

## Christian Stewardship.

Annual Sermon before the N. S. Eastern Association. Preached July 15, by Rev. A. F. Newcomb, M. A., and published by request of the Association.

TEXT: 1 Peter 4: 10.—"As good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

The proper conception of the Christian life is that of stewardship. Our Father, God, is the great Proprietor, and we are simply stewards. To us have been committed wonderful treasures in trust. Our Saviour taught this when he urged his disciples to "watch and pray lest they should enter into temptation," and thus the enemy coming upon them unaware and finding them unprepared, they might be robbed of the possessions they were left to guard; lest at a time unexpected the Lord should return and they should not be ready to receive him. This was very emphatically set forth in the parable of the talents. Even the one talent was not given for mere selfish possession, but for use for the Lord, who upon his return required his own with increase. The idea of stewardship is seen in all the teaching of the New Testament, giving the true coloring to our conception of service and leading us into right relations with him to whom all we have and are or can ever acquire or become really belong. In fact to be true even in our relations with our fellowmen we need to thoroughly appreciate the fact that we are not our own but that we entirely belong to Jesus Christ, and thus have attitude and service the outcome of a burning ambition to glorify God. The following description of a gentleman, which was found in an old manor house in England, is charged with the ennobling sentiment of stewardship:

"The true gentleman is God's servant, the world's master and his own man. Virtue is his business; study his recreation; contentment his rest, and happiness his reward. God is his Father; . . . the saints his brethren; all that need him his friends; devotion his chaplain; chastity his chamberlain; sobriety his butler; temperance his cook; hospitality his housekeeper; providence his steward; charity his treasure; pity his mistress of the house; and discretion his porter to let in or out as most fit. This is his whole family made up of the virtues, and he is the true master of the house. He is necessitated to take the world on the way to heaven, but he walks through it as fast as he can, and all his business by the way is to make himself and others happy. Take him in two words—a man and a Christian."

In this description, which is the picture of the true steward, all the life in all its plans and labor and issues is permeated with the thought of stewardship. In the words of the apostle we ought to be "good" stewards of the manifold grace of God.

That we should consider this theme at this Jubilee season seems not unfitting. For fifty years has this Association been seeking to do work for God. What has been the character of our stewardship? Have we been faithful to our trusts? Throughout the churches represented in this body has there been seen during this half century that fidelity in the care and use of the things committed to us which might reasonably have been expected? Do we all even now understand and thoroughly appreciate what is implied in stewardship? These are questions all-important in our denominational life. May the Holy Spirit so aid us in the worship of the hour that the contemplation of this theme may be exceedingly profitable to us all, so that from this day, as individuals, as churches, as a denomination, we may be more intelligent, more efficient, more devoted stewards of Jesus Christ!

We are stewards of this world's goods. The things we so often term our worldly possessions are really not our own; they are only committed to us to use as Jesus shall direct. "For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains; and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry I would not tell thee: for the world is mine." "The silver is mine and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts." A due recognition of this is of vital importance. It affects directly the personal life and the work of the Lord. Failure to recognize and honor this feature of our stewardship tends to contract the soul and retards the progress of the kingdom of heaven; while due appreciation and practice of it conduce to the enlargement and enrichment of life and the extension of the knowledge of salvation.

To us Baptists of the Maritime Provinces have been committed definite interests which the Lord, our Master, calls upon us to support. There are our educational institutions—Acadia College and the affiliated schools—the weak and struggling churches, the work among the Telugus, Grande Ligne and Northwest Missions, and aged and infirm ministers needing our help, besides the work in our local churches. Our material wealth, whether in bonds, mining stock, farms, business investments, professional skill or money, has been entrusted to us as stewards for carrying forward the work of the Lord through these various channels. Yet how much have these interests been receiving? For illustration consider two of them. Last year Acadia College received from the denominational funds of these three provinces \$1,896 63; this, however, was an exceptional year for Acadia, owing to the Forward Movement. The Foreign Mission Board received from the constituency of the churches \$14,048.85; of this amount \$8,200 came from

the W. B. M. U., and \$135.30 from Mission Bands and Sabbath Schools. This amount, then, \$14,048.85, is the largest possible estimate of what the Baptist brotherhood—and sisterhood—of these provinces are giving directly to carry the gospel to the Telugus. Of this amount a portion is of course contributed by non-church members. Yet to make the average as large as possible nothing more will be said of this. Our church membership, according to last Year Book, was 50,846. Allowing for non-residents and non-earners the number 10,000, we have 40,846 as the number who are, or ought to be, contributing to our Telugu work. With this reckoning we are giving 34 cents per earning member for evangelizing the heathen. Or reckoning simply the amount acknowledged by the Foreign Mission treasurer as coming from the denominational funds and miscellaneous from churches and individuals, \$5,452.25, we have as the average contribution 13 cents. Or taking a larger view we find—Year Book, page 208—that all our churches contributed last year, through regular channels for denominational work, \$11,625 85. Let it be clearly understood that this is apart from the offerings of the Woman's Aid Societies. Again taking 10,000 as the estimate of the number from whom no contribution is expected, we have on the average from each member, for the support of our entire denominational enterprises, 28 cents—not a munificent amount. Or bringing into the computation the amount for local church support, \$152,834 56, and adding it to the \$11,625 85 for denominational work, and we have as our entire contribution per member 4 dollars, 2 cents and 6 mills. Turning to our own Association we find the figures far better than the total for the provinces, yet not flattering. Here, applying the same methods as before, the gifts for denominational work reach 50 cents per member. What does all this show? Simply that heretofore we have not been faithful as stewards of the Lord's money, or possibly that a large number have failed to appreciate to any degree the significance of stewardship in this regard. Were we to show ourselves more worthy of our Lord's confidence in our use of worldly wealth doubtless we would find ourselves in possession of largely increased spiritual treasures. "Honor the Lord with thy substance and with the firstfruits of all thine increase," said the wise man of old. "Upon the first day of the week let each one of you lay by him in store as he may prosper," said the apostle.

Very urgently is there needed today the consecration of our possessions as well as of ourselves to the Lord. We need young men who will direct their business ability to Christian ends and by transparent methods gain money for the Lord's work. Why should the minister of the gospel keep before him the fact that his ability is the Lord's gift and must never be employed for selfish ends, and the business or professional man who is a Christian view differently his native qualifications and acquirements? There is no sufficient reason for this. To the Christian all duties are sacred. To him there should be no secular "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." When we shall learn the sacredness of handling money for the Lord as well as of the duty of consecrating wealth of brain and heart to the Master, a step in advance of far-reaching importance will have been taken.

WE ARE STEWARDS OF LIFE.—Job says, "Thou hast given me life." Even our bodies are to be temples of the living God. Of them we are stewards to keep them clean and pure as the indwelling place of the Holy Spirit. No Christian has any right to neglect to any extent due care of his physical life. We should conscientiously endeavor to have our bodies as healthy and strong as possible, in order that they may most generously contribute to our best life work. Our whole life is ours to improve. The true, intelligent Christian will be ambitious. "Covet earnestly the best gifts," not for personal advancement but for the glory of God in the progress of human weal. Let all our young people avail themselves of the splendid opportunities opened to them for noble training and culture under earnest Christian influences in our own Academy, Seminary and College at Wolfville. By honest use of the conditions which there prevail, life is developed on all sides, ennobled and enriched, appreciation of its possibilities takes its true place and one becomes in some degree equipped for the service of stewardship. Stewardship of life means stewardship of opportunity. Preparation for life means that equipment of the whole man which will best fit us to improve each opportunity. The dignity of posture may be admired by some; but to win the prize we must run. True life consists not in passivity but in Christ-directed activity.

"In the world's broad field of battle  
In the bivouac of life,  
Be not like dumb, driven cattle,  
Be a hero in the strife!"

"Trust no future how'er pleasant,  
Let the dead past bury its dead!  
Act—act in the living present,  
Heart within and God o'erhead!"

Visitors to art galleries at Versailles find the upper rooms filled with extremely ancient and valuable portraits. Here may be seen the faces of many of the greatest men of past ages, placed on canvas by the ablest artists. Yet it is a noticeable fact that instead of

lingering for a long period in the illustrious company of these magnificent works of art, the visitors after noticing one or two of the most prominent pictures, wander down to the other rooms where are displayed noble works of master artists presenting men and women in action. Before these productions the sight-seer is held in fascination. Here is the warrior cutting his way to glory over the bodies of dead and dying men; the orator delivering himself of burning words of argument or pathos; the statesman setting forth in weighty tones before the peers of the realm the policy of the nation; or the captain as the winds are blowing in hurricanes and the waves are dashing high, directing the affairs of the great ship. Men passing through these great halls of ancient and medieval art are engrossed not in the passive portraits but in the pictures of men in the thick of life's conflict and active duties. As our great prince among preachers once said: "Let us be who or what we may, we must bestir ourselves or be mere nobodies, chips in the porridge, forgotten shells of the shore. If we would impress we must act. . . . Our influence over our times will arise mainly from our doing and suffering the will of God, not from our office or person. Life, life in earnest, life for God, this will tell on the age; but mere orderliness and propriety, inactive and passionless, will be utterly inoperative."

Above all we need to live very near the Christ so that our view point of life may be right, our vision clear, our aims pure and noble. We need to have our lives directed by the Holy Ghost. We do not have true life at all until we yield ourselves to heaven's Lord and receive from him the life eternal which is life indeed. And the closer we walk with God the nobler and more helpful our life will be. One of the greatest needs of to-day is that we should let

"Our lips and lives express  
The holy gospel we profess."

We cannot be too jealous for the Word of God nor too careful in our presentation of the truth; yet it were devoutly to be desired that we were equally ardent to have our lives correspond to the immaculate teachings of Jesus Christ. Some one once asked concerning a certain preacher, "Is he sound?" "Yes," was the reply, "he is nothing else but sound." That reply could be easily understood to carry a deeper significance than simply reference to vibrations of the ether. There were once two brothers doctors, who lived in the same house. One was a medical doctor and the other was a doctor of divinity. One Monday morning a stranger enquired for the doctor; meaning the D. D. The M. D. responded to the enquiry, "You surely are not the doctor I heard preach yesterday. If you are you have certainly changed greatly," said the caller. "O, I see," was the reply, "it is my brother you wish to see. I, too, am a doctor, though my sphere is medicine. My brother preaches and I practice." It would mean much for the kingdom of heaven if we who preach were more careful to practice what we preach and our people were more diligent in this regard also. Orthodoxy of the head is grand but it has value only as it leads to orthodoxy of the heart and life. Let us not relax in our purpose and study to be orthodox in belief, ever contending for the faith once delivered to the saints, but let us be more zealous to be orthodox in life, for of life and its untold opportunities we are stewards.

WE ARE STEWARDS OF THE TRUTH.—To us has been committed the Word of God. This wonderful treasure of wisdom and knowledge it is our privilege to receive into our hearts, manifest in our lives and preach to others. The truth has not been committed to us as a possession to be selfishly enjoyed, but it has been intrusted to us for the ennobling of our own life and then for the uplifting of other lives through us. The manifold grace of God has been committed to us as stewards. Others are to hear the Gospel from us. Truth is universal. It cannot be stored up like the imperial crown and royal treasures in the tower of London. It is rather like the air which all need, without which none can live; or the water with which man everywhere slacks his thirst. The Gospel of the blessed God is adapted to the world's needs. It is to be preached among all nations. We are stewards to whom has been entrusted this unspeakable treasure to the end that through us others might come to a knowledge of the truth and by it be made free. The great commission, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature," is only the great principle of spiritual stewardship translated by the parting command of the Lord Jesus.

In this most glorious work we should never forget that we are stewards and that as such, it is our duty to give to the world a pure Gospel, the unadulterated truth. We are to conserve the truth as well as to make it known. This is a distinguishing principle of our loved denomination. But as we review the history of the past 50 years are we sure that we have been as devoted to the word of Truth as was our duty? Have we in any adequate sense realized that upon us has been laid the trust of holding the truth ourselves as it has come from the mouth of the Lord in face of designs of high or low critics by subtle or open efforts to change the Word of the Lord into the preference of man; and also of witnessing to the truth before the world? We have a duty to mankind in reference to the fundamental principles of soul liberty, the freedom of the truth. May it not be that we are too

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