

## Sermon IV – UWI Chapel

### **Christian Stewardship – Generosity Encouraged**

#### **Introduction**

Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Over the past three weeks we have been exploring the topic of Christian Stewardship. Today marks my final presentation on the subject. I hope that you have found the discourses useful and that they provided some food for thought as you continue on your Christian journey.

I am deeply grateful to my colleague the Rev. Garth Minott for affording me the opportunity to share with you in this way. I certainly enjoyed these past

weeks, and have been humbled by the graciousness with which I have been received and the generous expressions of appreciation after each service.

This beautiful Chapel stands as a bastion of ecumenism and Caribbean unity and I am always somewhat overawed whenever I enter its historic doors. To God be the glory!

### **Generosity Encouraged**

In continuing to look at Christian Stewardship, I have chosen the title **Generosity Encouraged** for my deliberations this morning, and my text is from 2 Cor.: 9: 6 NIV, ***“Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously”.***

*Let us pray:*

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.*

As we grow in our Christian faith, we find that giving freely becomes more and more natural for us. At that point, the realization is that everything belongs to God and out of one's love for Him, who is our Lord and Saviour, Stewardship becomes Christ-like and you come to find that one of the greatest joys of life is to give.

**Gratitude**

Many Christians seem to think that money is at the heart of Christian Stewardship. However, this is far from the truth. Christian Stewardship is about gratitude, and it is also about the difference between **possession** and a **trust**.

Gratitude is right at the heart of Christian spirituality. G. K. Chesterton said, “The best kind of giving is thanksgiving.” How profound.

But exactly what is gratitude? Gratitude is the connection or link between receiving and giving. Sadly, today, our culture, not only here in Jamaica but all over the world, encourages entitlement, not gratitude. Anyone familiar with the TV parody “The Simpsons” might recall an episode in which the head of the household, Bart Simpson, was asked to say grace at the dinner table. Bart folded his hands, bowed his head and said: “Dear God, we paid for all this stuff ourselves, so thanks for nothing!”

We smile about this, but isn't that the way we sometimes think. As Christians, we should never forget that everything we have comes to us as a gift from God – every breath, every ability, every opportunity, every moment of life. Becoming conscious of that reality changes the way we think. Studies have shown that gratitude contributes powerfully to human health, happiness, and social connection. Initiating even a single contact with someone towards whom you feel grateful has an effect on mood that can last for a long time.

Let us take a moment to do a little exercise - and I would like everyone, without exception, to participate. Think of 2 or 3 things that you have received as blessings or gifts. What do you notice? Do you notice that you did not have to expend too much energy to feel grateful for those gifts. Let us say together, "Thank God for our blessings". I challenge you to do the same thing each night before you go to sleep; then watch as awareness of your gifts increases and see how much your response to them begins to change. You might even want to cultivate a "gratitude diary", which will help

you to an understanding of how much has been bestowed upon you, and how grateful you are for them.

There are two ways of looking at stewardship: one way would be that of the world, a business attitude towards stewardship. The other way is Christ's way, the way of love. With this attribute, the fruits of one's labours are blessed. Without these, there is no Christ in the stewardship – only giving.



Stewardship is a spiritual principle based upon the word of God. 1 Peter 4:10 says, *“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace”*. Again, Leviticus 27:30 says, *“Every tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the trees, is the Lord's; it is holy to the Lord”*.

We must recognize God as the Owner of all things, and man as responsible for his use of these things in keeping with God's divine purpose.

Stewardship is based on the fact that God created all things and retains sovereignty over all. Our stewardship cannot be separated from the knowledge of Christ! It is not stewardship at all if it

is not done in a Christ-like manner! Christian stewardship grows out of gratitude.

### **Possession or Trust?**

At the heart of a Christian's understanding of stewardship is the difference between a possession and a trust. What is a possession? A possession is something we lay claim to – we think of it as “mine”; however, when we view something as a trust, we recognize that rather than it *being* mine, it is simply “mine to take care of.” A steward is a

person who takes care of something which is not his or her own.

You will recall in the Parable of the Talents, Jesus was making the point that, stewards don't just protect what they have been given, they are also expected to build upon them – put them to good use so they produce a yield.

Time, talents, and treasures that are recognized as *mine in trust*, and which are then put to the use of

the owner, not the steward, produce yields for God's work.

Sharing what we have been given in trust with others is putting them into the service of God so they can bless others. The recipients, in turn, can then also be grateful for the gifts they receive, and so the chain of gratitude continues.

## **Christian Stewardship & the Environment**

At its core, the environmental crisis is a moral challenge. It calls us to examine how we use and

share the goods of the earth, what we pass on to future generations, and how we live in harmony with God's creation.

We read in Genesis 1: 28, *“Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'* God blessed them and said to them, *'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’*”

Some Christians have interpreted this as giving people the right to exploit the *environment*. However, most people see themselves as being responsible for the world created by God and they have to make their own decisions about how to do this.

It is remarkable that although human beings are seen as the most intelligent life form on earth, they are responsible for almost all the damage done to the planet.

There are many examples in bible which can help us to see what our role as Christians are in the preservation of the environment.

In Psalm 24:1 we read, *“The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it”*.

Deuteronomy 20:19 says, *“When you lay siege to a city for a long time, fighting against it to capture it, do not destroy its trees by putting an axe to them,*

*because you can eat their fruit. Do not cut them down”.*

In recent times, the Christian Church has issued statements from various denominations in respect of the environment. The World Council of Churches issued the following pronouncement: *“The dignity of nature as creation needs to be bound up with our responsibility for the preservation of life”.*

In 2007 His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI (16<sup>th</sup>) issued the following: *“Care of water resources and attention to climate change are matters of grave importance for the entire human family”.*

One can therefore say that the Christian Church has been an active participant in agitating for the preservation of our environment.

There are numerous things we can do in our everyday lives that help protect God’s creation, such

as conserving energy and reducing waste. Our concern for the environment may open up opportunities to share with unbelievers that our service to the creation overflows from our love for God, the creator.

We worship God the Creator more fully as we see His glory in his creation and as we participate in His work of sustaining and restoring proper relationships within the creation.

And so as I close the series on Christian Stewardship, I implore you to heed the words of St. Paul in 2Cor.: 9: 6, ***“Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously”***.



Let us all endeavour to be good Christian Stewards of the talents with which we have been entrusted.

I leave you with this quotation from Charles Dickens  
*"Reflect upon your present blessings, of which every man has plenty; not on your past misfortunes of which all men have some."*

I challenge you today to become good Christian stewards of the blessings with which you have been entrusted.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Let us pray:

Good and gracious God, the source of every good gift, we praise you and we thank you for your great power and your tender, faithful love. Everything we are and everything we have is your gift. After having created us, You have given us the greatest of all gifts, your son, JESUS CHRIST. Fill our minds with His truth and our hearts with His love, that in His Spirit we may be bonded together into a community of faithful, caring people. And so we commit ourselves to be good stewards of the gifts entrusted to us, to share our time, our talent and our material gifts as an outward sign of the treasure we hold in Jesus, we pray in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

AMEN.