



What About . . .

Christian Stewardship

I have a suspicion Christian stewardship is one of those areas to which we really do not give adequate attention. Unfortunately, at times when stewardship is discussed it is done from the perspective of the Law, not the Gospel. In fact, it may well be that a number of people think that stewardship is only about raising funds for the church's budget. That is genuinely unfortunate, for, as we shall see, Christian stewardship is much more than this.

To fully appreciate the privilege we have of being Christian stewards, we need to return to those bedrock truths of the Christian faith so that we will continually live in appreciation of the glorious truths of God's Word, truths that set us free for lives of Christian stewardship.

Why are we here?

The age-old question is this, "Why am I here?" We need to admit that sometimes our answer goes something like this, "I am here in order to accumulate as many things as I possibly can in order to have a successful life. I work to earn money to buy more things."

But the real answer to that question is found in the first book of the Bible, "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." (Genesis 1:27). We are here because we are God's creation.

There was perfect and complete harmony between human beings and God. He created mankind to be in perfect fellowship with Him, reflecting His glory. He wanted this perfect relationship to continue forever.

What went wrong?

When Adam and Eve fell into sin, the beautiful relationship God intended them to have with Him was destroyed through their sinful rebellion against Him. "In Adam all die" (1 Cor. 15:22). To this very day and hour this fall impacts all areas of life.

From the moment of our conception we are sinful (Ps. 51:5). By nature, every thought and imagination of human beings from their childhood is evil continually (Gen. 8:21). Human beings, as they come into this world, are at war with God (Rom. 8:7), and "alienated from the life of God" through the ignorant blindness of their sinful condition (Eph. 4:18).

That is the most fundamental challenge and problem we face in regard to Christian stewardship. Ever since the fall into sin, human beings are always turned in upon themselves, with lives that revolve around what they want, what they need, and what they are concerned about.

Believers are constantly fighting against the old sinful flesh that wants to pull them back into these old patterns of thought and action.

How did God deal with our greatest need?

God promised to send a Savior when Adam and Eve fell (Gen. 3:15). When the time had come, God sent His Son into our world, to live perfectly under His Law, and to be the perfect atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world (Gal. 4:4, 5). By His innocent suffering and bitter death, our Lord Jesus Christ opened to us the gates of paradise.

By the shedding of His holy, precious blood, Jesus has cleansed you from all of your sin—all of it, not just some of it—all of it. You are forgiven. Your debt is paid. In Christ, you have become a new creation. He has opened all the doors that sin had closed (Is. 59:2).

He has pulled us out of destruction and made us new creatures to live under Him in His kingdom, serving Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness. We are saved from eternal damnation and saved for an eternity of life with God that begins right here and now.

The source and strength of Christian stewardship is the blood-bought salvation that is so richly and daily given us in Christ. We are given a new purpose in life and a new hope. We are given new hearts and renewed minds. We are set on a new path of life. We are freed from our former slavery to sinful patterns of thought and action.

Having been saved redeemed and forgiven by our good and gracious God, we now live in the reality of that salvation. We realize that life is not just about us, but about God's will for us. We live now in the awareness that all things belong to God. We are called to be stewards of those things God has entrusted to us.

What is the steward's highest priority?

Luke 19:11–27 is the parable of the talents. I would encourage you to take a few moments to read this parable.

What About Christian Stewardship?

Here our Lord clearly indicates how He wishes us to be stewards of His precious Gospel, the good news of salvation that is ours in Christ. Jesus told this parable as He was on His way to Jerusalem for the final time in His earthly life. He knew that soon He would no longer be present visibly with His disciples.

God has given us the soul-saving and life-changing Gospel through Word and Sacraments. These Gospel-treasures are to be guarded, defended and preserved, as Jude 3 makes clear. We are not, however, simply to bury these treasures, instead we are to make good use of them!

Christian stewards use the treasure of the Gospel in their own lives by faithfully gathering every Sunday around the Word and Sacraments. There they receive the life and strength and hope and power that makes Christian stewardship possible. We gather regularly with other Christians to study the Bible so we can grow in our understanding and knowledge about God's Holy Word. And having so gathered around Word and Sacraments, we then are ready to "invest" these treasures.

Stewards don't just bury this treasure, they put it to work! This is our sacred trust and responsibility. Christ wants us to share the saving Gospel He has committed to our trust, so that with it and through it, others may be won for Him for all eternity (Mark 5:19–20). He died for all (2 Cor. 5:15) and it is His will that none should perish, but that all should be brought to repentance and faith (2 Peter 3:9).

As Christian stewards joyfully use the greatest gift of all—the Gospel given through Word and Sacrament—they will find that priorities in their life change and take on a new perspective. No longer do they find themselves living only for themselves. Rather, they recognize they are part of the most dramatic, exciting and wonderful life possible—life with God and life in service to Him for the sake of others.

St. Paul puts it so beautifully when he writes in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself up for me."

How do Christian stewards use their material blessings?

The money that we have and all the things that we own—all of them are God's possessions. Everything in this life that we have is a sacred trust from our heavenly Father (Hag. 2:8; Lev. 25:23; Ps. 50:10ff). Everything belongs to God. He allows us to use His creation and intends it for our good.

The Apostle Paul puts matters quite clearly when he writes, "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that we can carry nothing out" (1 Tim. 6:7). Because this is

true, we need to realize that those things we have are not ours to use in any way we choose.

When we talk about Christian stewardship then, we are talking about a "big picture" view of how we manage and use all that our good and gracious God has given to us, and that certainly includes money. Some have more, some have less, but all have the privilege, duty and responsibility to give sacrificially for the work of the Kingdom. Clearly then, it is our joyful privilege and sacred duty to support the work of the church through our financial offerings. We give too of our time and our talents in the work of the church, giving as we have received and sharing as we have been blessed.

We do this in order that the message of Christ and the truth of His Word is spread abroad, through our own personal efforts, and through the efforts of our congregation and our district, and our Synod, as together we join hands to reach out boldly with the Gospel—telling the good news of Jesus.

Conclusion

When we catch the vision of Christian stewardship that flows from a Christ-centered and Gospel-centered understanding of God's Word, we are able to put issues of our wealth and possessions in proper perspective. They are not "ends" but "means." They are the means by which our Lord provides for our needs and the means by which He permits us to join hands with fellow believers in supporting generously the work of the church in reaching out with the message of forgiveness, life and salvation in Christ.

How much can we give? How much are we to give? We do not live under law, but under grace. Each of us needs prayerfully to determine what is most appropriate for their own situation. Many Christians have found giving a fixed percent of their income to be the best way to be regular in their giving.

Because of what Christ has done, we are called to lives of Christian stewardship—lives that reflect the glory of God. Christian stewards are privileged by God to live their lives in grateful praise and thanksgiving to God, reflecting this marvelous truth from God's almighty Spirit-filled Word:

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9).

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