

# Skyland Conference 1980-01 Christian Stewardship

by Stan Ford

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*Stan Ford emphasizes the importance of Christian stewardship, highlighting faithfulness, accountability, and grace in managing God's gifts.*

**Duration:** 43:49

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 4:1

**Topics:** "Christian Stewardship", "Faithfulness To God"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by reading from 1 Corinthians chapter 4, emphasizing the role of a steward and the requirement of faithfulness. The apostle Paul is seen as appearing before four tribunals - the saints, sinners, himself, and ultimately the Lord. The speaker highlights the importance of seeking the approval of the Lord rather than the judgment of others. The sermon concludes with a reminder of the accountability and assessment of our work as stewards of the mysteries of God.

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## Transcript

Let's not forget that. But it's not where we come from that counts as English. It's where we're going is.

That's the thing that counts. I want to read, if I may, a few verses from the fourth chapter of 1 Corinthians. 1 Corinthians, chapter 4, and you will see what's on my heart, both for today and for the coming day.

I will be doing exactly the same as I have done on previous conferences. When I finish, the notes that I've been using will be left on the rostrum for any of the young men that would like to have them. I don't know if you're going to do what you've done previous years, but on previous years I believe they've mostly been duplicated and others have had a chance of getting them.

I don't do that. It's too expensive. I leave you to do that.

If they're worth having there, they're worth getting done. But there it is. 1 Corinthians, chapter 4, if we may, please.

Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ and the stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of a steward that a man be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment.

Yea, I judge not mine own self, for I know nothing by myself. Yet am I not hereby justified? But he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time until the Lord cometh, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts.

And then shall every man have praise of God. May the Lord just have His blessing. I wonder if first of all I could say to the conveners and those who are responsible, how thankful both Mary and myself are that they invited us to come.

You'll appreciate I speak at many conferences all over the world, and yet I have a strong feeling that right at the top of all the lists of conferences I speak at would be this Skyland Conference. Not just because one has enjoyed the ministry of others when one has been with me, that's true, but because I just enjoy meeting friends. And I look around and we've got so many friends here and it's lovely to see you again.

We're all praying, and I would value your prayers very much, we're all praying that God's going to speak to us, have a dealing with us, that at the close of this conference we'll go back to the assembly from which we came, more like the Lord Jesus, that we might be a blessing where we came from. Oh, may this be so. I have on my heart that I might share with you today and in the coming days something called Christian stewardship.

Christian stewardship. If there is one thing I am absolutely certain of, whether we be stewards, or whether we be soldiers, or whether we be servants, or whether we be sons, or whether we be saints, we are at all through Jesus Christ. Now if not one of us will ever be able to have a position in the church of God unless, first of all, that position was given to us by the Lord Himself.

It is by divine appointment and by divine approval we are what we are. I said whether we be servants. Was it not the Apostle Paul who, writing to the church at Rome, dared to refer to himself as a servant? He dared to say, Paul, a servant, called to be an apostle.

And then, speaking wondrous things of the Lord Jesus, he goes on and dares to say, by whom we have received grace and apostleship. He was not a servant because God appointed him to be such. He was not a servant because God in His mercy wanted him to be such.

When we think of young Timothy, we remember the second epistle of Timothy and we hear those glorious words, Thou therefore endure hardness as a good soldier. And we remember that Timothy was a soldier. He was a soldier, first of all, because God called him to be such.

How many times have you, when thinking of the life of Timothy, thought of the commencement of that life as recorded in 2 Timothy? And we remember, indeed, the background of his grandmother and his mother. And we see how God, by even his family, was calling him to be a soldier. We remember something of his conversion, don't we? When the apostle could dare to say that he was his son in the faith.

We remember something of the commendation that was given him by his brethren. The man that was going to serve God had what every servant of God must have, the commendation of his own local church. And there they dared to say of him, hear this young Timothy, that he was a man approved by his brethren.

But whether we be a soldier, or whether we be a servant, or whether we be a son, it's the same. John could write and say, now are we the sons of God. But you will not forget that we become sons of God because of him.

When Peter entered into the wonder of this sonship, he dared to write and say that they were forgotten again. And he was forgotten, and every Christian is forgotten, through the word of God, the incorruptible word of God. When it comes to the fact that we've been called saints.

This is what the apostle dares to say, we're called saints. But never let us forget this, that we're not only called to be saints, he makes us saints, but we're called to be saint-like. But we might be like that.

And so you see, in whatever aspect we look at our Christian testimony, it begins with the tremendous fact that we are appointed of God, and we are approved of God. But when it comes to the matter of stewardship, how much more does the word of God express that truth? Isn't it wonderful to know that every one of us, and I want to emphasize this today, every one of us are called to be stewards. It is not given just to a few.

It is given to every believer that we might be in the very verses that we have read, that we might be those who are stewards. Let a man to account of us as of the ministers of Christ and stewards of the mystery of God. He's referring to himself, and then he goes on and reminds us of the things that are required of a steward, that a man must be found faithful.

Oh, how important stewardship is. During the coming days, we're going to look at stewardship in so many ways. We're going to think of the fact that we are stewards of the faith, says the third verse of Jude.

We're going to think of ourselves not only as stewards of the faith, we're going to think of ourselves as stewards of the flock, says 1 Peter 5 and 2. We're going to think of ourselves as stewards of the finished work of Christ. Oh, the wonder of the fifteenth chapter of Acts. We're going to think of ourselves as stewards of this fleeting life, and we're going to listen to the brother of the Lord, Jesus, James, tell us what life is like and what it's all about.

We're going to think of ourselves as the stewards of filthy lucre, of finance. We're going to see what the Word of God has to say of it. We're going to think of ourselves as stewards, indeed, of the fellowship of the Spirit, as the fourth chapter of Ephesians tells us.

Oh, there's so much in the Word of God of stewardship and our responsibility in facing this stewardship. But by the way of introduction today, I wonder if I could just remind you of the tremendous story that Jesus told in the sixteenth chapter of Luke. I think right at the very beginning of things, we will be able to hit the highlights as to what a steward is and how he becomes or she becomes a steward.

When the Lord Jesus tells the story in the sixteenth of Luke, he tells, indeed, of a man who has been made a steward and his authority has come from his master. A certain rich man, says the first verse of the sixteenth of Luke, a certain rich man had a steward. He was steward by the authority of his master.

If you and I are ever going to show to the world that we are stewards of the faith, that we are stewards of the finished work of Christ, that we are stewards, indeed, of filthy lucre, if we're going to show to the world that we are stewards of our fleeting life, then we're going to do it because we have a master. And, brethren, sisters, right at the very beginning of this series of talks, may I ask you this question. Do we acknowledge Jesus Christ as our master? It is so easy to acknowledge others as our master.

I am not trying to make debating points. I am trying to make a serious point. When we gathered this morning, we gathered not to that table.

We gathered not to those emblems. We gathered not to a creed or a doctrine. We gathered to a person.

We gathered to Jesus Christ. We acknowledged Him as Savior. We acknowledged Him as Lord.

We acknowledged Him as Master. May I ask, are we doing that constantly? Our authority comes not from a committee, not from a board of management. Our authority comes from Jesus Christ.

He is Lord of all. Would you notice, please, that in that parable, that story, if you will, the Lord speaks not only of a man's authority, but of a man's accountability. And if his authority comes from the Lord, his accountability is to his master.

Verse 2, the master comes and says, Give an account of thy stewardship. This is surely one of the most solemn, one of the most serious, and yet, one of the most wonderful of all things. That my authority comes from Christ, but my accountability is to Christ.

All the wonder of it. As I start day by day to say, Lord, I have a day that I've never walked before. As Moses, I have to say, I've not walked this way heretofore, but for this day, for the actions of this day, I have to give an account to thee.

You know, brethren, sisters, that irons out a tremendous lot of problems, doesn't it? We think so often that we're accountable to others. And while there is a sense in our ordinary social life, and in our secular life, we must be accountable to those who employ us. We must be accountable to those that we minister to.

It is still a good policy I'm given to understand to say that the purchaser is always right. I'm not sure of that, but I think it's a good policy. I only know this, that above it all, through it all, I am accountable to my master.

When I see him as master, I remember that every moment of my day, I'm accountable to him. But I see not only his authority, the authority of the man who indeed is a steward. I see not only his accountability, but I see his assessment.

And the wonder is this, that if his authority is the master, and his accountability is the master, it is the master that assesses him. In that story you will remember in verse 8, it was the master who has said, Thou hast done wisely. I'm going to make a suggestion to you.

I'm going to suggest that there are very few of you could read the 16th of Luke and put your hand on the man's shoulder and say, well done old Jack, well done. That's what the master did. Although this person had done what you and I would think was almost underhanded, knowing indeed that the master was wanting him to give an account of his stewardship, knowing that he wasn't worthy to give an account, you remember what he did? He called in those that were in debt.

He said to one man, sir, how much do you owe me? Oh, he said, I owe you a hundred, a hundred, not bushels of oil. What was it? Give me. Ah, that's it.

And he said, well, write eighty. He said to the other, how much do you owe me? Oh, he said, I owe you a hundred bushels of wheat. I got that right.

A hundred bushels of wheat. He said, you write, you write eighty. Fifty for one and eighty for the other.

And the master came and commended him. You see, it is important for us to remember this, that every one of us will face the Lord Jesus one day. And the thing that counts is whether he says well done.

Whether he says well done. And when you and I are looking around to our brethren and sisters, that they might assess our ministry, then all we have is heartache. All we have is heartache.

But when we look to the Lord, He knows every heartbeat. He knows every sorrow. He knows every endeavor.

He sees us through and through. And here the master assesses the man's worth. And I want to say this, and it once makes me feel I want to shout hallelujah, that if I see in the 16th of Luke, this man who was a steward, if I see his authority, and I see his accountability, and I see his assessment, I hear his appalls.

And what appalls? The master commended him. Verse 8, the Lord commended him. I love those words we read in the glorious epistles of the Corinthians.

Every man shall receive praise of God. Oh my brother, my sister, never forget that. The judgment seat of Christ has nothing to do with sin.

That was dealt with by the blood of Christ on Calvary's cross. Thy sin, O the bliss of this glorious thought, thy sin not in part, but the whole, was nailed to the cross. And I'll bear it no more.

Sin is dealt with by the blood, but service is dealt with by the judgment seat of Christ. And every man shall receive praise of God. Oh, what a day that'll be.

What a day. Steward. So we've seen a little of a steward.

But we will notice that there are some things required of a steward. The first thing that's required of a steward is this. It says 1 Corinthians 4 and 2, A steward shall be faithful.

As I read those words, it seems to me that the Apostle Paul in that fourth chapter of 1 Corinthians has appeared before four tribunals. Do you see that? That's how I see it anyway. As I read those verses, it seems to me that the Apostle Paul appears before four tribunals.

He appears, verse 3, before the tribunal of the saints. He appears, verse 3 again, before the tribunal of sinners. He appears before the tribunal, verse 3 again, of himself.

But then he appears before the tribunal of the Lord, the Savior. And so he sees his ministry, his stewardship, examined by saints, by sinners, by himself, and by the Savior. Do we see our life like that? First of all, he appears before the tribunal of saints.

He says these glorious words. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you. Of you.

Please, please, I say this sometimes. I'm not sure that it's true. But I say it sometimes.

I say sometimes, I don't really worry, bother about what Christians think of me. Now, I don't know if that's true. I think I do.

But I shouldn't. The Apostle says, I don't bother what you think of me at Corinth. I know all about you.

I know your waywardness. I know the fact that many of you are carnal. And I know this, that in the final analysis, I'm not going to be judged by the saints.

He says, look, I don't mind, I don't mind, I am sure of this fact, that I'm not judged by the saints, and I'm not judged by sinners. For he says, or of man's judgment, Mr. Darby says, man's day. I think that's important.

You know, my friend, the world today is judging the Christian church. And I use that word as the Bible uses the word church. I'm not speaking of Christendom.

That's not the church at all. But the world is judging those who have taken Christ as their Savior and are in the body of Christ and members of the church. The world is judging us.

But that's what we must expect. If the world looks at us, we must expect it to judge us. But we mustn't worry about it.

If the world says to the Christian church, we don't like you, we hate you, it said that to Jesus Christ. So let's stand with dignity and say, Hallelujah! If the world doesn't love us, I think that's the best testimony that the Christian church can have. He says, I don't mind being judged of the saints, and I don't bother about being judged of sinners.

And when it comes to self, well, when it comes to self, really when all is said and done, I am not to sit there constantly examining myself. Friends, what a person tells me at the end of the service is between me and them and the Lord. And I would never tell you what someone tells me in an inquiry room at the end of a service.

That's between me and them and the Lord. But in general principle, I can say this, that I get tired of Christians coming to me so filled with worry, so downcast, so depressed, because they've never learned to look up unto Jesus. They're always looking inside, aren't they? Well, I don't know about you, but when I look inside, I find nothing but that which will disappoint me.

But hallelujah, when I look up unto Jesus, I learned a lesson at Bristol years ago. Now, maybe the brother is here. If he is, thank you, brother.

Thank you. I went to Bristol to minister the Word, but you ministered to me. I was sitting out there, that old porch they had, you know, remember? And I was sitting there, and this brother suddenly came, and he came over and spoke to me as though he hadn't seen me for such a long time, and we were the greatest friends in the world, and I didn't know who he was.

He didn't have his badge up, you see. So I couldn't call him by his name. But I think brother's a wonderful name, don't you? How are you, brother? And they think they know you.

Oh, there we are. How are you, bud? And I said, how are you getting on? And he says, Brother Stan, it's taken me 28 years to learn something. My ears popped out.

If I could learn in one minute what it's taken him 28 years to learn, I wanted to learn it. And this is what he said. This is what he said.

He said, it's taken me 28 years to learn that God doesn't want me just to look to see Christ in a Christian. He wants me to look to see a Christian in Christ. Isn't that wonderful? Just to know as I look at you, brethren and sisters here, that you're in Christ.

And in Christ you're accepted by heaven, and you're perfect. Of course, sometimes I don't think you're perfect. Any more than you think I am.

And if you do think I am, have a little word with Mary. She's here somewhere. She'll soon knock that out of you.

I pray. Listen, friends. Isn't it wonderful to know that when we look within, we'll always be disappointed.

But when we see a Christian in Christ, all the wonder of it. I've been accepted in the beloved. That's it.

And the apostle said, Why? I don't mind the judgment of the saints, and I don't mind the judgment of sinners, and I don't mind and worry even about the judgment of myself. What I'm concerned about is the judgment of the Savior. He that judgeth is the Lord.

Oh, the wonder of it. That as a steward, as a steward, I can be found faithful, not worrying about the judgment of others. But when I look at the Bible and consider what a steward is, it seems to me there are three things I must share with you.

The first thing I want to share with you about a steward is this. That a steward is a person who is involved in the work of his master. May I repeat that? He is involved.

The second thing I want to say to you is a steward is not only involved, but a steward is intelligent about the work of his master. And the third thing I want to say to you, a steward is not only involved in the work of the master, he is not only intelligent in the work of the master, but oh, praise God, he is a man whose integrity is seen in the work of the master. First of all, he's involved in the work of the master.

I'm thinking, there's no doubt you are, I'm thinking of those glorious words in the tenth verse of the fourth chapter of Peter's letter. When Peter dared to say, As every man has received the gift, so minister the same as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Isn't that wonderful? Brethren, sisters, if you are a steward of the manifold grace of God, you will be a partaker of the manifold grace of God.

You will be involved in it. The grace of God. Whoever could talk about that in about five minutes.

Have you ever noticed how much we need grace? We need grace for salvation. By grace are ye saved. We need grace for salvation.

And hallelujah, the grace of God hath appeared. And we've seen him. Him.

Not a thing, a person. Him. We need grace not only for salvation, but we need grace for suffering.

The apostle Paul said, I've a thorn in the flesh. I prayed thrice that it might be removed. But somehow God does not seem fit to remove it.

But He's proved this for me. He's proved the wonder of the fact that His grace is sufficient. And for my suffering I need grace.

Friend, I don't know what the thorn of the flesh was. It might have been blind. Do you remember the apostle writing to the church at Galatia said, See with what a large hand I have written unto thee.

But maybe Paul was a bit like me. He wasn't a very good writer. I don't know.

It might not have been blind. I say, he could say indeed just what you would have put out your eyes. Maybe it was what many people think, that he suffered with some form of epilepsy.

He dared to speak of the fact that many of them criticized his speech. I only know this, that whatever it was, it was a thorn and it was in the flesh and he had to suffer it and he found out that God was greater than it. He found the grace of the Lord.

I say, is it a wonderful thing how practical the Christian faith is. It isn't just dealing with abstract things, is it? There's nothing abstract when you get a pain in the tummy. Nothing abstract when you wake up with a headache.

Nothing abstract when you get weary with the service of the Lord. Nothing abstract about hearing him say, My grace is sufficient. We need grace for salvation.

We need grace for suffering. We need grace for service. When the apostle writes to the church at Corinth, he dares to say, Oh, I labored more abundant than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me, in me, upon me.

The grace of God. Oh, brothers, sisters, let's get involved in the service of God. I'm sure that all of us feel this, that sometimes we're apt to look around and be a little critical of another brother, another Christian, a little critical of the way they do something.

We had an old brother in our meeting who when someone criticized another to him, he used to look at them and say, Well, brother, I'd rather the way he does it than the way you don't. I say, isn't it good to get involved, to do something for God? And if we're stewards, we'll get involved. We'll get involved with a manifold grace of our Lord.

As a steward, do you know, he says there are things we mustn't get involved with. He reminds them that they mustn't get involved with banquetings and with idolatries and with laughs and with reveling. Don't get involved with those things, he says.

But get involved with a manifold grace of God. The grace of the Lord like a fathomless thing. Sufficient for you, sufficient for me.

Oh, but we've not only to be involved, we've to be intelligent, a steward's intelligence. If I was to ask you for an illustration of the fact that a steward must be intelligent, what would you turn to? I've got a strong feeling that many of you sisters anyway, maybe the brethren wouldn't, but many of you sisters would say, Ah, Genesis 24. Oh, what a story it is, isn't it? There's the steward of Abraham and how involved he got into the desire of his master and how intelligent he was.

For he knew that his master wanted a wife for Isaac, his son. He knew that that master desired that wife not from the land of the heathen where he dwelt. And do you remember how he sends the steward as God has sent us? And he sends the steward away under to Mesopotamia.

And if we could say anything about that steward, we could say this, couldn't we? But he was intelligent. And he was intelligent first of all about the will of his master. May I repeat that? He was intelligent about the will of his master.

Do you know there was only one way he could be intelligent about that? And that's listening to his master speak. He must have sat by the side of his master again and again and heard his master say, Oh, I'd love to have a wife for my son Isaac. I tell you what she ought to be like.

And he knew. He knew the will of his master. Brethren, sisters, there's only one way you and I will ever know the will of the Father.

And that's by listening to him. And he's left us in no doubt for he's spoken through his word all that we might know his will. His will.

But not only was he intelligent about the will of the Father, but he was intelligent about the ways of the Father. He knew that Abraham had set himself a pattern of life. He knew that Abraham was on a journey.

He was seeking for a city whose foundation was not laid by mortal man. He was looking for that which God had promised him. And so he wanted a bride for his son who also would be prepared not to count this world as a home.

You know, to you and me, why, maybe that's a little strange. But not strange to these dear sisters. You know, if I've learned anything from Mary, of course I've learned a lot, you know.

I've learned what she intended to teach me. But there's one thing I've learned. I've learned how very much her home means to her.

Maybe it doesn't mean quite so much to me. I'm away from it so much. But she was the one who went out and picked the carpet.

She was the one who said, well, we'll have this, and we'll have that, and the other. Until I said, no, we won't. Can't afford it.

But nevertheless, nevertheless, there's a sense in which that home means so much to her. And Abraham knew that if they were journeying seeking a city, if they were going to do what God wanted them to do, and his son was going to be with him, that bride of his son had to be willing. Not to be looking around for a lovely house, but to move on with the man that she came to love.

And so that servant needed to know the ways of his master. So he could choose the right girl. Not only will, not only ways, but he had to be intelligent about the wealth of the master.

Isn't that true? Dear him, if he didn't know anything about the wealth of the master, what could he tell that girl? But when he got there, oh, what wonderful things he had. He had earrings, and he had gold, oh, he had something of a wealth. The wealth of the master.

And he said, look, this is my master's. Let me tell you something about Abraham. Let me tell you something.

Brethren and sisters, have we got the wealth of the master? Do we show men and women what it means to love Jesus? Or do they look at us and say, well, I don't see much difference between him and anyone else. But if we're enjoying Christ, if we're enjoying the things he has, oh, what stewards we'll be. But he not only needed to show that he was involved, and show his intelligence, but you know, it was not only knowing the will, and knowing the way, and knowing the wealth, but you're listening now, and if you forget everything else, remember this.

He had to know his well-beloved son. Oh, you can know all about his will, and his way, and his wealth, but the thing that counts is his well-beloved son. When he sat there, and spoke indeed to the girl that was to be the bride of Isaac, he had to be able to say, I'll tell you something about Isaac.

Of course, we don't do it in our country very much, do we? But in some countries I visit, it's still, well, mostly the eldest uncle that does it, you know. They still choose a wife for a nephew. Still do it.

But I've got a strong feeling that when those dear Africans go to see, go to see the girl that they want to size up, and they start speaking about their nephew, I've got a strong feeling they don't start talking about their brother. Because it wouldn't be long before that dear African would look at them and say, Hey, I'm not going to marry him. What's his boy like? Isn't it wonderful to know about the beloved son? The more I know about Jesus, the more I realize how wonderful He is.

Oh, that I may be involved and intelligent. And a steward needs not only to be involved, and not only intelligent, but he needs to bear the mark of integrity. Come on now, I almost feel like having a Bible quiz.

I almost feel like saying to you, Now, what story would you turn to, to illustrate a steward's integrity? And I've got a strong feeling most of you would answer it right. You'd think the same as I, and you'd go into the sixth chapter of Daniel, and you'd see a steward of the Lord. And you would remember that Darius wanted to make Rose to be the head, the princess of his land.

And he looked around, and of all the princes of his country, it says this, he chose first Daniel. And then he says this, he chose him because he preferred him. And why did he prefer him? I'll tell you why.

Because even those who disliked Daniel had to bear this testimony. They could find no fault in him. I suggest the faultless, friendly, faithful man, woman, boy, girl, is the person who is the steward of Jesus Christ.

May I read it again as I come to a close. Let a man so attend to us as of the ministers of Christ and as stewards of the mysteries of God. Oh, I haven't time this morning to talk about the mysteries of God, but I promise you something.

We'll get there before the week ends. We'll get there. And we'll see what we are stewards of.

But God give us from this place this morning to God with our back upright. Look at that. There's some notes going all over the place.

With our back upright, and our faces shining, let's go from this place then. Do you know what? I'm a steward of the Lord. Why, that'll put backbone in you.

That'll make you walk tall when you realize a steward of the manifold mysteries of the grace of our God. God grant we may function well both here and there until we meet him in the air. For his name's sake.

Amen. Amen. Now, how do I take this thing off, sir? You've got me tussed it up here like that.

Thank you. You know education, Lord. Shall we sing in full? Sing number 261.

When we walk with the Lord in the light of his word, what a glory he sheds on away. That's in the Red Book, 261, 297, in the Green Book. Shall we sing? First and last answer.

When we walk with the Lord in the light of his word. O God and Father, for thy kindness to work, for thy love and my mercy, that not only hast thou saved us, but thou hast sent us.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/10/SID10419.mp3>

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