

STUDY GUIDE: LIVING THE APPLIED LIFE (MODULE 202)

Lesson #5 – Applied to Our Gospel: Our Ultimate Stewardship Priority

We are all called to be stewards of a gospel that is burning so hot in our bones that we cannot hold it in. We should be compelled, willingly or reluctantly, to share this good news with both sinners and saints, because we have a “stewardship entrusted” to us to share it with any and all who will listen.

Of all that God has entrusted to us, what do you think should be our ultimate stewardship priority – our money, our time, our talents, our families, our careers, our bodies, the earth? What would God put at the top of His list? May I suggest that none of these, as important as they all are, would be ranked first on God’s list of top stewardship priorities. In fact, what is at the top of His list might not even make it on many of our lists at all.

Paul knew what was at the top of God’s list. He says it this way in I Thessalonians 2:4, “...we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel...” It is not our gospel - it is God’s. We were not the ones crucified, buried and raised from the dead - it was Jesus. It is not our salvation - it is His.

For whatever reason, God, in all His infinite wisdom, chose to entrust to mere mortals his top eternal priority. Candidly, I marvel that He would assign to such fallen and selfish creatures as us, the task of bringing the world to Him.

In God’s mind is there any greater priority than the proclamation of the death, burial and resurrection of His only begotten Son?

Paul repeatedly identifies sharing the gospel as a top stewardship priority. In each reference he gives us a slightly different focus on why our stewardship of the gospel is so critically important and of the utmost urgency.

I. The Gospel Saves - “God’s Grace”

In Ephesians 3:2 Paul writes, “...you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace which was given to me for you...”

We all readily accept that “...the gospel...is the power of God for salvation...” (Romans 1:16). What we may not be as aware of is that when we accepted the gospel we also accepted the responsibility of being stewards of “God’s grace,” now offering this grace to the lost world from which we have been rescued.

Remember, Matthew 28:19-20 is called the Great Commission, not the “Great Suggestion.” Just as with everything else our Father has entrusted to us, the gospel carries both a privilege and a responsibility. In this case it is the honor and the challenge of disseminating His good

news. We are to be ready and willing to both proactively (Mark 16:15) as well as reactively (1 Peter 3:15) share the gospel with unbelievers at every opportunity.

It is not enough to just intellectually agree that the proclamation of the gospel is our top stewardship priority, we must live like it is. The latter, I think we would all admit, is where the “rubber really meets the road.”

2. The Gospel Matures - “Complete”

Paul says in Colossians 1:25-28, “...I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God...to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.”

It is commonly believed that the gospel is for the unbeliever. Once sinners accept the gospel, they then need to move on to the “meat” of the word and leave the “milk” (of the gospel) behind (using the language of Hebrews 5:12-14). The implication is that there are more “meaty” things in the Christian life that need to be pursued and developed to become a mature Christian.

But according to Paul, he intends to present every man complete in Christ by proclaiming Christ to them. The gospel is not just the beginning of the Christian life, it is also the end. What in your life should not be radically affected by your acceptance of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ? I have now been a Christian for over 50 years and I can still be easily brought to tears when reminded of what Jesus did for me at Calvary. In fact, the older I get the more moved I am by it all.

Paul reminds the Philippians in 1:27, “Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ...” He is telling us that our daily behavior should be a consistent representation of the foundation of our faith – the gospel of Christ.

The gospel must permeate every aspect of our lives: how we spend our time and our money, how we use our talents, what we allow to entertain us, how we raise our children, how we treat our bodies, how we give, when, where and how we work. Absolutely everything should be impacted by the good news of what Jesus did for us on the cross and the price that was paid to redeem us.

No matter how long we have been following Jesus, the gospel must remain the immovable foundation that leads us “to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13).

The gospel is not just for the sinner who needs to be saved, it is also for the saint who needs to be made “complete in Christ.”

3. The Gospel Motivates - “Compulsion”

In I Corinthians 9:16-17 Paul confesses, *“For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me.”*

You might conclude that after the third beating with rods and a life-ending stoning (II Corinthians 11:25) Paul might be getting a little bit weary of this stewardship of the gospel that God had entrusted to him. He endured more than any of us will likely ever endure and it really didn't matter whether he liked the job or not. Paul is saying, “Want to or not, easy or not - I'm all in.” I think Paul could echo the words of Jeremiah 20:9, *“But if I say, ‘I will not remember Him or speak anymore in His name,’ Then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I am weary of holding it in, and I cannot endure it.”*

We are all called to be stewards of a gospel that is burning so hot in our bones that we cannot hold it in. We should be compelled, willingly or reluctantly, to share this good news with both sinners and saints, because we have a “stewardship entrusted” to us to share it with any and all who will listen. I think that is what Paul is talking about when he is telling Timothy, *“be ready in season and out of season...”* (II Timothy 4:2). In other words, be ready to share when it is convenient and when it is not, when you feel like it and when you don't, when it is safe and when it is not.

The slogan of Nike might be the charge Paul would give to us today regarding sharing the gospel either voluntarily or as a duty - “Just do it!”

Conclusion

In I Corinthians 4:1-2 Paul tells us what God is looking for from stewards of His gospel, *“Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.”*

I think there is one unavoidable question that we all must honestly ask ourselves, “Am I being a trustworthy steward of the gospel He has entrusted to me?”

Proverbs 11:30 tells us, “...he who wins souls is wise,” and might I add is also a trustworthy steward. May we all be found trustworthy in this – our ultimate stewardship priority.

STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS

1. Discuss how and why some people might see their ultimate stewardship priority as being our money, time, talents, families, careers or bodies?
2. How does it make you feel to know that God has entrusted the salvation of mankind to you? Share your thoughts on this statement, “Just as with everything else our Father has entrusted to us, the gospel carries both a privilege and a responsibility. In this case it is the honor and the challenge of disseminating His good news.”
3. Describe how if we really believed that the proclamation of the gospel is our top stewardship priority it would influence our lifestyle?
4. Relate how “the gospel permeates every aspect of your life” (how you spend your time and your money, how you use your talents, what you allow to entertain you, how you raise your children, how you treat your body, how you give, when, where and how you work)?
5. Discuss how the gospel not only saves us, but also matures us? How has it matured you in your own personal spiritual walk?
6. Why could someone conclude from observation that Christians must not really believe that people will actually go to hell without the Gospel?
7. How well are you doing managing this ultimate stewardship responsibility?
8. What does II Timothy 4:2 mean to you: “be ready in season and out of season?” What can you do to be better prepared to share the gospel?
9. Discuss the responsibility that comes with fully understanding that God has commanded with all authority in Heaven and on earth to preach the Gospel.