Pilgrim Stewardship

21 Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours: 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come-- all are yours. 23 And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.1 Corinthians 4:1 Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful. 3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. 4 For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. 5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God. 6 Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other. 7 For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? (1Co 4:1-7)

When children are very little, parents wait with baited breath to hear what the first words will be. Some will even write those words down and keep a list. Usually the words are some noun – mama, dada, ball, bow-wow. But one of the mysteries of the world is that seemingly universally, babies learning to speak manage to come up not just nouns, but with a possessive pronoun - “Mine!” Ask any parent, “Did you coach him to say, 'Mine!' ? Did you sit him down and say, 'Yours, mine!'?” Any parent will tell you, no. But there is something so innate in fallen human beings, so deeply rooted in us, that infants seem to find that word before ever finding the words “Yours” or “thank you”. I'm sure it is true in just about every language.

That powerful 'mine' impulse doesn't go away with age. It just gets more sophisticated, more calculating, more manipulative. Adult people are not screaming the word 'mine', but their actions, sometimes their entire lives, revolve around the word 'mine'. Much of it goes back to the Garden when Satan told Eve that she did not need to depend on God for knowledge, she could be independent. She could say of the knowledge of good and evil, 'mine', and then of her own life, 'mine'.

When we come to God in Christ, God begins to pull this deep, tough “mine” root out of us. He replaces it with the idea of stewardship. The English word steward comes from the Old English/ Anglo-Saxon words which meant hall-keeper, someone who looked after the goods of another. The Greek word for steward means someone appointed to look after the household of another. A steward was a manager, an administrator, but never the owner. He was charged to oversee and manage other people's wealth.

For the Pilgrim Church, this has huge effects on how we use everything that we have been given, whether it be money, or time, or opportunities, or our bodies. Stewardship, as Christians understand it, is radically different to the way the world treats wealth and the body, and time. This passage in 1 Corinthians 4 will help us understand stewardship.

Some background – Paul is talking about stewards in chapter 4 of Corinthians because he was explaining the difference between stewards and superstars. Paul has been dealing with divisions in the Corinthian church. Various cliques and parties had developed, some being Apollos fans, and others Simon Peter fans, and others Paul fans. Paul takes pains to deal with their childish love of human wisdom and miracles, and points them back to Christ and His cross. He wants them to know that he and Apollos and Peter were all fellow servants, building on the same foundation. And now in chapter 4, he calls himself and Apollos stewards. He wants them to understand what stewardship is, because if the Corinthians understand stewardship, they will understand that there can be no competition between Christian leaders, and no cliques and parties developing. And as we listen in,

we can learn what biblical stewardship is.

I. Pilgrim Stewardship Believes All We Have Comes From God

For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? (1Co 4:1-7)

Paul tells us in verse 1 that he and Apollos are servants of God and stewards of God's Word. And then in verse 7 against all their comparing Paul with Apollos and Apollos with Peter and Peter with Paul, Paul says, Who is the One who gives all this? Who makes Paul different from Apollos? Who decides who has what gift? Who decides who looks a certain way, who sounds a certain way?
The answer is obviously, God. All that a man is, is given to him. So what is the point of making it a competition, a rivalry, when no one can boast that it is his own?
If God decides in advance who gets what, then to compare and compete is to act as if we are the source of all we have, and we can use it to glorify ourselves. But stewardship understands all we have comes from God.
Paul's rhetorical question here is good for us – what do you have that you did not receive? In other words, what in your life did you create out of nothing?

Stop for a moment and do some inventory. What in your life has been lent to you by God? Start with your life. Who decided you would be born? Who decided on your appearance, your body? Did you choose and create your body, or was it given to you? Who has given you the exact amount of years you have lived, knowing that many others have had shorter lives? The remaining time in your life – do you decide that, or is it given?
What about your salvation, or the Gospel, or God's Word, or the church, or spiritual gifts? Are these earned, created, or received?
Your relationships – your parents, siblings, extended family, spouse, children – were these things you chose autonomously, or were they given to you?
What about your abilities? From the earliest age, when you found you had an ability, something that came easily to you – working with numbers, or drawing, or speaking, or fixing things, or creating ideas, or decorating, or some craft, or music, or working with money, or leading people – where did that come from? You might have developed the ability – I hope you did – but why did you have that ability and someone else did not?
What about the opportunities of your life? The era you grew up in, the kind of family you had, the schools you went to, the people you were exposed to, the chances you were given to study, the places you got to travel to, were these created by you or given to you?
Whether you became wealthy or not, the amount of money you received at different times in your life, whether your business thrived or not, the house and cars and possessions – given or self-created? Oh, certainly we can speak about how we earned things through hard work. But any honest Christian will tell you that an economy is such a complex thing with so many things that can change in a day, that no one human being can control that and master it. Becoming more or less wealthy is ultimately something given by God.

So the answer to Paul's question, what do you have that you did not receive, is *nothing*. Everything we have and are, from our bodies to the clothes on our bodies, from our daily bread to our health to our friendships, to our children, to our future comes from God.

But what Paul is trying to stress here is not simply that stewards acknowledge all they have comes from God, but that all they have still belongs to God. Stewards cannot boast, because they do not, in the final sense, own anything. God owns every atom in the universe.

The earth is the LORD'S, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell therein. (Psa 24:1)

For every beast of the forest is Mine, And the cattle on a thousand hills.11 I know all the birds of the mountains, And the wild beasts of the field are Mine. 12 "If I were hungry, I would not tell you; For the world is Mine, and all its fullness. (Psa 50:9-12)

Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. (Act 17:25)

This is why in the stewardship parables that Jesus teaches, you have a master who commits his goods to stewards. In one of the parables he gives one steward five talents, one two, and on one talent. In another, he gives each steward ten minas. In another, he tasks the steward with feeding his household. But the concept in common is that the owner entrusts the steward to manage and rightly use his goods. The steward never becomes the owner.

Now that doesn't mean there is no such thing as private property. The reason God says, "You shall not steal" is because humans do own things. In fact, look back at chapter 3:21-23:

Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours: 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come-- all are yours. 23 And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

Here Paul means that if you are in Christ, then really all of creation is your inheritance.

But the point of stewardship is to understand where all that we have comes from, and who is the final and ultimate owner of all things. When David is preparing goods for his son Solomon to build the Temple, he strikes the perfect balance.

But who am I, and who are my people, That we should be able to offer so willingly as this? For all things come from You, And of Your own we have given You. (1Ch 29:14)

It is from God. As Paul says, God even supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food.

The pilgrim church dwells in the world, but does not make its home in the world system. How does the world think about the source and the ownership of things?

Through the theory of evolution, a large section of the world can make the excuse that none of what we have has been given to us. It is all blind chance, completely random. None of what you have was chosen and entrusted to you, it is all purely accident. You don't need to feel grateful, you don't need to feel awe and wonder, you don't need to even feel a sense of deep purpose and responsibility. What you have is what you can get, and you shouldn't feel any guilt about how you get it, because it's survival of the fittest, every man for himself. It's 'Mine' with a capital M.
Some take a modified view, which is deism. They realise this world is too complex and beautiful to have come about by random chance. But they think God simply made it and then left it up to us. So while we can be grateful, it's best we forget about God, and get on with it ourselves. He might have made it, but it seems He has entirely left it to us, like a man who has died and left an inheritance. And really, with that view, you come pretty much to the same place – live your life to gather and consume, grab and grasp as hard and as fast as you can. It might not be 'mine' with a capital M, but it still 'mine'.

Pilgrim stewardship understands all we have comes from God and ultimately belongs to God.

II. Pilgrim Stewardship Knows All We Have is to be Used For God

1 Corinthians 4:1 Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.
2 Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.

Paul says the fundamental mark of a steward is that he is found faithful, not like the Corinthians who wanted Paul or Apollos to be impressive or entertaining, or winsome. No, Paul says stop all this childishness, because the main idea in stewardship is not that we be successful, but that we be faithful.
What does faithful mean? Well, it means filled with faith, or filled with trust. That has an active and a passive sense. If you are actively faithful, you are filled with trust for God. But in the passive sense, it means you are full of trustworthiness. That's the sense here. A steward can be trusted by the master. He is loyal. He is reliable. He will keep faith in his master, and so his master has faith in him.

Once you embrace the idea that all you have has been given by God, and is still really owned by God, it logically takes you to the next step: you are supposed to reliably, faithfully manage what God has entrusted you with. If you don't own it, if you didn't create it out of nothing, if it has been lent to you, then you have a requirement to wisely, carefully, and skillfully use it.

Again, in each of the stewardship parables, you have this idea. The stewards are entrusted with the talents, or the minas, or the household, or a vineyard, while the owner leaves for a time. And in each of the parables, we understand even while reading them for the first time, these stewards are supposed to use the master's goods in ways profitable for the master. Make more money with the money, take care of the household, cultivate the farm.

Negatively, when we see the stewards who either hide the money, neglect the farm, quarrel with the household and beat them up, we know what's coming. We know these stewards are abusing their position, neglecting what they have been given. We know they are going to pay for what they have done with another's goods.

Now think about all you have been given. Your life, and the years you've had, and have ahead of you. Your body and your health. Your family, relatives and friends. Your abilities and giftings. The opportunities. The place and time you are in. The church you are in. Your wealth and possessions. All of this has been entrusted to you, and God wants you to be faithful with it all. He has given all of this to you not to be selfishly abused, but to skillfully use it so as to bring profit to the Master.

How do we know how He wants us to use our time, money, bodies, our abilities, our families? It begins with consecration.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. (Rom 12:1)

Paul means, because of God's great love for you, put your entire being as a burnt offering to God. Say to God, all that I have, and all that I am is yours. It is to be used for you. I consecrate it. I set it apart for your use. I want my body and what I do with it to please you. I want my children and family to grow up to love you. I want my money to be used according to your priorities. I want my possessions and my house and my car to be used for you. I want the years of my life to count for you. I want my job and my abilities and my giftings to bring you glory.

This is the idea of consecration. It is bring together your life and the sacred – dedicating it all for Him. It's what Paul says the Macedonians did before they gave their money.

5 And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God. (2Co 8:5)

When you dedicate something to someone, you become conscious of how He wants it used. And if you don't know how God wants you to use your body, your time, your abilities, your career, your house, your possessions, your church, your opportunities, then you go to His last will and testament to find out. You search His Word.

This goes right back to Genesis. When God makes the world, for six days, he turns disorder into order, chaos into beauty. And then when He makes man, He tells man to take dominion over the whole world, that is, do the same thing. Order the world, bring it into a place of orderly beauty, for my glory. Shape the whole created order into a place that reflect me. I own it, but I am entrusting you as the managers of the whole Earth, to make the whole Earth into a place like the cultivated, orderly Garden.

And it becomes a matter of allocating and managing time, money according to wise priorities. Your giving, your serving, your spending, how much do I keep, how much do I give, how much time, how much there, what do I say yes to, what do I say no to, it is all how you manage what you have been given.

That's how pilgrims act. But think about how the world system treats the body, money, the created order. Some people say, "It's my body, I can do what I want with it. It's my life. I can defile it sexually, I can deface it, I can put things into it that slowly kill it, because it's mine." I can watch what I want, listen to what I want, eat and drink what I want, go where I want, wear what I want, because they're my eyes, my ears, my tongue, my skin, my appearance. If a woman has an unwanted child, she can legally kill it, because it's her body. This is hedonism and selfish narcissism – I belong to my self, I am the most important one, and if it feels good to me, then I do it.
The world treats the created order as a big mall to plunder and consume. If it doesn't come from God, then I can use whatever means necessary to just get and take and consume. *You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. (Jam 4:2)*
Consumerism and materialism. The world is just a big collection of goods to consume any way possible. You only live once, so grab and get your fill.
There is a reaction to that in the world. You get this teaching that the world is really this sacred place. God is the world and the world is god. We are just parasites, upsetting the balance of Mother Earth. So we need to do as little to the planet as possible, get out of its way. That's not what we see in Genesis. We are here as stewards of the world, tasked to shape it for God, not leave it alone or act like unwanted intruders. We are supposed to use what we are entrusted with for God's glory.

III. Pilgrim Stewardship Knows All We Have Will Be Returned to God

4 For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord.
5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.

Again, Paul is clear here that the reason the Corinthians should stop all this comparing and competing is because of stewardship. Paul and Apollos have received all they have from God, not points in a competition or rivalry. Paul and Apollos minister to be faithful with what they have been given, not to build kingdoms for themselves. And here Paul says, in the end, all this rating of Paul and Apollos was foolish, because God alone would judge Paul.

There is no point trying to pass final sentence on a man's ministry, because only God will see the

whole thing, internal and external, hidden and revealed. One day, after the Lord's coming, God will evaluate and decide how the life was lived. We see this a few verses earlier:

11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. 14 If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. (1Co 3:11-15)

This is the logic of stewardship. When you understand it comes from God, you understand it must be used for God, because at some point it is going to be returned to God and evaluated.

God will judge, and He will judge fairly, because He knows exactly what He entrusted you with. And the principle is:
48 " For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more. (Luk 12:48)

In all of the stewardship parables, the master goes away, and then the master returns. And when he returns he calls for each of the stewards to see what they have done with his money, or his vineyard, or his household. The point of those parables is that stewardship has a deadline. There comes a day when you hand your work in, or go for the final evaluation. Pilgrim stewardship is not open-ended. The body, the time you have, your abilities, your work, will one day be judged.

And this is what is most fascinating about the stewardship parables: the stewards are judged, and then they are rewarded with a greater stewardship. The one who brought back ten minas is given ten cities to rule over. It seems stewardship is so important because it is a trial, a test of how much God can entrust us with. Your whole life is a trial period, an evaluation of what you do with what God gives you. And what you do with it, will apparently affect your eternal rewards.

10 "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. 11 "Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? 12 "And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own? (Luk 16:11-12)

That's why the Bible so often uses the idea of sowing. Our stewardship now is sowing, with a future harvest coming. *But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. (2Co 9:6)*

All things of of Him, and through Him, and to Him. He entrusts, He expects us to use it profitably for Him, and one day He will do an accounting, a reckoning of what we have done, with what He entrusted us with. And that accounting is not because God needs to make a profit- He could make a million worlds in a second – it is because our stewardship now is the testing ground for our stewardship of the glories of Heaven.

Pilgrim church, consider how different this perspective is to the world you live in. Since they do not believe the world is given by God, and since they do not believe they have to use it for His glory, they cannot imagine that one day they will be held accountable for how they used their bodies, their wealth, their time, their abilities. They think what they have is what they have, it is 'Mine", and when I die, that's it. No loss or reward, no Heaven or Hell, and that means the big winner is the one who dies with the most toys, having gathered the most stuff. Some think that we enter a big recycling centre, and come back again, and try all over. And some people have the audacity to think that even though they lived without thankfulness, without carefulness, without sobriety at future judgement, that somehow God will happily welcome them into Heaven, so they may continue their

godless hedonism, materialism or consumerism upon the golden streets.

As one preacher put it, God will only have to ask people two questions to show them their guilt. One, did you feel offended and sinned against when you gave things to people and they did not thank you or were careless with what you gave them? Two, wasn't it completely obvious to you that all you had had been given to you? Answer: yes. Then you are guilty of the same sin, only on a massive and lifelong scale.

The pilgrim church replaces that word “mine” with “Thine”. And we then use what is His for His glory, hoping to one day hear the words, “Well done, you good and faithful servant.”