges things that the assets of the generous man become frozen or over-committed, that he cannot give what he genuinely wishes to give. Expanding business too rapidly often demands reinvestment on a scale that leaves little for giving.
- o **BY KEEPING IT TOO LONG:** We live in such an age of uncertainty. Many elderly fear that their savings will be exhausted before they expire. Many others want to pass the wealth on to their children. This causes us to be guilty of undue stacking. We all need to be sure we give all we can in our lifetime, and have the joy of seeing our money work for God. God promises a reward for "deeds done in the body," not out of it. To be generous with God from right motives brings its reward here as well as hereafter.

4. **SO WE OBEY OUR MASTER AND GIVE.** Luke 12:33-34 Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. 34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (NIV)
 - o To be giving and sacrificing is to be Christlike and blessed. It is as wise to prayerfully plan to sacrifice as it is to think Henry Flagler was wise when he trusted John D. Rockefeller for those few shares at the infancy of his new company Standard Oil. Flagler's shares went on to be worth hundreds of millions of dollars in the 1920's! What a wonderful investment he made. Want to be just as fortunate? Then get Christ's heart for this world, be moved with compassion and ask for the grace of giving and the Lord will work wonders through your treasures given Him of any size!

5. **SO WE UNRESERVEDLY SURRENDER TO OUR MASTER** Luke 14:33 "So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple. (NKJV) THIS DEALS WITH PERSONAL POSSESSIONS!
 - o TAKE MY LIFE # 379. This hymn reflects the stewardship of the godly Frances Ridley Havergal (1836-1879) who wrote the lines we so often sing without due seriousness of commitment: "Take my silver and my gold, Not a mite would I withhold." It is a matter of record that this hymn was autobiographical.

 - o Frances Ridley Havergal did what she sang. In her writings is this personal testimony: "'Take my silver and my gold' now means shipping off all my ornaments-including a jewel cabinet which is really fit for a countess-to the Church Missionary Society... I don't think I need to tell you I never packed a box with such pleasure." This was giving with hilarity!

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