



Stewardship Primer 4

Defining Christian Stewardship

1 Corinthians 4:2

“Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.”

There continues to be much confusion about Christian stewardship. There are many who equate it solely with the giving of money to the church. If the word “stewardship” is mentioned it means money for budgets, buildings, salaries, etc. Allowing stewardship to be compartmentalized in this way is a tragic mistake both for individual stewards and for corporate stewardship.

Where do we begin when defining Christian stewardship? It begins with the grace of God in Christ. We are Christians because of what Christ has done for us on the cross. We do not find favor with God because of what we do. Stewardship (what I do as God’s child) is not the cause of our salvation, but a response to it. Christian stewardship is the response of the believer to what God has done for them in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The New Testament word translated “stewardship” (*oikonomia*) is never used to refer to the giving of money. It is about managing what belongs to someone else. “*Oikonomia*” writes Roy Bleick in *Much More Than Giving*, “relates primarily to the office of administration or management or to the implementation of a plan.” Christian stewardship is what the steward does in every area of life as he/she manages what belongs to God.

Christian stewards understand the privileges and responsibilities they have in all the relationships of life. Christian stewardship impacts our relationship with God, with our neighbors, with ourselves, and with all of creation. To limit it to issues related to finance misleads and robs the Christian steward of the rich, full, and fruitful life that God intends for His children (John 10:10; Titus 2:11-15)

Why is it so important to define Christian stewardship accurately? Without a proper understanding of the fullness and richness of Biblical stewardship the life changing nature of Christian stewardship is lost.

One of the most important aspects of considering stewardship education in the congregation is the proper understanding of Biblical stewardship. This can be a difficult task because many congregations have done a very good job of teaching their members to think of stewardship as primarily or solely giving money to the church.

Christian stewardship is the free and joyous activity of the child of God and God’s family, the Church, in managing all of life and life’s resources for God’s purposes.

In *What Do I Own and What Owns Me?* Daniel Conway writes, “Stewardship means letting go of my independence, my ego, my need for control, and my desire to be someone...True stewardship means that I depend on a good and gracious God for who I am and what is mine—because they are all gifts to me” (page 7).

*Is the way I am
investing the
time God allots
for me, the
abilities God
gives me, the
resources God
entrusts to me,
and my very life
pleasing to the
Owner?*

“Christian stewardship,” writes Roy Bleick in *Much More Than Giving*, “is a partnership with God in the business of salvation. Both the partnership and the nature of the business are beautifully described in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20...It is to be noted that this is not an equal partnership, since the business and all of the resources belong to God...The object of all stewardship activity is to use the resources placed in our hands in such a way that people come to know and trust in the only true God” (page 19).

Ed Varnum writes in an article entitled, *Building a Year Round Stewardship Culture*, “If your church members consider stewardship the ‘\$’ word and you avoid speaking it lest you offend, it is definitely beyond time to open them to stewardship’s bigger picture. Help them discover the joy of using their physical, emotional, spiritual, and financial gifts in meaningful ways that build up others and give glory to God. Help them recognize the faithful stewardship of your church in a variety of ministries, which their gifts support. Above all, help them be captured by the larger vision of God’s ownership of all and our role as Christ’s servants and stewards” (page 10 *Net Results Magazine*, May/June 2008).

Reflection:

How have I defined stewardship in my own life? (When you hear the word “stewardship” what comes to mind first?)

How has this congregation defined stewardship? (What do most of the members think of first when they hear the word “stewardship”?)

Describe in your own words “stewardship’s bigger picture.”

Digging Deeper:

Read *Ask, Thank, Tell* by Charles Lane.

Read *Christian Stewards: Confronted and Committed* by Waldo Werning.

