

Biblical Reformation: A Trust Committed to Our Care

Ezra 8:24-30; 1 Corinthians 6:20

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A trustee is one to whom is committed the care, management, and safety of some possession. Let me relate this concept of a trustee to situations that even our children might understand. Children, if your mom is going to be out of the room for a little while, she might say to you, “Watch your little brother (or your little sister, as the case may be) and keep him out of danger while I am downstairs.” Your parents have entrusted you, children, with the care and safety of someone very important—your little brother (or sister). Now if you go outside to play with your friends, leaving your little brother (or sister) in the room all alone, you have not been a good and faithful trustee. However, if you hear your friends calling you to come outside and play, and you tell them that you cannot do so right now because your mom entrusted to you the care and safety of your little brother while she is downstairs, then you are in that instance a faithful and dependable trustee. You have shown yourself to be trustworthy, that is worthy of the trust that your mom placed in you in caring for your little brother (or sister), even over the constant calls of friends to join them in doing what is fun.

Dear ones, God calls us as Christians to be faithful trustees of the material gifts and spiritual graces that have been entrusted to us by our Heavenly Father to be cared for, cherished, managed, protected, and used for His glory in advancing a biblical reformation in our own lives, in our families, in the church, and in the nations of this world. No Christian can escape the position of being a trustee of Christ. All Christians are appointed to be trustees of all the blessings of heaven and earth graciously bestowed upon you by the Lord. We will either be a faithful trustee or an unfaithful trustee with that which is committed to us. We will either listen to all of the voices (within us or outside of us) that tempt us to forget (just for a little while) what is entrusted to us by God, so that we can fit in with others, so that we can have fun, so that we don’t have to be bogged down with that heavy duty and responsibility to guard our hearts, our homes, our church, or our nation; or we will listen to the voice of our Heavenly Father who graciously adopted us by faith alone to be His own beloved children (who once were His enemies) when He says (through the Apostle Paul), “For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, **which are God’s**” 1 Corinthians 6:20.

Dear ones, if a biblical reformation is to advance in our lives, in our families, in the church, and in the nations of this world, Christians must ever be growing in our sanctified desire to be faithful trustees in all that God has committed to us to use for Him in promoting the Kingdom of Christ. This Lord’s Day, we shall be considering how Ezra made the Priests and Levites trustees of the gold, silver, and precious vessels that were to be used in promoting a biblical reformation in Jerusalem. The main points from our text this Lord’s Day are the following: (1) A Trust Committed in Advancing a Biblical Reformation (Ezra 8:24-28); and (2) A Trust To Be Guarded in Advancing a Biblical Reformation (Ezra 8:29-30).

I. A Trust Committed in Advancing a Biblical Reformation (Ezra 8:24-28).

A. In the previous sermon from Ezra 8:21-23, we observed that as God’s people prepared to embark upon their journey on the road to reformation from Babylon to Jerusalem, they saw their desperate need of God’s protection from the enemies that would lie in wait for them along the road to reformation.

1. And so they prepared for the journey on the road to reformation with a time of prayer and fasting. For any time, we set out by God’s grace to advance reformation in our own lives, our families, the church, or the nation, one can rest assured that there will be enemies ready to attack us for our small numbers, for our little resources, for our great hope and expectation of a covenanted reformation yet to

come, and for our constant adherence to the principles of a biblical uniformity in doctrine, worship, government, and discipline. Even fellow Christians will misrepresent what we believe and the judicial actions we have taken, and will drag our names through the mud. But we must view even those who oppose us as God's means to our sanctification and growth in Christ. For adversaries also reveal our weaknesses and our failures, so as ever to keep us humble and dependent upon the Lord (rather than dependent upon ourselves). In that sense our most tenacious adversaries become our greatest friends in continually driving us to cast ourselves upon our Savior, and His might, His mercy, His wisdom, and His righteousness to uphold us and to pick us up when we are cast down.

2. But we also observed in the previous sermon in Ezra 8:21-23 that Ezra had decided not to request from King Artaxerxes royal troops to accompany God's people from Babylon to Jerusalem. Ezra had spoken of God's greatness and majesty in protecting His people in the very presence of the king, and if Ezra now requested from the king a royal body guard for protection, it may appear that Ezra was trusting in the king rather than in the Lord God Almighty for his protection. Thus, rather than bring shame upon the name and honor of God, Ezra would rather go without the protection of man—He would rather cast himself and the people entrusted to him entirely upon the mercy and faithfulness of the Lord to preserve and protect them. Dear ones, there will be a biblical reformation when we hold the honor of God higher than all our comforts, and the glory of God supreme even over the necessities of life. When the honor and glory of Jesus Christ is that which we will not cast away, even when attacked, misrepresented, and maligned, we will show ourselves ready to embark upon that road to a biblical reformation from Babylon to Jerusalem (not eyeing over our shoulders the comforts of Babylon, nor cowering before the enemy, but eyeing the Lord in His mercy and faithfulness to preserve us in bringing a biblical reformation within Jerusalem, the city of our God).

B. As we consider the trust that was committed to the people of God in advancing a biblical reformation, let us observe first who the trustees were to whom was committed the gifts to advance reformation in Jerusalem?

1. We read that the trustees were Priests and Levites (Ezra 8:24). There were 12 Priests appointed to be trustees, and also 12 Levites in addition to the 12 Priests to whom Ezra entrusted the sacred gifts to be used in advancing reformation in Jerusalem. For Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and their brethren (the names found in Ezra 8:24) were all Levites, not Priests (according to Ezra 8:15,18,19). Thus, there were a total of 24 trustees (12 Priests and 12 Levites) to whom Ezra entrusted the holy things of the Lord.

2. We also read that the trustees were called "holy" in Ezra 8:28. Now the word, "holy", does not specifically refer to inward holiness in this context, but to the fact that the Priests and the Levites (as the Ministers of God in the Old Testament) had been set apart and consecrated by God to minister on God's behalf to the people in the doctrine and worship of the Lord. The Priests and the Levites had been ordained by the Lord to handle the holy things of the Lord (Exodus 30:30; Numbers 8:10-14). God committed into the trust, care, and protection of the Priest and Levites all that pertained to His worship and His doctrine. As trustees, they were not to be innovative in introducing new ordinances in worship or to be creative and original thinkers in the doctrines they taught to the people. Trustees are not entrusted with a commission to create something new, but rather are to care for, manage, and preserve that which is committed to them. This is not only true of the Ministers of the Old Testament, but is also true of the Ministers of the New Testament.

3. In the New Testament, a very closely related term to that of a trustee is that of a steward. A steward was one who was entrusted with caring for, managing, and preserving the house of his master (1 Corinthians 4:1-2; Titus 1:7). Likewise, Ministers and Elders are entrusted by Christ with the feeding, the managing, and the protecting of Christ's house, His Church. Paul says, that which is most important in a steward is that he be found faithful, not innovative in worship, not creative in doctrine—**faithful to Christ, faithful to feed** the household the true doctrine of Christ and to lead in the true worship of Christ without innovation, **faithful to manage and govern** the household of Christ out of love, **faithful to protect** the

household of God with one's own life and reputation if necessary. Dear ones, that which is absolutely necessary in a Minister/Elder is that he be faithful to the form of sound words that summarize the whole counsel of God (2 Timothy 1:13-14; 2 Timothy 2:2).

4. Dear ones, as Christians, you are trustees/stewards in the calling God has placed you (the Lord calls all Christians "stewards" in one of His Parables in Luke 16:1-12—note verses 10-11). You may not be Ministers in the Church, but you are set apart as holy (in fact, the word, "saints", means holy ones in Ephesians 1:1, that is Christians are set apart and consecrated by God to serve the Lord Jesus Christ as His trustees/stewards in the home, at work, at school, on the Lord's Day, on the other six days of the week, when worshiping the Lord, when working, or when recreating). Do you know that as Christians, you are trustees, stewards, and holy ones? Have you forgotten that you have been set apart by the Lord and entrusted with the blessings of heaven and earth (with all of the gifts and graces that you possess) in order to bring your Heavenly Master glory and honor wherever you are and whatever you are doing? You cannot be faithful in what has been entrusted to you, if you do not even know or have forgotten your appointment to be a trustee/steward for the Lord.

C. Next let us observe what was committed to the care of these priestly trustees and these Levitical stewards (Ezra 8:25-27)?

1. The gifts entrusted into their care and protection were the silver, the gold, and the precious vessels given by the king and his counselors, and given by God's people as free offerings to be used in advancing a biblical reformation in Jerusalem.

2. Not only are the priestly trustees and Levitical stewards called holy, but the gifts themselves are called holy (Ezra 8:28). For these gifts and freewill offerings were set apart as consecrated to be used for the Lord in the Temple of the Lord.

3. According to the Apostle Paul, Ministers of the New Covenant also have gold, silver, and precious stones entrusted to them as well in the doctrines, ordinances, government, and discipline that Christ has committed to them (1 Corinthians 3:10ff). These are the "mysteries" of the New Covenant with which the Lord Jesus has entrusted His Ministers to dispense on behalf of Christ to His household of faith (1 Corinthians 4:1). These are the precious treasures that Christ has committed to us as His trustees and stewards (and in particular, the Gospel of Jesus Christ).

4. In a more general sense, what are the gifts and graces God has entrusted to you as His trustees and stewards? Husbands, your wives are entrusted to you. Are you being faithful with this precious gift to cherish, to care for, and to protect from all enemies this precious gift? Wives, you are given a trust to be a submissive helper to your husband. Are you being faithful to your calling to help your husband, or are you a rival to your husband in the home? Parents, your children are entrusted to you. Are you being faithful with this precious trust committed to you by the Lord lead them to set their heart and affections upon the Lord? Dear singles, your affections, your gifts and abilities, and the present time of preparation are entrusted to you by God to be used for His glory. Are you wasting what God has given to you, or are you using each day to prepare yourself to be the godly husband or wife God will call you to be? Dear Christian, your job, your successes, your ambitions, your possessions, your gifts and abilities, your souls, and your bodies all belong to the Lord by right of creation and by right of redemption. Are you more concerned with how others are not using their gifts and graces to bless you, or are you more concerned with how you are to use your gifts and graces to bless others to the glory of God?

5. Dear ones, there is no room for envy and jealousy in what God has given to each Christian to manage and to preserve on behalf of Christ. There is no room for discontentment, envying the blessings of others while wallowing in our own self-pity. Because it is God who apportions the gifts and graces to each trustee/steward, we are to concern ourselves with our own faithfulness as trustees/stewards, and we are rejoice in the gifts and graces that God has bestowed upon others.

6. A practical truth: All that we have is ultimately not ours, but His (Psalm 24:1; 1 Corinthians 6:20). If He gives to us, we will be diligent and faithful to manage it for His glory and honor. If He takes it away, we will not fear; we will not fret; we will not accuse the Lord of being unloving, unfair, or unfaithful; for we are simply managing for the Lord what actually belongs to Him in the first place. How our lives would be used to advance reformation, if we remembered that truth.

II. A Trust to Be Guarded in Advancing a Biblical Reformation (Ezra 8:29-30).

A. There is not only a trust committed to the priestly trustee and to the Levitical stewards in promoting a biblical reformation in Jerusalem, but there is also a trust that is to be watched and guarded until they safely reach Jerusalem. To be a trustee of a rich man's wealth is a great honor, but so many revel in the position or office, but will not be faithful in guarding and protecting the wealth entrusted to them. Those Priests and Levites to whom were committed the silver, gold, and precious vessels could not wander off to have a good time, while forgetting they were entrusted with these gifts to protect.

1. So likewise, Ministers and Elders have been commanded to protect the sheep entrusted to them, just as the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11). It is the hireling who flees and leaves the sheep unprotected (John 10:12-13). The care, protection, and needs of the sheep are on the heart and in the prayers of the Good Shepherd and ought to be of faithful under-shepherds. By faithful doctrine, worship, government, discipline, and prayer, the household of faith are protected and preserved from wolves and hirelings. For the sheep recognize the loving voice of Christ in the faithful doctrine, worship, government, and discipline entrusted to faithful under-shepherds.

2. But dear ones, just as each of you as Christians has a trust committed to you to cherish and to manage the gifts and graces bestowed upon you by Christ, so each of you also has a trust to protect and to guard those gifts and graces that they be not taken away by the enemy, that they be not lost due to negligence, that they be not forgotten due to preoccupation with so many things in the world, that they be not spent on gaining the applause of others, but that the trust committed to you be guarded and managed so that it is preserved, improved, and enlarged to the glory of God (Revelation 2:25). Don't lose what Christ has entrusted to you, but your forgetfulness, by your preoccupation, or by your negligence. Guard what Christ has given to you, and use all those gifts and graces to show how great He is.

B. Dear ones, the seriousness of diligently guarding the silver, gold, and precious vessels entrusted into the hands of the Priests and the Levites is revealed in that there was to be an accounting of their stewardship once they arrived in Jerusalem. There would come a time in which each Priest and Levite would be required to present before the Lord in His house there in Jerusalem the gold, silver, and precious vessels entrusted into their care and protection. Then it would be revealed whether the trustee/steward was faithful with what was committed to him.

1. A very similar accountability will be required of us all as to our diligent faithfulness in cherishing, using (not hiding), and preserving the many gifts (material and spiritual) entrusted to you in order to glorify God and to advance reformation (by way of Parable in Matthew 25:14-30 and by way of Prophecy in Matthew 25:31-46 where even the cup of water is committed to us in order to glorify the Lord, serve others, and advance a biblical reformation).

2. I conclude by drawing your attention to the fact that not only are we as Christians made trustees for the Lord, but that also the Lord is made our Trustee, as we by faith alone commit to Him our lives, our souls, and our eternal salvation (2 Timothy 1:12). We all fall and fail in being faithful trustees/stewards of all that Christ has committed to us and in living the Gospel of Jesus Christ in our daily lives (it is only by God's grace that we arise again after falling seven times), but, dear ones, the Lord is not a careless, forgetful, unwatchful trustee in what you have committed to Him to keep until that final day. Beloved, you are not saved

on the basis of our perfect faithfulness, but are rather saved on the basis of Christ's perfect faithfulness to keep that which you have by faith committed to Him to keep—namely, your life, your soul, and your eternal salvation. Our unfaithfulness at times with what He has entrusted to us will not prove Him to be unfaithful in the least in saving those who manifest unfaithfulness. He will be ever faithful to keep His promise to save you who trust Him in spite of your daily sin and unfaithfulness. You can be absolutely persuaded that Christ will keep and guard you now and for all eternity, because faithfulness is a part of His unchangeable character. That confidence of which Paul speaks from the midst of a dungeon as he pens this last letter is not due to his sinless faithfulness, but is due to Christ's perfect faithfulness to guard even the faith and salvation of the chief of sinners.

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