

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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Getting To Know The Father's Heart, In Order To Do His Will

“The one trustworthy in an insignificant thing is also trustworthy in a great thing; and the one unrighteous in an insignificant thing also in a great thing is unrighteous. Accordingly, if in the unrighteous mammon y'all did not come to be trustworthy ones, who will entrust to y'all the real *treasure*? And if in the thing belonging to another y'all did not come to be trustworthy ones, the thing of your own who will give to y'all?”

Luke 16:10,11

“Moreover it is sought out among the stewards, in order that any might be found trustworthy.”

I Cor. 4:2

What is a steward? The Greek word for "steward" (*oikonomos*) is a compound word from the words meaning “law” (*nomos*) and "house" (*oikos*). The steward, then, was **one given responsibility to carry out the "law of the house"**.

The word “law” in our culture tends to bring up images of legislation (to *establish* the law), police (to *enforce* the law) and courts (to *punish* lawbreakers). We tend to conjure up synonyms such as “moral absolutes, precepts, rules, regulations, ordinances, codes of behavior”, etc., all of which emphasize *regulating peoples' behavior* from a legal-judicial point of view. The reason we tend toward these kind of word pictures and word connections has to do with our cultural background and history, going way back to the early days of Western civilization. **The Roman Empire was very much a legal-judicial animal.** As they conquered more and more territory, *the Romans discovered that they needed to develop a uniform set of laws that would govern the behavior of their citizens consistently*, wherever they might be located in the empire that was under their control. The Roman people tended to be practical, utilitarian “doers”, ones that often would utilize the inventions and creations of other cultures. They were not so *creative*, or *speculative*, as much as they were *pragmatic*. They had no time or interest in philosophical kinds of questions. They just wanted to know, “Did you *do* that?” If so, they would mete out justice based on that behavior.

The Roman emphasis on outward behavior and law codes strongly influenced the Western church, both in theology and in practice. The root meanings of certain Biblical word pictures became obscured in centuries of church practice and the Roman mindset. **It was all about behavior, not about wrestling with matters of morality, nor even about relationship with God.** It was about, “Did you *do* what the law prescribed?” Don't ask, “Why?” Just *do* it. **If you failed to do what was prescribed, there would be punishment. God's grace was defined in terms of being saved from punishment.**

By contrast, long before the Romans came on the scene, the Hebrew word for law, *torah*, conveyed more the flavor of “instruction, teaching, directions for living successfully”. The measuring line or goal was less about right and wrong, so much as it was on *learning to live skillfully, effectively, and insightfully in all one's dealings and relationships*. It grew out of Israel's covenant relationship with God. **The law was the guidebook to instruct the nation on how to conduct themselves in order to succeed at living a long, healthy, prosperous life with regard to God and each other.** More than just a code of behavior, it was directed toward developing a relationship of respect, worship, and love toward God, as well as respect, concern, caring, and uprightness in relation to one another. **It went beyond simply policing behavior to instructing and shaping one's inner attitudes and perspectives on life**, because repeatedly these are portrayed as of premier significance for success in living life. **The torah was the guidebook to developing a heart attitude and lifestyle that reflected the values of their God and King.** It was designed to teach them to successfully walk within His care and blessing upon their lives. *This* concept of law was behind the New Testament understanding. God's grace was to be seen in His willingness to overlook sin and to continue to have care, oversight and relationship with Israel, so that they might live well, successfully, and harmoniously with Him and each other. **The focus was on relationship with, and loyalty toward God.** The blessings and curses that accompany obedience or disobedience were seen as the consequences of living faithfully toward God, or of disregarding Him and His ways. Following the guidebook of the law would lead to joy, blessing and long life, because those who would pursue that path of obedience were doing so out of a trust that God is good and a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6). **Following torah was accommodating oneself to what God says is important to Him, in order to have successful relationship with Him.** To follow *torah* would draw the seeker much deeper than issues of mere outward behavior to adjust and school the attitudes and perspectives of the heart.

In the Old Testament, there was no specific word used for “steward”. It was a function described by a phrase. **The steward was the person who was “over the house of” his master** (Gen. 43:19; 44:1,4; I Kg. 16:9). This idiom described one who had spent sufficient time with a household to have learned the values and business practices of that family well enough to be entrusted with the oversight of their daily affairs. This was a role that, typically, was given only to trusted, seasoned servants who had demonstrated skill, integrity and wisdom through years of service. To be groomed or prepared for this task was a high honor. **It required that you get to know the heart and methodology of the master well enough to handle his affairs according to his principles, values and priorities.** A successful steward was one who would treat the other servants responsibly, and care for his master's affairs with at least the same efficiency and care as the master himself would. **The Greek word for steward, *oikonomos*, also conveys this idea.** The Greek word for “law” is derived from the word, *nemō*, which meant “to parcel out, distribute, dispense”, especially with regard to food or the grazing of animals. From the verb, *nemō*, to the noun, *nomos*, the idea was that a stewardship “law” was any policy, rule of action, or principle which was received by customary usage, or was observed as a repeated course of events, or was prescribed by the master’s wishes, by which life was to “carried out”, and goods dispensed, or parceled out. In other words, the Greek word, *oikonomos*, would bring us around to the same kind of idea as the Hebrew word did, that **the “law of the house” is instruction in how things ought to be done, not so much because of right and wrong, but from the perspective of “this is what the master wants” or “this is how things are done around here”.** *The heart and values of the Master are the key concern.* Interestingly, many of us think of stewardship as *saving money, but it had more to do with utilizing or spending money in accordance with the Master’s wishes.*

The important point that I am trying to make here is that **if we look back at “stewardship” through the lens of our Western civilization, we will tend to see it as a duty**, ...as primarily a behavior-thing, something we will be held accountable for, ...a right-wrong thing that we are either "doing" properly or poorly, and we are either being approved or disapproved accordingly, etc. **This taps into all kinds of unhealthy emotions and inner dynamics.** *Stewardship quickly comes to be a weight, something which we see in terms of mechanics, not a passion of the heart.* It is easy to fall into the Romans 7 dynamic, and remain stuck there indefinitely, over this issue. We can easily feed the flesh, instead of nurture the Spirit, if we approach this issue from the wrong perspective. On the other hand, **if we approach this from its actual Hebrew Old Testament foundation, we can see this concept of stewardship as primarily a relationship issue.** It is a *challenge* and *opportunity* to us to draw near to know and understand the heart of God, so that the rhythm of His heart may set the musical pattern of our own. **It is another part of our lives where we can express our faith that God is good, and that His ways are best.** Those who walk in agreement with Him will *not* be put to shame. **There is life, joy, and fulfillment to be found in His counsel**, though it may seem crazy to the minds of those who do not know Him. **This is about trust.** Building our own trust in Him, by seeing His provision and care of us as we step out in faith, as well as establishing a consistent walk of faithfulness, will lead us on into greater levels of intimacy, opportunity, and responsibility with our Master. **God intends stewardship to be an invitation to get to know His heart, so that we can do His will effectively.** He desires that it not be a mere duty, but the full and integrated expression of our faith, so that His Spirit can freely operate through the expressions of our heart.

Secondly, I want to challenge you to go on a quest to understand God’s heart in this matter. Most of us *have been given* cultural definitions and expectations about these issues *by others*. We have an expectation about what “stewardship” should look like. *It could be that we have been handed a bunch of cultural ideas that are not at all consistent with the Father’s heart.* **How are we to discover the Father’s heart on this matter? We need to search the Scriptures, to see what has been valuable to Him in the past.** What values and priorities can we see in the Old and New Testaments? What were *the original contexts* for those teachings or messages about what was important to God? How does that carry over to me today?

Thirdly, Jesus pointed out the world system has perverted strength into power to control and dominate, and those who have power like to lord it over others. **He said that the kingdom of God was different, however. There, those who had power, strength, and ability are to use them for serving others.** Those who would be great are those who would be least of all and servant of all. Do you think there may be some parallels with money and possessions, as well? What would that mean for my spiritual maturity and stewardship? Are spiritual growth and material wealth given to simply be enjoyed *by me*, or are they given *to benefit others*? I Chron. 29:1-17; Acts 20:35.