

*“And walk in love, as Christ also
has loved us and given Himself for us,
an offering and a sacrifice to God for
a sweet-smelling aroma.”*

Ephesians 5:2

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When and How Did Stewardship Begin?



In the Beginning...

To fully understand any biblical system or principle, one must first understand how and when it was established and to whom it applies. To understand the principles of true stewardship, as ordained by God, we must first revisit the Garden of Eden, since it represents the beginning of the human race.

In Genesis 1:27, 31 the Bible states,

So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

There are seven references to the term good in Genesis Chapter 1 (vv. 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). The Hebrew word for good is *tobe*¹ and it means “perfect”, “beautiful” or “complete”. Therefore when God created Adam and Eve, they were perfect, beautiful and

complete in every aspect because they were created in His perfect image. There was no sin in their lives. God walked amongst Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and talked face to face with them. They actually saw the face of God and communicated directly with Him. There was no sin in their lives so they were close to God, and they enjoyed a sincere relationship with God their creator.

In their perfect form, Adam and Eve enjoyed a holy communion with God and He with them. As long as they remained sinless, they continued to be close to God and they were able to communicate directly with Him in a very personal and direct manner. Prior to sin entering the world, the relationship between Adam and Eve and that between them and God was the way that He intended it to be. We were created by God to worship Him and to exist in His presence (Ephesians 2:10).

During their abode in the Garden of Eden, God introduced Adam and Eve to the fundamental principles of stewardship. They understood the principle of the sovereignty of God (Genesis 1:27), since He was their Creator. Secondly, they were assigned as stewards or managers of God's property (Genesis 1:28, 29; Genesis 2:15). Finally, to help them understand the principle of reserving for God a portion of what they had been given, He instructed them that they had access to all but one of the trees in the Garden (Genesis 2:16, 17). The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was the one tree that they were to reserve for God, since it was His portion.

Sin Enters Into a Perfect World

Adam and Eve struggled with the stewardship principle that pertained to reserving a portion of what they had been given for God; they selfishly desired to have it all.

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.

Genesis 2:16, 17

Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate of the fruit from the forbidden tree. They failed to return to God the portion that was due to Him. The result of their action was immediate and disastrous for the human race. As a result of their disobedience to God's command, sin entered into the world and God evicted them from the Garden (Genesis 3: 23, 24). They were no longer able to communicate directly with God, and could no longer bear to see His face, for they would have been destroyed by His glory.

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command, they demonstrated disregard for His principles of stewardship. This tendency was passed onto the entire human race (Romans 5:12). It is therefore no surprise that we find ourselves today struggling to adhere to God's principles of true stewardship. They also traded their perfect nature for a sinful one, which resulted in their separation from God (Isaiah 59:2). When we fail to follow God's principles of stewardship, our actions result in our separation from Him. That is not what God intended when He created the human race.

Once sin entered into the world, God's plan to redeem man back to Him became engaged. If the separation never occurred, through Adam and Eve's sin, then there would not have been a need for our redemption. Once the plan of redemption became engaged, God's principles of stewardship took on a deeper and more profound spiritual significance for the human race.

The Beginning of God's System of Stewardship – The When

Life for Adam and Eve continued after they were evicted from the Garden of Eden, but it was never the same for them. God blessed them with their first children, Cain and Abel.

And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering.

Genesis 4:3, 4

This is the first recorded instance in the Bible of an act of worship that included the offering of a sacrifice to God, and it occurred after Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden. What is the significance of this to stewardship? Before Adam and Eve were evicted from the Garden of Eden, here were some highlights of their lives:

- They were close to God and He was close to them.
- They communicated with God face to face.
- They were perfect.
- No offerings or sacrifices to God were made or required in the Garden of Eden.

After they sinned and were evicted from the Garden of Eden:

- They were no longer close to God.
- God couldn't communicate with them face to face.
- They were no longer perfect.
- Because of their sin, the entire human race became sinners.
- God's plan of redemption became engaged.
- Their children made the first recorded instance of an offering or sacrifice to God (Genesis 4:3, 4).

According to Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch: a "sacrifice" implies giving up something that is of value to oneself for the benefit of another. An "offering" implies a gift which satisfies the receiver. The Almighty does not need our gifts. He has no needs or desires. The Hebrew word (for sacrifice) is *korban*, which is best translated as a means of bringing oneself into a closer relationship with the Almighty. The offering of *korbanot* was only for our benefit to come close to the Almighty.²

Adam and Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden separated the entire human race from God. Once sin entered into the world, the system of stewardship took on new spiritual significance; it provided a mechanism to allow the human race to come close to God.

The Spiritual Meaning of God's System of Stewardship – The Why

God implemented His system of stewardship in two (2) phases. The first phase was implemented prior to sin entering into the world and provided the following for the human race:

- It reinforced the sovereignty of God in the mind of man (Genesis 1:1, 27, 31).
- It reinforced God's ownership of everything that man acquired. We are the managers of God's property (Genesis 1:28; 2:15).
- It helped man understand the concept of reserving a portion for God (Genesis 2:16, 17).
- It demonstrated God's care and affection for the human race (Genesis 2:18).

The second phase was initiated after sin entered into the world and the human race became separated from God. During this phase He expanded the principles of stewardship to provide the following:

- A mechanism to allow the human race to come close to God (Genesis 4:3, 4).
- A reminder to us of our need to come close to Him.
- A mechanism to reveal to us His plan of redemption (John 3:16).
- A reaffirmation of His love for us - Christ's death was the ultimate sacrifice (Jeremiah 31:3).

Even though sin separated the human race from God, it has always been His desire to restore the relationship with us back to its pre-sin state. Why does God want us to come close to Him? Why would He spend so much effort on a race that had disobeyed Him? The principles of stewardship provide an answer to these questions. Listed in the sections below are some reasons why God implemented stewardship.

1. God Implemented Stewardship Because He Loves Us

In Jeremiah 31:3 the Bible describes the love of God for us, *The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying: “Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore with loving kindness I have drawn you.”*

Because of His great love for us, God desires that we come close to Him; He went to great lengths to implement His system of stewardship to reinforce that in our minds. Jesus spoke of the depth and breadth of His love for the human race, *“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends”* (John 15:13). Our human minds cannot begin to comprehend the everlasting love of God. However, when we adhere to His principles of stewardship in our lives, the Holy Spirit helps us comprehend His munificent love.

2. God Implemented Stewardship to Serve as a Reminder to Us

One of the frailties of human nature is its tendency to forget. Some people tie a string around a finger to help them remember, but they look at it later and say, “Aha, I have a string on my finger,” but they cannot remember why. It is a natural human tendency to forget things.

The American Institute for Cognitive Therapy (AICT) states:

No one is exactly sure how memory works. We understand that the mind can store a tremendous amount of information—far more than any of us is capable of thinking about in a given moment. Having information in our minds, however, doesn’t always mean having access to it. We’ve all experienced moments when we’re certain we know something but are unable to remember it. Scientists have

given the sensation a name: Tip-of-the-Tongue phenomenon. It’s in this category—things we know but can’t remember—that mental blocks originate. We walk into a room and forget why we came; leave keys in the front door; make a call and draw a blank on the person we’ve dialed. None of this is unusual.

According to Judith Beck, a psychologist at the Center for Cognitive Therapy at the University of Pennsylvania, “Most of us are trying to juggle so much; it’s no surprise that we become confused.”

The AICT advises that the first step towards coping with anxiety from mental blocks is to anticipate it, and the second step is to prepare for it. Since God created us He knew of our tendency to forget, so He took the first step for us; He anticipated the anxieties of a sinful world. Secondly, in order to minimize our anxiety He gave us His principles of stewardship to serve as reminders of His love and His plan of redemption for us; God prepared us.

Whenever we bring our gifts to the altar, they should remind us that we are in need of being close to God. Paul understood the concept of being close to God; he characterized it as been crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20).

Adam and Eve were the first stewards. The tree in the midst of the Garden of Eden was placed there by God to constantly remind them of His presence in their midst. When we practice the principles of stewardship in our lives, it serves as a reminder to us of God’s presence in our lives. Just as the tree was physically in the middle of the Garden, stewardship puts God in the middle of our lives; it allows Him to become the epicenter of our very existence (Acts 17:28).

3. God Implemented Stewardship as a Test of Our Obedience

God created man with the freedom of choice and He empowered Adam and Eve to manage His entire creation. They were even allowed to name all the things that God created. However, He gave

them one small test of their loyalty to Him, the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil. They were not permitted to eat of the fruit of that one tree. It was a test of their obedience to Him and would prove their trustworthiness as stewards.

As faithful stewards, they were required to respect that tree as God's portion. If they chose to obey His command they would become co-owners of the world with God, but if they chose to disobey they would lose everything. Adam and Eve chose to disobey God by coveting His portion; they failed the test of obedience. They proved their untrustworthiness as stewards and lost all that had been given to them.

God has blessed us with lots of things: families, friends that care, homes, cars, good jobs, disposable income, freedom to worship, health and a sound mind, just to name a few. He has asked that we return the first portion to Him (Exodus 23: 19). If we choose to obey and demonstrate our trustworthiness as stewards, He has promised to multiply what we already possess beyond our wildest imaginations (Deuteronomy 12: 5-7, Proverbs 3: 9-10, Malachi 3:10, 2 Corinthians 9: 6-8). However, if we choose to disobey and prove to be untrustworthy stewards, we stand to lose everything (Haggai 1:5,6). The New Living Translation Bible brings this point home in a very sobering way;

This is what the LORD Almighty says: Consider how things are going for you! You have planted much but harvested little. You have food to eat, but not enough to fill you up. You have wine to drink, but not enough to satisfy your thirst. You have clothing to wear, but not enough to keep you warm. Your wages disappear as though you were putting them in pockets filled with holes!

4. God Implemented Stewardship to Help Us Understand the Ugliness of Sin

The system of stewardship was implemented for man and not for God. God hates sin, but He loves the sinner. In Hebrews 1:9 the Bible

explains that, "*You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness;*"

Sin is very displeasing and repugnant to God. Ever since our first parents (Adam and Eve) sinned, our human nature has inherited a dispensation to sin and we fail to comprehend how displeasing sin is in the sight of God.

We often consider the really bad disgusting sins to be things like murder and rape, but the Bible does not support that human perspective on sin. In 1 John 5:17 the Bible states, "*All unrighteousness is sin*". Each and every sin is despicable in the sight of God, and He uses the system of stewardship to help us understand the ugliness of sin in His sight.

When Adam, according to God's special directions, made an offering for sin, it was to him a most painful ceremony. His hand must be raised to take life, which God alone could give, and make an offering for sin. It was the first time he had witnessed death. As he looked upon the bleeding victim, writhing in the agonies of death, he was to look forward by faith to the Son of God, whom the victim prefigured, who was to die man's sacrifice.

This ceremonial offering, ordained of God, was to be a perpetual reminder to Adam of his guilt, and also a penitential acknowledgment of his sin. This act of taking life gave Adam a deeper and more perfect sense of his transgression, which nothing less than the death of God's dear Son could expiate. He marveled at the infinite goodness and matchless love, which would give such a ransom to save the guilty. As Adam was slaying the innocent victim, it seemed to him that he was shedding the blood of the Son of God by his own hand. He knew that if he had remained steadfast to God, and true to His holy law, there would have been no death of beast or of man. Yet in the sacrificial offerings, pointing to the great and perfect offering of God's dear Son, there appeared a star of hope to illuminate the dark and terrible future, and relieve it of its utter hopelessness and ruin.³

The system of stewardship that was presented to the Israelites consisted of a number of offerings, which are explained in further details in Chapter Five. Some of these sacrifices involved the killing of animals and the burning and eating of some of their entrails. The process of preparing and killing an animal for sacrifice was a very unnatural and unpleasant one for the worshipper as well as the onlookers. A visit to an animal slaughterhouse would help one to better understand how unpleasant this process of animal sacrificing was. The gruesome sight of an animal resisting being killed in preparation for sacrifice was meant to leave an indelible impression in the minds of the individual and the beholders that their sins were displeasing to God. The process of preparing the sacrifice was meant to present a powerful visual deterrent to the individual against continuing to practice sin.

5. God Implemented Stewardship to Reveal to Us His Plan of Redemption

God implemented the system of stewardship to reveal to us His plan of redemption for us. Because of the sins of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, redemption for the entire human race became necessary.

The Bible states in Hebrews 9:22:

And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.

The plan of redemption required the shedding of blood. The redemption process was defined by God before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:19-21), but only became engaged after sin entered the world. In order for the human race to have a better understanding and appreciation of the process of redemption, God instituted the process of stewardship. One of the mandatory offerings required the repentant individual to bring to the altar an animal sacrifice. The animal sacrifice required the shedding of blood and was a sin offering from the repentant sinner to God. The sacrifices

offered to God typified the ultimate sacrifice of Christ on the cross at Calvary for the redemption of the entire human race (John 17:3).

Prior to the death of Christ at Calvary, the process of presenting a sin offering to God allowed the individual to demonstrate his or her faith in the coming of Christ and their acceptance of the significance of His death. Matthew 1:21:

And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.

The coming of Christ and His death on the cross meant that we are no longer required to bring animal sacrifices to the altar (Ephesians 5:2). We read in Hebrews 7:27:

who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.

Under the old covenant, which existed prior to the death of Christ on the cross, animal sacrifices were required. Under the new covenant, which became effective after the death of Christ, our sacrifices now take on a completely different symbolism and meaning. Every time we bring our offering or sacrifice to the altar, it demonstrates our acceptance of Christ's death on the cross for us and publicly indicates our belief that He is the atoning lamb who "taketh away the sins of the world."

He paid the price for you and me so that we could gain eternal life; that's the result of God's sacrifice and the significance of stewardship to us.

6. God Implemented Stewardship as a Mechanism to Communicate His Thoughts

When Adam and Eve sinned, the lines of direct communication with God became disrupted. As a result of sin, God cannot communicate directly with man. There are times when by our very actions

we signal to God that we do not wish to communicate with Him. The children of Israel refused to communicate with God and delegated that responsibility to Moses. When God implemented His system of stewardship, He desired that by our adherence to its original principles we would glimpse some of His deep thoughts of His love for us and His plan of redemption. We are always on God's mind (Jeremiah 29:11).

When we adhere to the principles of stewardship, God elevates our minds to understand His love for us and He reveals His secret thought to us. Communication is a two-way process; God to us and we to Him. Through our observance of God's principles of stewardship, we open up the channels of communication with Him. When we become faithful stewards, we communicate to God our acceptance of His love, our belief and acceptance of the death of Christ as the atoning lamb; we express our love for Him and our desire to be with Him when He returns.

Final Thoughts

When God created Adam and Eve they were perfect and close to Him; they were faithful stewards. Because they allowed the devil to encourage them to covet God's portion, the tree of knowledge of Good and Evil, they became unfaithful stewards. As a result of this, they displeased God.

An important spiritual significance of stewardship is that God instituted it to remind us of His everlasting love for us, and of our need to return to Him.

The practice of the principles of stewardship in the life of the individual helps him or her to understand how detestable sin is in the sight of God. By being a faithful steward, we allow the Holy Spirit to remind us that our sins displease God and they led to the death of His son.

The decision to adhere to God's principles of stewardship is a voluntary one. We decide our destiny: "*choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve*" (Joshua 24:15). Our decision to follow these principles demonstrates our love for God.

References

1. Hebrew #2896 – *Strong's Dictionary of Hebrew and Greek Words*
2. *Shabbat Shalom Weekly – Vayikra 5762, Torah Portion: Vayikra* by Rabbi Kalman Packouz
3. "*The Sacrificial Offering*", *The Story of Redemption* by Ellen G. White