

What is a steward? Looked up definition in several resources and here is my paraphrase of what I found: One who handles the affairs of another. A servant empowered with the authority to act on behalf of a master. One who cares for another.

The image is of one who does work for and on behalf of another, being responsible to the other for the work done! It is not a demeaning position but one that is cherished and upheld. Some Biblical stewards: Joseph, Nehemiah and Daniel. Not bad company to keep.

Peter reminds us we are called to be **stewards of God's grace**. We are the ambassadors of Grace who carry out not our will but God's will in the world. Peter is reminding us of who we should be in Christ. Now, as usual this may require some clarification.

We are not the ones who make the rules (amazing how often we forget this). Rule making/law giving is not in our job description. But we like to make the rules. A few weeks ago I was playing a game with our younger grandson and I knew I was going to lose. You see he had designed the game, the game board and made the rules! Each play seemed to include, "O yeah, Grampy, I forgot to tell you."

This is not so in Christ. Rules have been established and they will not be changed or added to. Our task is only to invite others to come and join in the process. Or, our task is to extend the hand of God's grace. We are only the stewards of God.

Peter acknowledges this often requires a change in lifestyle. When we are in Christ we are in a new relationship with God, Christ and one another. The old way of life, our past life, was one lived predominately for self. We used people to get what we wanted. We acted out of our own self interest, our own self satisfaction. The new life is one of respect for one another. It is a life style where we not longer use one another for personal gain or personal self satisfaction. Imagine a world where all were concerned more about the other than themselves? Where all stopped, listened and respected the other person. Our former life was not one of doing that, but in Christ we have become as Christ and this must be one of the characteristics of who we are.

The American Baptist Women are focusing their attention on "Breaking the Chains" of slavery, especially as this concerns women and girls around the world and how they are treated or mistreated. Women and girls are not something to be bartered, traded and used, but humans made in God's image who need to be treated with dignity and respect. They are asking the same thing Peter is, that we change our vision of how we see and react with one another. This is part of our new life style in Christ.

We are called to be stewards of God's grace. Peter reminds us we are to serve one another with the gift(s) God has given. Now not all of us have the same gift(s) but we all have some gift. There are no clones in God's creation. Each of us has been given specific gift(s) to be used to build up the kingdom of God. Peter calls on us to use those gifts. There is no one greater gift (hard for some to believe). All are equal in God's eyes. Remember Paul's image of the body. Each part has a purpose

and no one part is greater than the other (I Corinthians 12). Use the gift(s) you have been given. Don't long for gifts you do not have. And remember, all of us have the gift of God's grace. We are called to be stewards of it and to give it as Christ would.

Then Peter says we are to have a "constant love for one another." The church is young and Peter is already having to remind them to love one another! We are to stop complaining. Seems like this has always been a part of human nature. The most negative reaction I ever received from a sermon was one on gossip. Apparently many in the congregation spent a good deal of their time on the telephone in gossip – 16 party lines had a way of making this possible even before the world wide web! I simply stated: if people spent as much time building up the church as they do sharing in gossip and tearing people down the world would be changed. Do we gossip about those we are in constant love with?

Love is difficult. People hurt us. We don't want to give grace to those who have hurt us. Remember Christ died for us. Our sins led him to the cross. It was for our hurt he died. He died that we might know love and have the love/grace to share with a world in need. We know grace because of the cross. Love constantly.

We are to give out God's love and grace abundantly. We cannot "overdraw" the account of God's grace. It will not run out. We don't need to ration it for another who may be more in need of it. God has given us the vastness of eternity and the vastness of God's grace. Peter quotes from Proverbs 6:12, "*Love covers all offenses.*" Do you notice the word **all**? It does not say love covers some offenses. Or love covers my offenses but not yours. No. It says, "*Love covers all offenses.*"

Peter calls us to remember that we are the stewards of God's grace and only the stewards. We are not the rule makers or the law givers. We cannot decide who does or does not merit God's grace. Peter reminds the readers of their past life – there were those who thought they were not worthy to receive God's grace – especially if they were Gentiles. There may be some who think we are not worthy of God's grace. And, they are right. We are not – but that is the wonderful thing about God's grace – it is ours because of God's gift of Christ.

It does not matter what our gift(s) are. We are all stewards of God's grace.

We have an open invitation to this Table of our Lord. We can no more deny a person's participation in this Table today than we can deny God's grace to those present here. Whenever we begin to limit participation we are out of step with God's grace. Come to this Table – not because you are worthy, but because of God's wonderful, marvelous Grace you are welcome.

May all who come here find that in this place God's grace is the norm, not the exception.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quoted is from NRSV, NCCC/USA 1989
NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1973, 1978, 1984
Mortenson, Greg and Relin, David Oliver, Three Cups of Tea, Penguin Group, NY 2006