

# The Stewardship of the Gospel

by Clarence Sexton

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*Clarence Sexton's sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding and fulfilling our stewardship of the gospel by actively sharing it with others.*

**Duration:** 38:06

**Scripture:** Luke 24:45-46, 1 Corinthians 9:16-17, 1 Corinthians 15:1-5

**Topics:** "Stewardship"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the importance of understanding and fulfilling the stewardship of the gospel. He highlights how wealthy individuals often give large sums of money to charitable causes, but emphasizes that no gift is greater than paying the debt of the gospel to others. The speaker shares a personal anecdote about trying to impress his girlfriend by buying matching shirts, only to find out that the event they were attending was free. He uses this story to illustrate that people often spend their lives striving for satisfaction, when the greatest thing they can receive is the free gift of the gospel. The speaker then delves into the Gospel according to Luke, emphasizing the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the core message of the gospel.

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## Transcript

I would like you to take the Word of God, please, and turn with me to the New Testament book of 1 Corinthians, the ninth chapter, 1 Corinthians chapter 9, and we'll begin reading in just a moment with verse 16, 1 Corinthians chapter 9 and verse 16. We're dealing with the subject of stewardship, and in particular the stewardship of the gospel. I think we've come to understand, at least I hope we've come to understand, the difference between stewardship and ownership.

We do not have ownership, we have stewardship. The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. And God has made us stewards over His possessions.

A steward is one who is the manager or caretaker, organizer, all things combined, of another's possessions. And the apostle Paul here is giving a testimony about his stewardship. The Bible says in verse 16 of 1 Corinthians chapter 9, for though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of.

For necessity is laid upon me, yea, woe is unto 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.

I'd like you to take the time, please, if you're in the habit of marking things in your Bible, to mark that expression at the conclusion of verse 17. A dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me. The word dispensation literally means stewardship.

That's what the word literally means. A stewardship of the gospel is committed unto me. Often when people think of stewardship, they think we're going to talk only about money.

But we must begin with the Lord Jesus Christ and stay with the Lord Jesus Christ. Here we're dealing with the person of Christ. The truth of the matter is, if we are right in the matter of Christ, we'll be right in the matter of our money.

There's no doubt about that. A stewardship of the gospel, I want you to hold your place here just for a moment and turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 15. The Bible says, moreover, brethren, verse 1 of 1 Corinthians 15, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand, by which also ye are saved, if you keep in memory what I have preached unto you, unless you have believed in vain.

For I delivered unto you, first of all, that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve. After that, He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. Now when God declares in His Word, this is the gospel, when He says, this is the gospel, He goes on to tell us, this is the gospel.

I delivered unto you, first of all, that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. Now here we have the death, the burial, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. God has described for us the gospel.

I'd like you to turn back with me, please, to the gospel records, the gospel according to Luke. There's so much confusion about the gospel, I want us to understand the gospel. What is the gospel? If it's so important that the Lord Jesus Christ said, go into all the world, and He could have said anything, but He said this, go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.

How are we going to declare the gospel if we don't know what the gospel happens to be? So in Luke chapter 24, let's begin reading here as our Lord deals with His disciples on the day of His resurrection after He's appeared to them. And in verse 45 of Luke chapter 24, the Bible says, then opened He their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures. And by the way, God still does this supernatural work of illumining us, teaching us His Word.

I've reminded you many times that we have the supernatural work of divine revelation, inspiration, preservation, and also illumination. This is not like any other book. It is not an ordinary book.

This is the Word of God, and God gives us an understanding of His Word. We cannot have that understanding apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, quickening us, making this book live for us. And the Bible says in verse 46, and said unto them, thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

And ye are witnesses of these things. Now He said He behooved Christ to suffer, no way to get around Him, and to rise from the dead the third day. We're dealing here with the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

And then He said to His disciples, and ye are witnesses of these things. I'd like you to write these things down as we consider the stewardship of the gospel. First, we have received the gospel.

We have received the gospel. Remember what I read a moment ago in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, when the apostle wrote to these Corinthian believers and said, moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand. He said, you've received it.

We have received the gospel. Those of us who know the Lord as our Savior have received the gospel. He also says here in Luke chapter 24, you know that He behooved Christ to suffer.

Remember, your understanding has been opened, that He was buried, that He rose again the third day. You are witnesses of these things. We have received the gospel.

When I was just a boy, in and out of Sunday school, we would go on occasions. As a matter of fact, during the time I lived in Alabama, most of the time I lived just less than a block from the church that we occasionally attended. And I heard many things about God, about the Bible.

I can still remember Sunday school events and Sunday school parties. I remember songs I learned in Sunday school. I washed my hands this morning, so very clean and white, and hold them up to Jesus to work for Him till night, and still remember some of those things.

I remember once in a Sunday school party, we had a balloon race, and the children were having an area where they had a chair at the end of one room, a chair at the end of the other room, and another chair at the end of the room, and we had to pop a balloon sitting on it. I remember that as a child. I remember once at a Christmas play, we had to purchase sort of a robe to pretend to be a shepherd in the Christmas play.

Lots of things. There were all kinds of things going on in these churches, but I never heard the gospel. And because I never heard the gospel, I never received the gospel.

I'm not saying that's the fault of children's workers. I'm taking all the blame for that myself, but I do realize that much goes on in churches in the name of God, religiously, and with activities, and the gospel is never given. The boys and girls should know the gospel and hear the gospel, believe the gospel.

Do we understand that? When the children leave your class, when the adults leave the class, when young people leave the class, have they heard the gospel? I heard Dr. Lee Robertson give his Christian testimony so many times about Miss Daisy Halls, and he was brought to church by a young fellow who was a little older than him named Clyde Martin, Claude Martin, and he brought him to Sunday school in church. Dr. Robertson, as a young boy, wasn't interested. The first time he came to class, Miss Daisy Halls said, how many of you are Christians? And he said he was the only person in the class who could not raise his hand.

It troubled him. During that week, he knelt down, as he knelt down beside his bed, on a Wednesday evening, he asked the Lord to forgive his sin, and by faith, trusted Christ as his Savior, having heard her present the gospel in that Sunday school class the Sunday before. When he came back to the class the

next Sunday, he said when she asked the same question she asked every Sunday, how many of you are Christians? He said his hand shot up.

He could say now that he had received the gospel, he had been born again. And I remember in a youth choir meeting, I was a part of the youth choir, the First Baptist Church in Maryville, Tennessee, and they not only allowed me to join the choir, they were seeking after my soul. Mr. Don Breakwell, who was the youth director and choir director, one of the same, directed the young people's work and also the choir, inquired of me one evening after choir practice if I was a Christian.

He knew I was confused about it. And evidently, they had planned this thing all out because the church service was over, the choir practice had ended, and he took me from the choir room down the hallway of the First Baptist Church in Maryville, and Dr. J. William Harbin was waiting in his office. And I say more than likely they had planned it because he knew the pastor was waiting down there, and together they talked to me about salvation.

Now, I'd been in Sunday school, I'd been in church, I'd heard religious conversations, I believed in certain things to be true, but no one had ever explained to me the gospel. They just hinted at it, well-meaning, but they just hinted at it. And when they took the time to explain to me that I was lost in my sin and that Christ died for me and was buried for me and my debt for sin was paid and He rose from the dead alive forevermore, would I ask Him to forgive my sin and be my Savior? I bowed my head and I received the gospel.

We have received the gospel. Now, because we've received the gospel, we have a dispensation of the gospel. Look again, please, at the text I read just a moment ago in 1 Corinthians chapter 9. He's dealing with the subject of the gospel here, and he says again in verse 16 of 1 Corinthians chapter 9, for though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of, for necessity is laid upon me.

Yea, woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel. Now, why does a man talk that way? Verse 17, for I do this thing willingly. Why? There was a time he did not do it.

Why is he doing it now? I have a reward. If I do this thing willingly, I have a reward, but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me. I have this stewardship of the gospel.

Now, Paul did not have a monopoly on the gospel. Others had the gospel, but the gospel had a monopoly on him. It dominated his life.

That leads me to the second thing. I want you to write it down. To have the gospel means that we owe the gospel to others.

If we have the gospel, it means we owe the gospel to others. I want you to turn to Romans chapter 1 just for a moment, and we'll begin with verse 14. Romans chapter 1 and verse 14.

We have forgotten our debt, and in Romans chapter 1 and verse 14, the Bible says, I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise. So as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

He says, I am debtor. Why are you a debtor, Paul? Why do you owe? And he says, I not only owe one group, I owe all people. I owe to the Jews, I owe to the Greeks.

I owe this gospel to all people because God has entrusted me with something. He has given me a stewardship of the gospel, and now I owe the gospel to all of the people. To have the gospel means we owe the gospel.

How this would make a difference, such a dynamic difference in our lives, if we really believed it with conviction. No matter who I see or where I go, I have something that I owe to them. It's not just that they need it, I owe it to them.

Think of that. I owe it. A number of years ago, I was serving on the board of an organization called the Sword of the Lord.

At this present time, I don't belong to any boards of any kind. The only thing I hold membership in is the local New Testament church. But we were having a meeting after the death of the editor of the Sword of the Lord, Dr. Curtis Hudson, about who should become the next editor.

We decided we would have the meeting at the airport in Nashville, Tennessee, because it was a common location for people to get to. And so the board members all flew in and we didn't go anywhere. We met in a conference room there at the Nashville airport.

There were only five of us, if I remember correctly, to begin with, then we added a sixth member. And one of the men who was on that board of the Sword of the Lord was a well-known pastor, pastor in the largest Baptist church in the world at the time. His name was Dr. Jack Hiles.

Dr. Hiles and I had known one another for many, many years. I had preached with him on numbers of occasions, had had him in our church in Patterson, New Jersey, and had invited him to be here in this church. We were sitting there and we met in that board meeting for three and a half hours, praying and talking.

During the conversation, Dr. Hiles, seated right beside me, turned to me and in a soft kind voice said, you know, I've been through it. And he had gone through some personal trials and I believe that history will record good things of Dr. Hiles in the short term and the long term. And he looked at me squarely in the eyes and he said, you know, you've never tried to hurt me, but many people have.

Many people have tried to hurt me and they had. He became a target for many people. But then he said to me, you've never tried to hurt me, but you could have helped me.

He said, it's not easy for me to say that to you, but he said, you could have helped me and you didn't. Now, you never deliberately tried to hurt me, but you could have helped me and you didn't. Now that conversation was conducted years ago and I've never been able to escape it.

Never have I been able to escape that conversation. I determined when his son-in-law became the pastor of his church at the very outset of the whole thing that I'd do all I could to encourage him because of that conversation. And I know he was right.

There were things I could have said and done, but I didn't do them. I just thought no involvement would be better than any other course I personally could take. And I'm convinced that that's the way many Christians feel about so much of their Christian life.

Look, I'm not causing anybody any trouble, look, I'm not against this, look, I'm not living a terrible life and not bringing a reproach. But beloved, we owe a debt simply because we have received the gospel. We owe a debt to give the gospel.

That means that my so-called omission and neglect is really criminal in nature because the Word of God says, therefore him that knoweth to do good doeth it not, to him it's sin. One of the great things that must be disturbed in our lives and in our churches, if we're ever going to know God's full blessing, is that we have to consider the failure of not doing what is right to be as harmful and sinful as going out and doing wrong. Because so much of our Christian neglect is excused.

Like a child saying to me, young in life, what am I doing wrong? The answer would be nothing except if you consider not doing right to be terribly wrong. If a husband treated his wife that way, and many do, they just say, well, look, I'm good to you. How are you good to me? Well, I'm good to you.

I provide a roof over your head and food on your table and clothes on your back. Or the wife may say, well, I'm good to you. I'm not out saying ugly things about you or doing something that would be some sin against our marriage.

I'm doing good to you. Wait a minute. It's like the fellow who said to his wife, you know, I don't need to tell you I love you.

I told you that once, that ought to be good enough for the rest of our lives. You and I both know that's not the way we're supposed to live. I have received the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ.

Jesus suffered my death in hell for me. I should have been crucified. I should have died and gone to hell.

I should have to pay my sin debt or at least try to pay it in hell forever and never fully get it paid. But he paid it for me. He has forgiven my sin.

People say, what about future sin? Listen, understand this. All our sins were future when Christ died on the cross. He paid for all our sin.

Not my sin in part, but the whole is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more. Does that not mean something about my indebtedness because of what I've received? Let me tell you, the ideal thing that should be happening in my life and yours is that we should be deliberately going after the salvation of every human being we can go after. It should be the ordinary thing that no one we know has been without a gospel witness from us.

Somebody should be saying, well, you know, they confronted me about my soul. And somebody said, well, what business is it of theirs? And you would say to them, those people say they've been forgiven their sin. They possess the gospel.

They have the gospel. And because they have the gospel, they owe the gospel to everyone else. That's exactly what the word of God teaches.

They're kind, benevolent people who have money to do things for others. And from time to time, we hear about people who use their money to pay for medical things or to get people certain places where they need to go or to purchase things for children. When I was just a boy, my father was dead and he had a brother, an older brother by the name of Clarence.

I was named after him. And when I needed a high school letterman sweater, we had no other place to look for it. And if my uncle knew that I needed it, he'd wire the money from Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and I'd have the money.

And we felt like, well, he has the money. He wants to do this. And we were very grateful for it.

There were other personal needs that arose in our lives. And from time to time, people would help us because they had the means, they helped. And I believe they didn't do it out of obligation.

They did it out of love because of what they had. Listen, people are dying without God and without hope. If they stop breathing, they're going to go to hell forever.

And we have the salvation that they need. And to have it means we owe it. That's the stewardship of the gospel.

What are we doing with it? The Lord has given us this salvation. What are we doing with it? And Paul says, Paul says as he writes to these Corinthian Christians, this is not a thing out of the ordinary. It's the expected.

I should do this willingly. Necessity is laid upon me. Why? Because I have a stewardship of the gospel.

I have a dispensation of the gospel. This is my time to live. I have the gospel.

And others who don't have the gospel need to hear the gospel from me. I am a debtor. Now, let's write down a third thing.

And the third thing is we are to pay our debt. We're to pay our debt. How many of you ever got a bill in the mail? Would you raise your hand? Pretty interesting.

What happens if you don't pay it? Anybody know what happens if you don't pay it? Somebody's going to try to collect it, aren't they? And you say, well, should I pay it? You know, at one time, the state of Tennessee led the nation, every other state in the nation, in personal bankruptcy. Now, that's a law of the land that you can file for bankruptcy, and people have that law available to them. I'm not trying to say one thing or the other about that.

I'm just trying to make a point. We know what it means to owe a debt and have the obligation to pay the debt. We know that.

We don't expect to live an entitlement life. At least I hope we don't. And so, if we have the gospel, God says we owe the gospel, and by owing the gospel, we must pay our debt.

If we haven't paid our debt, it is a sin against God, a sin against the lost in our world, and a sin against the gospel not to pay it. I want you to look at the book of 2 Corinthians 5, would you please? In 2 Corinthians 5, the Word of God says, beginning with verse 14, For the love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge that if one died for all, then all were dead. Verse 15 of 2 Corinthians 5, And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them and rose again.

It's just quite natural that we are to live for the one who died for us. Now, when we are not living for the one who died for us, guess who we're living for? Ourselves. And when we're not living for the one who died for

us and we're living for ourselves, then we find everything we can possibly imagine as an excuse for not having this stewardship of the gospel.

But no matter what we say, it is an inescapable truth that we shall meet God with. How many of us have the gospel? Would you raise your hand? You've received the gospel. If you died now because of that, you'd be going to heaven forever.

Is that right? You believe that. Christ died as you, for you, and as you. He paid your sin debt and mine.

He tasted death for every man. Was buried and rose from the dead. And we've asked God to forgive our sin and by faith come to know Christ as Savior.

And so we understand we've received the gospel. Because we've received the gospel, the Bible says we owe. We are debtors to all people.

When's the last time you and I made a payment on that debt? How long has it been since we made a payment on that debt? Did you make a payment this week? Did I make a payment this week? Payment on what? The payment on the debt we owe. Where did you make a payment? Did you make a payment at a restaurant? Did you make a payment at the dry cleaners? Did you make a payment at a gasoline station or grocery store? Did you make a payment knocking on someone's door, telling them about the Lord Jesus Christ? It's more than talking about church. We make a great mistake in our witnessing effort by going to people and asking where they attend church.

We ought to begin with Christ. Do you know the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior? He died for you. Once long ago we were so actively and aggressively involved in the soul winning effort at the University of Tennessee.

They put a cartoon in the paper at UT, in the Daily Beacon. It says, watch out for those temple people that tell the people they're going to hell without Christ. It was a cartoon in the campus paper.

There was such a presence of witnessing there. When's the last time any of us paid a debt there on that campus? Are we paying a debt on other campuses where God's opened the door? We have a debt to pay and it ought to be paid. The Word of God says in 2 Corinthians chapter 5, beginning with verse 14, Because we thus judge that if one died for all, then we're all dead, and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them and rose again.

Wherefore, henceforth, know we no man after the flesh, yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we know him no more. Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. All things are passed away.

Behold, all things become new. All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation. Think of that.

God has reconciled us to himself. And because he's reconciled us to himself, we the ones had to be reconciled. He did nothing wrong, so he doesn't have to be reconciled.

We had to be reconciled. We've been brought to God, our sin debt paid, our sins forgiven, and now, because we've been reconciled to God, God has turned over to us the ministry of reconciliation. And we may say, well, I have a lot of fun with folks.

I enjoy being around people. But do you pay your debt to those people? Do I pay my debt to those people? You say, I've got some great friends. We've done a lot of things together, interesting things together.

But have you paid your debt to those people? I'm trying to find the right motive for my own life and stop excusing myself in this matter of the stewardship of the gospel. Often we hear about wealthy people who become very benevolent with their money. They have so much money, they don't know what to do with it, and they establish trust and other type things they can use to distribute their money.

And we hear about tremendous sums of money that very wealthy people give away to feed hungry people or to clothe the naked or to establish educational institutions. And we think, how much money they invest in it. Do you know that no one on earth at any time has ever given any greater gift to any person than to pay the debt of the gospel to those people? Are we paying our debt? I want to tell you a little funny story.

When I was just a boy, I, like most boys, had a girlfriend. I had lots of them. But on this one particular time, I decided that my girlfriend and I would get matching shirts.

Did you ever hear of such a thing? And they had these matching shirts at the most prominent department store in my hometown of Maryville. It was called Minton's Department Store. They had them displayed in the window, his and hers.

Now, I wouldn't do that today, but I did it then. And I found out how much they cost, and I worked hard to save money. I had a job, always had a job.

And I saved my money, and I saved up to buy both those shirts. And I gave the one to the little girlfriend. And I said to her, I'm going to wear this to the football game, and I want you to wear yours to the same football game.

And when people see us together, they'll know we're a thing. That's the general idea, isn't it? It was what we called a B-team football game. Now, I started on the varsity, played with the varsity.

I didn't play with the B-team. But it was a B-team game, a junior varsity game, perhaps you would call it. And so when I went to school that evening to attend the football game, I made up my mind I wasn't going to pay to get into a football game.

I'd already spent so much money on these matching shirts. I didn't need to spend more money getting into football games. So I went to the back of the school property, where I knew people slipped into ball games without paying.

And I climbed a big fence and went over the fence down on the property and got inside the school property at Everett High School without going through the place where people typically paid to get in. The only problem is, climbing over the fence, I ripped a huge gash in that brand new shirt. And then to make bad matters worse, when I got into the ball game, trying to cover up the torn place in my matching shirt, having met my little girlfriend, I found out they were not charging to get into the varsity B-team game.

It was free. It was free. And here I'd worked so hard to get those matching shirts and to make the appointed place and time so we could be seen as a thing, and the game was free.

I got involved in all of that, made all of my schemes and plans, climbed over the fence, tore the shirt, and it was free. It was free. I could have just gotten right in, walked right in.

Free. Listen, people spend a lifetime trying to achieve everything imaginable to satisfy. And you and I know that the greatest thing that could ever happen to them is free.

It's free. Jesus has already paid for it in His own blood. Would you listen, please? What is wrong with us? What is wrong with us when we have designed every kind of thing imaginable from choirs to Sunday schools to special music to offertories to orchestras to programs to schools and curriculums? We've just designed everything imaginable at great cost, and we have forgotten.

Has it been we've forgotten? Is it buried somewhere in the recesses of our mind? Have we willingly put it aside? What's happened to us? What has happened to us that the one thing God gave us to do, He gave us so we could have this own personal stewardship of this one thing, and we've totally, nearly totally, on the personal level, neglected to do it. Do you think God is pleased with that? You know the answer, don't you? No. You see, stewardship involves all of our life, but it certainly involves the gospel.

We have received the gospel. To have it means to owe it. And, beloved, we're doing a very poor job.

If anything, of paying our debt. We've got to say, God help us, and mean it, that we're going to aggressively, every day we live, work at paying our debt of the gospel. Would you bow with me in prayer?

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