



Stewardship Primer 6

Christian Stewardship is a Spiritual Issue

1 Corinthians 4:2

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

One of the reasons many churches and many church leaders have relegated stewardship education to the back burner (or do not do it at all) is because they see it as primarily an institutional issue instead of a spiritual issue. Institutional issues are about budgets, buildings, salaries and other financial aspects of church life. Spiritual issues are about the relationship God has established with us in Christ. Christian stewardship is more a spiritual issue than it is a financial issue because it is about our life in Christ.

Christian Sharen writes in *Faith as a Way of Life*, “Christian faith is a gift of God that entails dying to one way of life and rising to another lived not for ourselves, but for God. To receive Christian faith is, in St. Paul’s words, “to walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4). Paul shows that Christian faith is not simply a state of mind or a belief that has no practical consequences for daily living. Rather, it is a way of life marked by the mysterious union with Christ described by Paul in these words: ‘it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me’ (Galatians 2:20)... Christian faith, then, is God’s gift, not just of salvation and new life, but of a whole new way of life ‘in Christ’” (page 4).

Stewardship is a spiritual issue because it is about this new way of life in Christ. Sharen continues, “Faith as a way of life is not given simply that we might be at one with God, assured of our special place in cosmic history. No, God’s saving gift of faith shapes daily life lived in and for the sake of God’s reconciling work in the world” (page 4).

Luther reminds us in his explanation of the First Commandment in the *Large Catechism* that how we live, especially as it relates to money and possessions, can get in the way of the relationship He has established with us in Christ. Luther writes, “Many a person thinks that he has God and everything in abundance when he has money and possessions. He trusts in them and boasts about them with such firmness and assurance as to care for no one. Such a person has a god by the name of ‘Mammon’ (i.e., money and possessions; [Matthew 6:24]), on which he sets all his heart. This is the most common idol on earth. He who has money and possessions feels secure [Luke 12:16-21] and is joyful and undismayed as though he were sitting in the midst of Paradise. On the other hand, he who has no money doubts and is despondent, as though he knew of no God. For very few people can be found who are of good cheer and who neither mourn nor complain if they lack Mammon. This care and desire for money sticks and clings to our nature, right up to the grave” (pages 18-19).

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“Stewardship,” writes Roy Bleick in *Much More Than Money*, “is the responsible administration of something that has been received as a trust. As a steward the Christian is to be under no illusions about his position. He is steward and not master. He is not the one who gives the trust” (page 18).

Bleick underscores the importance of the spiritual aspects of stewardship when he writes, “We ought to avoid speaking of stewardship in the hackneyed terms of time, talent, and treasure. The slogan about giving of our time, talents, and treasure ought to disappear from our vocabulary. To speak of only giving our time, talents, and treasure ignores the far greater concept of managing. Management covers not just a portion of the resources but *all* of them. We are to manage everything in the way God intends, even what we use for ourselves. Using the common, alliterative phrase makes it too easy for people to fall into the trap of thinking of these things as ends in themselves. It is not the money or the time in itself that is the object of the mission that Christians have been given. Money, time and talents are merely resources to be used to accomplish the mission. They are means to an end. The mission is the ministry of reconciliation that God has committed into the hands of His believers. We would be misleading people if we taught them that the time and talents they offer in activities centered in their church building are all that is involved in their stewardship responsibility” (page 20).

Bleick concludes, “The Christian steward constantly needs to ask himself, What is the objective of my life? What is my main concern in life? According to Jesus, the main concern should be seeking the kingdom of God—even before the necessities of life (Matthew 6:25, 32-33). To a large degree, Christian stewardship is a matter of priorities. It is not only a matter of how I use God’s possessions, but it means putting God first in all areas of life” (page 21). It is a spiritual issue.

Reflection:

How can viewing stewardship in purely institutional terms be damaging to the steward?

What do you think of Bleick’s suggestion that “time, talent, and treasure” should “disappear from our vocabulary” when speaking about stewardship?

What are the implications for the steward and for the congregation in seeing stewardship as a spiritual issue?

Digging Deeper:

Read *Much More Than Giving* by Roy Bleick.

Read *Faith as a Way of Life* by Christian Scharen.

