

Titles of Christians (#16)
Stewards of The Manifold Grace of God
1 Peter 4:10 – 11
Sermon by Pastor Sylvia Chan

Today we continue to study the titles of Christians in the New Testament. Let's look at a passage:

^{NASB} **1 Peter 4:10 – 11** As each one has received a *special* gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. ¹¹ Whoever speaks, *is to do so* as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves *is to do so* as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1Pe 4:10-11, NASB)

According to this passage, 1 Peter 4:10 – 11, Christians are compared to stewards of the manifold grace of God. As stewards have to take care of their masters' property, business and even family matters, so Christians should use the grace that has been granted us to serve one another so that Yahweh God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

First of all, please take notice that the grace that Yahweh God has granted us is not for our own benefit, but to serve one another so that God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

For example: Some people are granted the gift of preaching; they can preach with power and clarity, so they ought to preach the word of God. Some people are granted the gift of doing administrative work, they should take care of the administrative work in the church. Some people have the gift of music, they should serve God in the area of music. Some people have the gift of encouraging people, they should encourage those who are sad and discouraged.

Many years ago Pastor Bentley and I were serving in a church in Asia, where there was a brother who was a very good cook. He would often invite many Christian brethren as well as non-Christian friends to his place for dinner. This brother would work very hard to prepare the good food while the brethren and non-Christian friends would sit together to discuss and share stories. That was his way of spreading the gospel to the non-Christians.

In another country where we served the Lord, I got to know a Christian sister who was very concerned for the sick and the poor. She worked in day time, and would visit the sick and the

poor in the evening time; she would clean the house for them and cook for them. When someone was very sick, she would even take days off to bring the person to hospital. She was taking care of both Christians and non-Christians. She wanted to spread the love of Yahweh God and the Lord Jesus Christ with practical love and care. You may think that this sister must be very rich and physically very strong. No! No! She was not rich, she was just a cleaning lady who cleaned offices and houses for people; and she was definitely not strong at all! Indeed she was quite weak physically, she would get pains here and pains there all over the body, and quite often she herself needed to go to hospital. But she never complained; on the contrary she would often praise and give thanks to Yahweh God; every day she would go here and there to visit the sick and encourage them. She definitely had glorified Yahweh God through the work that she was doing.

A good steward has to be wise

Do you want to be a good steward of Yahweh God? What kind of qualities does a steward of God need to have?

^{NASB} **Luke 16:1 – 13** Now He was also saying to the disciples, “There was a rich man who had a manager, and this *manager* was reported to him as squandering his possessions. ² And he called him and said to him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an accounting of your management, for you can no longer be manager.’ ³ The manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig; I am ashamed to beg. ⁴ I know what I shall do, so that when I am removed from the management people will welcome me into their homes.’ ⁵ And he summoned each one of his master’s debtors, and he *began* saying to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ ⁶ And he said, ‘A hundred measures of oil.’ And he said to him, ‘Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.’ ⁷ Then he said to another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ And he said, ‘A hundred measures of wheat.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, and write eighty.’ ⁸ And his master praised the unrighteous manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light. ⁹ And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the wealth of unrighteousness, so that when it fails, they will receive you into the eternal dwellings. ¹⁰ He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much. ¹¹ Therefore if you have not been faithful in the *use of* unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true *riches* to you? ¹² And if you have not been faithful in *the use of* that which is another’s, who will give you that which is your own? ¹³ No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.” (Luke 16:1-13, NASB)

Here the Lord Jesus was teaching his disciples with a parable. After you have heard this parable, do you wonder why this manager would simply reduce the amount of debt for the debtors without asking his master? In any society and at any time, if a manager does something like this, he would be put in jail! But strange enough, not only does his master not punish him, his master even praised him, in v.8, “And his master praised the unrighteous manager because he had acted shrewdly.” That’s very strange!

In order to understand this parable, first we have to understand the Old Testament Law.

^{NASB} **Deuteronomy 23:19 – 20** “You shall not charge interest to your countrymen: interest on money, food, *or* anything that may be loaned at interest. ²⁰ You may charge interest to a foreigner, but to your countrymen you shall not charge interest, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all that you undertake in the land which you are about to enter to possess.” (Deu 23:19-20, NASB)

This passage Deuteronomy 23:19 – 20 tells us that according to the Law, when the Jewish people lend money, or food, or anything to their own countrymen, they are not allowed to charge any interest at all. It is only when they lend money to foreigners that they can charge interest. Charging interest to their fellow Jewish people is against the Law in the Bible.

When the Jews lend oil to foreigners, they can charge interest 100%; that means when they lend 50 measures of oil to foreigners, the debtor has to pay back 100 measures of oil; the capital is 50 measures, and the interest is the other 50 measures.

When they lend wheat to foreigners, they would charge interest of 25%; that means when they lend 80 measures of wheat, the debtor has to pay back 100 measures of wheat; the capital is 80 measures, and the interest is 20 measures.

In this parable, when the manager reduced the amount of debt for the debtors, actually he was simply reducing the interest, he didn’t touch the capital. 100 measures of oil minus the interest is 50 measures of oil; 100 measures of wheat minus the interest is 80 measures of wheat. That is why when the master knew about this, he couldn’t do anything, because when he himself charged interest from his fellow Jewish brethren, which was against the Law, and what the manager did was according to the Law.

After we understand the reasoning in this parable, exactly what does the Lord Jesus want to teach us in this parable?

Let's look at verse 8 of this parable:

Luke 16:8 “And his master praised the unrighteous manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light.”

Here the Lord Jesus says that this unrighteous manager had acted shrewdly.

Does it mean that the Lord wants us to learn to act shrewdly? But what is so good about shrewdness?

In order to understand the Lord's point, we have to look into the original language. In this verse, the original Greek word for “shrewd” is “φρόνιμος” (*phronimos*); according to Greek-English dictionaries, this word “*phronimos*” pertains to an understanding that results from insight and wisdom.

^{NASB} **Proverbs 3:7** Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD (Yahweh) and turn away from evil. (Pro 3:7, NASB)

The Greek word for “wise” in this passage is “*phronimos*”. According to this passage, a truly wise person is someone who fears Yahweh and turns away from evil.

^{NASB} **Matthew 7:24** “Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock.” (Mat 7:24, NASB)

Here the Lord Jesus says that the one who hears his words and acts on them, which means to obey them, is a wise man who builds his house on the rock, and his house will not collapse.

Let's take a look to see how wise the manager in Luke chapter 16 is. When his master had charged interest from his Jewish brethren, that was against the Law. In the past the manager would have certainly conspired with his master to carry this out. But when he knows that his job will be taken away, he immediately looks for ways to compensate for his wrongdoing. He reduces the amount of interest that his master has charged the people. This act is repentance and obedience to the Law of Yahweh God.

In Luke 16:9 the Lord Jesus says, “And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the wealth of unrighteousness, so that when it fails, they will receive you into the eternal dwellings.”

Because his master had charged interest to his fellow Jewish people, that was against the Law, and the money that his master had earned was unrighteous. Now this manager made friends with the unrighteous money, that was very wise; but when he was about to lose his job, he used the unrighteous money to take care of his own future.

Indeed not only money can pass away, even the gifts we have can also pass away. Today I am preaching the gospel on YouTube and websites. I will pass away, but the work I have done will remain. That’s a wise way to use the gifts that Yahweh God has granted me.

A good steward has to be faithful

Besides the quality of being wise, a steward also has to be faithful. Let’s look at the parable again.

Luke 16:10 “He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much.”

The Lord Jesus says that if we are faithful in a little thing, we are also faithful in much. Conversely, if we are unrighteous in a little thing, we are also unrighteous in much. That means we have to be faithful in everything; no matter whether the thing is big or small, whatever God has entrusted to us, we have to carry them out wholeheartedly.

Every Christian has received one gift or many gifts from Yahweh God. No matter what gifts we have received, we have to use them to serve Him. If we don’t use the gifts that God has granted us to serve Him, we have squandered the grace that God has granted us.

Conclusion

Now let’s sum up everything we have studied today. Christians are stewards of the grace of God, and we have to use that grace to serve God and serve one another.

A good steward of God needs to have these two qualities:

1. Wisdom. We use the grace of God wisely in everything we do for the kingdom of God.

Stewards of The Manyfold Grace of God

2. Faithfulness. We don't squander the grace of God, and we don't use the grace of God for our own benefit, but we use the grace of God to serve Him.

^{NASB} **Matthew 24:45** "Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time?" (Mat 24:45, NASB)

If you are a faithful slave of God, you will be given the responsibility to give food to the household at the proper time.