

Number 36 (6 - 2)

**Copy of the "GRACE JOURNAL"**

"Preaching grace in the Dispensation of grace"

A Bible Study

Richard Jordan, Editor, President of Grace School of the Bible

888-535-2300 [GracelImpact.org](http://GracelImpact.org)

---

**Faithful Stewards**

BY RICHARD JORDAN

Paul exhorts the divided and discontented Corinthian believers to look upon him and his associates as "the ministers of Christ and *stewards of the mysteries of God*" (*I Cor. 4:1*).

The portion of a steward is one of great responsibility in the Scriptures. For example in the Gospels our Lord used this term often to describe the role of His disciples during His approaching absence. In Luke 12, after telling them that it was their "Father's good pleasure to give [them] the kingdom" (v. 32), He looked toward His impending rejection and ascension to the Father's right hand as a royal exile and instructed them concerning "*that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household*" (v.42).

This is exactly what a steward is--one who dispenses his master's goods and affairs. This responsibility surely indicates that the steward must be wise--but *first* he must be *faithful*. Thus Paul presses home this basic requirement as he reminds the Corinthians:

"Moreover, it is REQUIRED in stewards that a man be found FAITHFUL"

(*I Cor.4:2*).

In early Acts the twelve apostles were faithful to the "goods" committed to them, faithfully pressing the claims of the Messiah on the nation Israel. Peter, for example, "*filled with the Holy Ghost*," boldly proclaimed to Israel's leaders:

"...Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel,

"If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole;

"Be it know unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand here before you whole.

"This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.

"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we (Peter refers here to national salvation, the salvation of the nation over which *they* were rulers. Cf Matt. 1:21; Rom. 11-26, 27.) must be saved" (Acts 4:8-12).

Rather than yielding in faith to the witness of the Spirit, as He worked through the apostles, the nation resisted in unbelief. Thus the Lord, in unsearchable wisdom, officially "concluded them in unbelief" and made known the unsearchable riches of His grace by revealing to Paul, the chief of sinners saved by grace, the most wonderful message ever sent by God to man-- "*the gospel of the grace of God*":

"But none of these things moved me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and THE MINISTRY WHICH I HAVE RECEIVED OF THE LORD JESUS, TO TESTIFY THE GOSPEL OF THE GRACE OF GOD" (Acts 20:24).

WHEREOF I AM MADE A MINISTER ACCORDING TO THE DISPENSATION OF GOD, WHICH IS GIVEN TO ME FOR YOU, TO FULFILL THE WORD OF GOD,

"Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, BUT NOW IS MADE MANIFEST TO HIS SAINTS" (Col. 1:25, 26).

"In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began;

"But hath in due times manifested His Word THROUGH PREACHING WHICH IS COMMITTED UNTO ME ACCORDING TO THE COMMANDMENT OF GOD OUR SAVIOR" (Tit. 1:2, 3).

To Paul was committed a *new* set of "goods"--contained in the mystery "*kept secret since the world began*" --and through him to us. Thus, like Timothy, we are exhorted: "*keep that which is committed to thy trust*" (I Tim. 6:20).

"Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou has heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

"THAT GOOD THING WHICH WAS COMMITTED UNTO THEE, KEEP BY THE HOLY GHOST WHICH DWELLETH IN US" (II Tim. 1:13, 14).

It is of no little significance that Paul used the same Greek root, *oikonomos*, both in I Cor. 4:1, 2, where it is translated "steward," and in I Cor. 9:17, where it is rendered "dispensation". Our stewardship is clearly that of giving out the truths and riches of the dispensation of grace--"the mysteries [or secrets] of God," committed through Paul to us.

### **THE ONE GREAT REQUIREMENT**

The one great requisite for a steward is *to be found faithful*. It is *required* that a steward *first* be *faithful*--not successful. Too many today mistakenly suppose that "gain is godliness" --that success, in terms of the world's standards, is proof of rightness by God's standards: that if we are not "successful" we must be wrong. But we do not serve man and thus should respond with Paul to such criticism: "But with me *it is a very small thing* that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment...*He that judgeth me is the Lord*" (I Cor. 4:3,4).

When men turn their ears from the truth and will not endure sound doctrine, preferring instead a diet of "more timely and relevant subjects," *we must* be faithful to our Master. "*Preach the Word,*" Paul tells Timothy, and *why?*

"For THE TIME WILL COME WHEN THEY WILL NOT ENDURE SOUND DOCTRINE: but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears:

"And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (II Tim. 4:3, 4).

Hence Paul adds the charge to Timothy--and to us:

“But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, MAKE FULL PROOF OF THY MINISTRY” (II Tim. 4:5).

“As stewards we are *duty-bound* to fulfill the tremendous task committed to us by our Lord, regardless of human criticism and opposition. May we join with Paul, then, and say with equally sincere hearts:

“For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: FOR NECESSITY IS LAID UPON ME: YEA, WOE IS ME IF I PREACH NOT THE GOSPEL!

“FOR IF I DO THIS THING WILLINGLY, I HAVE A REWARD: BUT IF AGAINST MY WILL, A DISPENSATION OF THE GOSPEL IS COMMITTED UNTO ME” (Cor. 9:16, 17).

Either the "mystery" revealed through Paul is the answer to the prevailing theological confusion or it is not. If it is not, let's forget it. If it is, let us ask God for the wisdom to explain it clearly, the courage to stand for it faithfully and the power of the Spirit to proclaim it effectively and to demonstrate its relevancy to our times in the details of our lives

### **THE BELIEVER'S PRAYER LIFE**

Man was made to worship the Lord. The Reformers put it correctly: "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." And this is exactly the right order.

Today's Christianity, on the other hand, makes God the great heavenly Bell Hop whose one great purpose is to serve man's interests. The glory and majesty of God is missing today. How we need to get back to the Word of God and let the glorified Lord Jesus speak to us through the Pauline epistles and shake us back into the world of reality where we can recognize that we were not only created by Christ but created *for* Christ as well.

Nowhere is this imbalance more apparent than in the arena of prayer. The prayer life of the average believer--yes, even the grace believer--makes God the creature and man the creator, reducing the Almighty to a great Geni in the sky who, if we rub our "prayer lamps" correctly, will grant our wishes, change our circumstances and make our lives smooth running and painless to manage--in other words, make life easy for *us*. In such a system our happiness becomes the supreme end of His existence.

Repeatedly we are told, "Prayer changes things". The reality is quite different, however, for prayer was not meant to change things. *Christ* changes things. It is His Word that does this. The truth is that prayer is simply talking to God, communing with Him and thinking through the details of life before Him--conscious that He hears and knows our every thought, we thus talk to Him. Prayer is a fantastic operating asset which must be properly understood in order for the life of Christ to fully live in and through us.

While reading a biography of E.W. Bullinger, I came across a quote from an article by him on prayer which I cannot fail to share it with our readers. What follows came from Bullinger's pen in September 1898, yet its exhortation is as appropriate and needed today as then:

The answer to your question will be found in the definition of the term "prayer". What is prayer? Our hymn says truly, "Prayer is the Christian's vital breath". Or, it may be more accurately expressed by saying, *Prayer is the breath of the new nature*.

Just as the natural breath is the sign and evidence of physical life--so prayer is the mark and sign of the possession of spiritual life. Natural life commences with the breathing and the breathing produces a cry. It is so with the spiritual birth. A New Life is imparted-- "the breath of life" is breathed; a cry is produced and prayer goes forth, "God be merciful to me a sinner." From that moment the breathing continues as the spontaneous outcome of the New Life.

We require no more rule for the one breathing than the other. No knowledge of physiology is required for the one, and no knowledge of theology is necessary for the other. Indeed, one has often listened to discourses on physiology till one has exclaimed, "Please, say no more or I shall be afraid to breathe!" So it is with the breathing of the new nature. The moment it becomes the subject of discussion or of rule --its essence is gone. We are such formalist by nature that we need nothing to encourage formalism in our prayers. Our efforts should be used in the opposite direction. The moment we reason about prayer we make it artificial. But true prayer is *spontaneous*. Our business in natural life is to breathe and not to *think* about it. Our business in spiritual life is to breathe (i. e., to pray) and not to think about it. The

moment we begin to think about our prayer we are occupied with the *means* and lose the *end*.

We are reminded of an old rhyme which we recently heard, but which illustrates our meaning exactly:

The centipede was happy quite  
Until the toad, in fun  
Said, pray which foot goes after which?  
Which moved his mind to such a pitch  
He lay distracted in the ditch  
Considering--How to run.

We immediately pointed the moral and put it into the following form:

The praying soul was happy quite  
Until someone did say,  
Prayer must be *this*, and *that*, and *thus*!  
Which put his mind in such a fuss  
That here and there in vain he's rush  
To find out --How to pray!

Nothing can be added to this great truth or to its lesson. As to "definiteness in prayer," well, if we were *omniscient*, we would be very definite, but believing that God knows what is best, we are content to very definitely ask Him to do all that He knows to be best. Unfortunately, most Christians think they know better than God, and hence very definitely decide what they want Him to do. And this--in spite of the fact that He has told them that "we know not what we should pray for as we ought" (Rom. 8:26).

For our part we have but one desire in this matter, and that is that He would do all His will. By our increasing knowledge of Him (Eph. 1:17) we are so convinced of His

infinite love and infinite knowledge, and infinite power that to substitute for these the definiteness of our "infirmities" (Rom. 8:26) would be our own infinite loss.

---