

Stewardships & Two Principles, Among Three People Groups

Stewardships

From beginning to end, Scripture presents a number of relationships that are called or can be characterized as *stewardships*. The ability to identify and understand the various stewardships in Scripture is valuable to believers because Scripture itself says that this understanding is profitable (2 Timothy 3:16,17). We are to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18), who is Himself the most pivotal steward in all of this present creation as well as the new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17; Colossians 1:15-20; Revelation 21 and 22). A steward has been defined as¹:

A person who manages another's property or financial affairs; one who administers anything as the agent of another or others.

These stewardships vary from small scale and impact to stewardships that have eternal import. Scripture refers to these stewardships by a great variety of related words, phrases, and synonyms - and even metaphors. But the key aspects of biblical stewardships can be summarized as follows:

- One entrusts the stewardship to another or to others (the steward or stewards).
- The steward (or stewards) may be given a title, and the arrangement or assignment given to the steward(s) may involve specific durations or milestones of time. There will often be specific principles and objectives that go along with the stewardship. The character and faithfulness of the steward(s) is often a critical point of concern.
- The domain or extent of the stewardship may be the land and/or people over which the steward has responsibility, and there may be a specific calling for those in that land or people group.

Adam, for example, had a stewardship over the garden of Eden, in which Adam was entrusted by God with the garden, naming of its animals, and his wife, Eve. A number of the aspects of a stewardship listed above were detailed in the instructions given to Adam, as recorded in Genesis 1 and 2. Many of the details of that stewardship and the consequences of Adam's failure under that stewardship are outlined from Genesis 3 on.

The apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 3:1-3 about the stewardship that had been entrusted to him:

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles-- 2 if indeed you have heard of the **stewardship** of God's grace which was given to me for you; 3 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief.

Two Principles

While Scripture conveys a great number and variety of stewardships, from beginning to end Scripture presents two primary reigning principles for the stewardships brought out in Scripture:

¹ The first definition given at <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/stewardship>. Another word for a stewardship is a *dispensation*.

- The Principle of Law
- The Principle of Grace

Under the Principle of Law, the responsibility falls upon a man or mankind to do or not do specific acts or carry out specific accomplishments, and failure results in negative consequences. The Principle of Law was in place for both Adam in his stewardship in the garden of Eden, and under the Law as instituted in Israel by Moses, and afterwards carried on by Joshua and subsequent stewards (judges, kings, prophets, priests, etc.).

Under the Principle of Grace, God Himself takes on responsibility, and the responsibility of each man under the Principle of Grace is to believe God. Under the Principle of Grace, believing in God's work is the means of seeing the promised positive consequences come about - and God does not fail. Abraham and Paul, for example, were key stewards under the Principle of Grace (Romans 4:16-25; Galatians 3:6-18; Colossians 1:25-29).

Romans 5:15-21 tells us that the Principle of Law reigns under Adam, accompanied by sin and death, but that Grace is the reigning principle for those who are saved by faith in Christ, resulting in eternal life².

Three People Groups

While Scripture tells us about people both as individuals and as all humanity together, from the beginning of Scripture to the last pages we see the historical development and enduring identity of three primary people groups in this sequence:

- The Gentiles as an ethnic distinction (from Genesis 1 on, revealed by Moses)
- The people of Israel, as an ethnic distinction (from Genesis 12 on, revealed by Moses)
- The Church, as a body created by God from Gentiles & Israel, but a new & spiritual creation – not ultimately of ethnic distinction (from Acts 2 on, but revealed by Paul)

For all time, any ethnic Gentiles and ethnic Israel are saved by grace through faith. But the Church consists only of those who are saved by faith from among ethnic Gentiles and of ethnic Israel, from the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) to the Rapture, such that their ethnic distinctions from among Gentile and from among Israel no longer remain a part of their primary spiritual identity. The three people groups are aspects of Scripture's most important stewardships.

The saved of these three primary people groups, all saved by grace, each maintain an identity and unique relationship to God and to the Lamb that endures on into eternity³.

Conclusion

Though Scripture presents a great number of stewardships at various levels, every stewardship in Scripture is either under the Principle of Law or the Principle of Grace, and the pivotal stewardships will often be found among the three people groups identified above: the Gentiles, Israel and the Church.

² For a comparison and contrast of the Principle of Law and the Principle of Grace see <http://hollyhillsbiblechurch.org/?p=78>.

³ For the distinct identity and place of the Gentiles, Israel and the Church on into eternity, see <http://hollyhillsbiblechurch.org/?p=76>.