

A Stewardship Bible
Study Based Upon the
Synodical Stewardship
Principles of the LCMS

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I. GOD'S STEWARDS ARE GOD'S STEWARDS

What does this mean? God's stewards are stewards by virtue of creation and their re-creation in Holy Baptism; therefore, they belong to the Lord.

What does God's Word say about this?

Gen. 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Is. 43:1 But now, this is what the Lord says--he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: fear not, for I have redeemed you. I have summoned you by name; you are mine. (cf. 43:1-3a)

What does this passage say to us about ownership and relationship with God?

When God speaks in ownership terminology, He is applying the Gospel to our lives!

Rom. 6:4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. (cf. 6:1-11)

What is the significance of your Baptism for your daily living?

2 Cor 5:16-17 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (cf 5:14-17)

What does it mean to be a "new creation in Christ Jesus?"

Eph. 2:8-10 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

What does the word "grace" mean?

What would be examples of "good works" that a Christian will do?

What does it mean to be a steward?

Give examples of stewards which we encounter in our daily living:

Read Genesis 1:27-28. **“And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish the sea and the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”**”

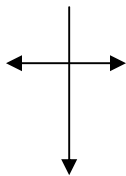
What do those words say to us about the role which we have been given in relationship to the created things of the earth?

What does that say in terms of being a “steward?”

Matt. 5:13-16 “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty again? It is good for nothing any more, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do men light a lamp, and put it under the peck-measure, but on the lampstand; and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

How does Jesus identify the believer in these verses?

What implications does that have for our daily living?



We operate on two planes. The horizontal plane represents the fact that we are created by God. On this plane we interact with both believer and unbelievers. This is First Article theology of the Apostles’ Creed.

Creation

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

What does this mean? I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them.

He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life.

He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil.

All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him.

This is most certainly true.¹

How does Luther indicate that the First Article is grounded in “grace?”

On the vertical plane we have our relationship with the Triune God which began in the waters of Holy Baptism.

Redemption

[I believe] in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty. From thence he will come to judge the living and the dead.

What does this mean? I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.²

Sanctification

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

What does this mean? I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers. On the Last Day He will raise me

¹ *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986) 105.

² *ibid*, 115-6.

and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true.³

As we look at the 2nd and 3rd Articles of the Creed on the Vertical Plane, what does that say about being a “steward of God” as the first principle states?

What truths have specific application for you?

How is this done?

As children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit’s help, we will:

- Recognize that we are made stewards by God’s activity;
- Respect Christian stewards for Whose they are; and,
- Remind stewards that they are God’s new creation each day.

Stewardship involves management and being faithful. What is the most important thing which we are to be faithful with?

The second bullet point stresses what from “God’s perspective?”

The third bullet point leads us back to our baptism.

The Small Catechism states: It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.⁴

As children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit’s help, we will not:

- Use short-cut methods that consider stewards to be merely “donors,” “clients” or “customers” or means to an end;
- Neglect to name the name of the Lord who is the Source of all stewardship; or,
- Present stewardship as limited to a single area of life, such as money.

³ *ibid*, 144.

⁴ *ibid*, 210.

Another example of the first bullet point would be when you refer to people as “giving units.”

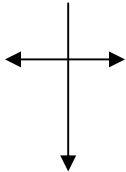
What would be the significance of stating that we name the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as the Source of all stewardship versus just using the name Lord?

The final bullet point leads us back to our Baptism and to the realization that our life on the horizontal plane is a living out of our Baptism which flows from the vertical plane. We return daily in repentance to our baptism where we are assured that our sins are forgiven and that we are new creations in Christ Jesus!

II. GOD’S STEWARDS ARE MANAGERS, NOT OWNERS.

What does this mean?

God’s stewards have been entrusted with life and life’s resources and given the privilege of responsibly and joyfully managing them for Him.



This operates on both planes. We have the created things of the horizontal plane and also the “given things” of the vertical plane, namely the 2nd and 3rd Article gifts. Both of those endeavors involve a call to “be faithful.”

What does God’s Word say about this?

Gen. 2:15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

Ps. 24:1 The earth is the LORD’S, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. (cf. Ps. 89:11)

1 Chron. 29:14 But whom am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand. (cf. 29:1-20)

2 Cor. 8:5 And they [Macedonian Christians] did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. (cf. 8:1-7)

Luke 12:48b From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked. (cf. 12:41-48)

1 Tim. 6:17-19 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

What does the Gen. 2:15 passage tell us about managing?

What does Ps. 24:1 show us in terms of ownership?

In 1 Chron. 29:14 we see that what we have is truly a what from God?

What does 2 Cor. 8:5 show us in terms of what must underscore all of one's stewardship life?

It is important that one is being properly fed and nourished, and built up in Christ Jesus if one's stewardship life is to continue to grow.

What responsibility is given to one who has been given much according to Luke 12:41-48?

What explicit warning is given by Paul in 1 Tim. 6:17-19?

What is the firm foundation which Paul is referring to in v. 19?

How is this done?

As children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit's help, we will:

- Encourage proper management of all of life and life's resources for God's purposes.
- Promote materials and approaches to stewards that are firmly grounded in the Owner/manager understanding of stewardship.

- Encourage cheerful, firstfruit, proportionate (included but not limited to tithing) living and giving in all areas of life by Christian stewards; and,
- Receive and use God's gifts with thanksgiving.

As children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit's help, we will not:

- Approach the steward as if he or she is the Owner;
- Neglect to remind the steward of Who the Owner is;
- Forget the Owner for the sake of the interests of the entity being represented; or,
- Fail to remind Christian stewards that greater blessings call for great responsibility to manage them according to God's purposes.

Paramount in any stewardship program is that the materials be Biblical and Lutheran. If such is the case, then they will also be sacramental. Only as God's people are properly fed will they respond!

As to "tithing," we are no longer commanded to "tithes" as all things have been fulfilled in Christ Jesus. To demand "tithing" is to no longer encourage **"the free and joyous activity."** Anytime the church uses such words as should, ought, and must, you are using the Law to coerce what only the new person in Christ will produce. It works in the short run, by creating guilt, but is not growing the person in Christ Jesus. We respond because of "who" we are "in Christ Jesus."

Proportionate firstfruit giving is encouraged. To challenge people to increase their giving can and will happen over time, but only if the people are being properly fed. Paul states:

"Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? *For you have been bought with a price;* therefore glorify God in your body." 1 Cor. 6:19-20⁵

⁵ NASB, 1087.

This all flows from the forgiveness of sins which Christ Jesus has earned through His suffering, death, and resurrection and which He imparted to us in our Baptism!

III. GOD'S STEWARDS ARE SAINTS AND SINNERS.

What does this mean?

God's stewards rejoice in and live out what the Lord has declared them to be through the cross. At the same time His stewards recognize they are sinners who fight sin and its consequences each day.

What does God's Word say about this?

Eph. 4:22-24 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitudes of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (cf. Col. 3:15-17).

This is the real struggle which all Christians face each day of their lives. For us as Lutherans who understand the "saint" and "sinner" terminology, we are led back to our Baptism. Look again at the quote from the Catechism:

The Small Catechism states: It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.⁶

The passage from Eph. 4:22-24 is included in the above section of the *Small Catechism*.

Rom. 7:21-25 So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God--- through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

While Paul points out the real struggle which is going on, he also offers the hope and comfort of the Gospel, when he points us to Christ Jesus. The words: **"Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!"** lead us to the rescue which has taken place already in our Baptism!

⁶ *Luther's Small Catechism*, 210.

Paul states this in these words:

“having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having cancelled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” Col. 3:12-14⁷

I John 3:1-2 How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

We have a beautiful use of the Gospel here in that as we think of the Father’s love we can only be drawn back to the cross where Christ Jesus laid down His life to earn for us the forgiveness of all of our sins. We are also led back to our Baptism in that is where God’s name was placed upon us. Not only was that name placed upon us, but look at how beautifully Paul declares what has taken place:

“Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection.” Romans 6:3-5⁸

Since the world did not know Christ Jesus, neither will it know us, says John. Here our “being in Christ Jesus,” is so important. We are called to reflect the love of Christ Jesus in all that we do. As we live out our baptism in our daily vocations, we reflect the fact

⁷ NASB, 1120.

⁸ *ibid*, 1074.

that Jesus calls us “salt and light.” (cf. Matthew 5:13-16). We live as the baptized in Christ Jesus!

1 Peter 2:9-10 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

What do these words declare us to be?

What purpose do we have according to these verses?

How is this done?

As children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit’s help, we will:

- Recognize the potential for great good, or great evil, lies in the way stewardship is presented and received;

How could stewardship be presented in a harmful manner?

How would you describe a good way of presenting stewardship?

- Evaluate carefully all communication, oral or written, according to the proper distinction between Law and Gospel, and in keeping with the biblical truth that each steward is at the same time saint and sinner; and,

Why must the Gospel dominate in any stewardship program?

Why is a strong Sacramental presence essential for a fruitful stewardship emphasis?

- Offer varying opportunities for Christian stewards to grow, recognizing that they are at different points of spiritual maturity.

Read 1 Peter 2:1-3.

THEREFORE, putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.⁹

What does this passage say to us about having the “correct doctrine?”

What happens through that pure Word?

Where do we taste the “kindness of the Lord?”

Where do the Sacraments find application in these verses?

As children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit’s help, we will not:

- Assume, that, because we are dealing with Christians, we can set aside the proper application of Law and Gospel in serving God’s stewards;

What is the Law?

What is the Gospel?

- See all Christians as being at the same maturity level; or,
- Use any approach to stewards that appeals to the sinful nature, selfish interest, or something other than faith active in love.

Read Galatians 2:19-21.

“For through the Law I died to the Law, that I might live to God. 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 delivered Himself up for me. I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.”¹⁰

Where is the emphasis for Paul in these verses for the life of the believer?

Where do we once again meet our Baptism?

IV. GOD’S STEWARDS ARE UNIQUELY SINGULAR, YET PROFOUNDLY PLURAL.

What does this mean?

⁹ *ibid*, 1152.

¹⁰ *ibid*, 1107.

God's stewards recognize that their lives are not solo performances but are personal responses to God, lived out within the community of faith to benefit the whole world.

At this point I wish to emphasize that it is our baptism which we live out each day. We are led back to it in repentance and are assured that our sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. God does not need our good works, our neighbor does! We live out our lives within the context of the Church but in the greater arena of the world around us. We are not islands unto ourselves, but are connected to Christ who is the Vine, and while we are "in the world, we are not of the world."

What does God's Word say about this?

Rom. 12:4-5 Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

Think of the church as being a symphony orchestra. In order to produce a beautiful sound, each instrument must play in tune and at the proper time. In the body of Christ we call the church, each member has something to contribute to the body. The director of the orchestra directs. Christ Jesus is the Head of His Body, the Church, and He directs, feeds, and sustains it through Word and Sacrament. Proper feeding of the sheep is essential to a healthy congregation.

I Cor. 12:12-13 The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

Where do we meet "grace" in the above passage?

What does the Spirit give us to drink of?

I Peter 4:10 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

Read the NASB translation of the above verse:

As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.¹¹

While this passage is Law, it is something which will flow from the new person in Christ Jesus.

The words of Luther are appropriate here:

Now this is also a work of love, as is also the injunction that follows, namely, that we should serve one another. With what? With the gifts of God which everyone has received. The Gospel wants everyone to be the other person's servant and, in addition, to see that he remains in the gift which he has received, which God has given him, that is, in the position to which he has been called. Thus everyone should regard himself as a servant. Then the master can surely remain a master and yet not consider himself better than the servant. Thus he would also be glad to be a servant if this were God's will. The same thing applies to other stations in life.¹²

Paul Kretzmann wrote:

No talent may be hidden away in the ground for specious reasons. But these gifts are not our own to use as we choose, especially not for selfish purposes, for the advancement of various ambitious schemes. In receiving gifts from God, we have become stewards of God, we are responsible to Him; our gifts, according to His will, should be exercised in serving one another, in proving ourselves useful in the work which we are carrying out at God's command, to the praise and honor of God and to the benefit and salvation of our neighbor.¹³

In both the words of Luther and Kretzmann, we see the singular and plural ideas of the principle being set forth.

How has God uniquely made and gifted you?

¹¹ *ibid*, 1154.

¹² *Luther's Works, The Catholic Epistles, Vol. 30*, Jaroslav Pelikan, Editor (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967), 123-4.

¹³ Paul E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible, New Testament, Vol. II*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1924), 536-7.

In what ways are you serving in your various “stations in life?”

2 Cor. 8:13-14 Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality.

To fully understand this passage one should take the time to read all of 2 Cor. 8.

In what ways today do we participate in like manner?

Gal. 6:10 Therefore as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. (cf. 6:7-10)

What obligation do we have to fellow believers?

Luke 24:46-7 And He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.¹⁴

Here we see our obligation to those who are not yet part of the Kingdom of God.

Listen to how Luther puts this:

The noblest and greatest work and the most important service we can perform for God on earth is bringing other people, and especially those who are entrusted to us, to the knowledge of God by the holy Gospel.¹⁵

The greatest of all services is to free him [my fellow man] from sins, to liberate him from the devil and hell. But how is this done? Through the Gospel, by preaching it to him and telling him that he should cling to the works of Christ and firmly believe that Christ’s righteousness is his and his sins are Christ’s. This, I say, is the greatest service I can render my fellow man. Cursed be the life that a man lives only for himself and not for his fellow man. On the other hand, blessed be the life which a man does not live for, and serve, himself but his fellow man.¹⁶

It is the Gospel of Christ Jesus, His death and resurrection which are of utmost importance, in our homes, and in relationship to our neighbors whom we have contact with in our daily “vocations or stations in life.”

¹⁴ NASB, 1005.

¹⁵ *What Luther Says, Vol. II*, Ewald M. Plass, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 958.

¹⁶ *What Luther Says, Vol. III*, Ewald M. Plass, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 1282.

How is this done?

As children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit's help, we

will:

- Emphasize the privilege and accountability this privilege entails of being unique children of God with specific gifts that honor the Lord and bless others;
- Recognize the personal and sensitive nature of the steward's response; and yet emphasize the truth that Christian stewards are members of the Body of Christ and are in kingdom work together with fellow Christians; and,
- Remind Christian stewards that God showers blessings upon those who manage them wisely and well for the common good.

What is wrong with the above bullet point?

What does it not emphasize?

As children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit's help, we will not:

- Emphasize one aspect or area of church work to the exclusion or detriment of others;
- Teach or influence in ways which minimize the steward's connection to and need for the rest of the Body of Christ; or,
- Equate stewardship with merely meeting an organization's budget or financial goal.

In your own words, describe what the mission and purpose of the Christian congregation is:

V. GOD'S STEWARDS ARE *IN* THE WORLD, BUT NOT *OF* THE WORLD.

What does this mean?

God's stewards recognize that the Lord sets them apart from the world and by the transforming power of the Gospel sends them into the world to live out the Gospel.

We are sent forth into the world to live out our Baptism. We are transformed by the Gospel and the Sacraments. This principle speaks to the reality of one's "vocation." One needs to be careful in stating that we live "out the Gospel," as that turns the Gospel into something which we do, instead of it being God forgiving us our sins in Christ Jesus.

This is all done in relationship to our neighbor.

Read Matthew 5:13-16:

You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty again? It is good for nothing any more, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do men light a lamp, and put it under the peck-measure, but on the lampstand; and it give light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.¹⁷

What does Jesus call the believer?

How do our lives reflect salt and light?

In reflecting light, Whom are we reflecting?

What does God's Word say about this?

Rom. 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Rom. 12:2 Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God remold your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and move toward the goal of true maturity.¹⁸

Reflect on how the world "tries to squeeze you into its own mold."

What can we do to keep from letting that happen?

¹⁷ NASB, 914.

¹⁸ *The New Testament in Four Versions*, (Phillips Modern English), (Washington, D.C.: Christianity Today, Inc. 1965), 485 and 487.

What is the role of the local congregation in that process?

John 17:15-18 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into this world, I have sent them into the world. (cf. John 20:21-23)

What significance do the words, protect, sanctify, and sent have for you and for your congregation?

Col. 3:1-4 If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you will also be revealed with Him in glory.¹⁹

How does the passage from Colossians tie in with what Jesus is saying in John 17:15-18?

When were we raised up and when did we die and become hidden in Christ?

Our lives are lived under and through the cross of Christ Jesus. Being a person of glory is not of this world.

Gen. 12:1-3 The LORD said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and to go the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

What blessing is the Lord pointing to?

John 16:33 I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

What two promises does Jesus state in this verse?

Have you found them to be true? If so, in what ways?

How is this done?

As children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit's help, we will:

¹⁹ NASB, 1121.

- Emphasize how the Gospel transforms stewards' attitudes in, about and toward the world;
- Emphasize the Christian witness of stewards in the decisions that are made; and,
- Encourage the support of appropriate projects and activities both within and outside the church.

The first bullet point above raises some important questions. What can happen to congregations who are “only self-centered and self-focused?”

How are unhealthy attitudes changed?

What do consider appropriate projects and activities?

What would you consider to be inappropriate projects and activities?

What should guide the choices we make in our giving?

As children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit's help, we will not:

- Limit the scope of Christian stewardship to “church-related” projects and activities;
- Use spiritually defective approaches and motivations from the world that are based mainly and primarily on the criterion that they “work;” or,
- Forget the daily tensions and struggles of being God's stewards *in* but not *of* the world.

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.”²⁰

As we again look at our original definition, how does it apply to the first bullet point in the section above?

VI. GOD'S STEWARDS ARE LOVED AND LOVING.

What does this mean?

²⁰ From the LCMS Stewardship webpage under *Stewardship Principles*.

God's stewards recognize that their stewardship flows out of God's act of love for them in Christ which empowers them, in turn, to love others in acts of Christ-like love.

What does God's Word say about this?

I John 4:19 We love because he first loved us. (cf. I John 4:11)

We can only love, because God has loved us in and through Christ Jesus.

I John 3:16-18 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or with tongue but with actions and in truth.

What does the above passage say to us in terms of sharing the material blessings which we have received as a gift of grace from God?

In regards to the above passage, Dr. George Stoeckhardt wrote:

To communicate one's earthly goods to the brother in need is an evidence of brotherly love. Giving which requires self-denial is a token of love. Whoever is not ready to practice self-denial to help the brother suffering want shuts up his heart against him. Hand and heart are very closely related. Some Christians think that giving is unimportant. But here we see by one's giving one can tell what is going on in the heart. Whoever gives generously opens his heart wide, and whoever gives niggardly, does not open his heart at all, but rather shuts it up, and finally strangles every germ of spiritual life. It takes sincere love to move one to willing, generous giving.²¹

Seeing the needs of people and responding to them out of Christ's love for us is always a challenge. **How can you and your congregation help to meet the needs of those within your congregation and those outside it?**

John 13:34-35 A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know you are my disciples, if you love one another.

What happens in regards to our "loving of others?"

²¹ George Stoeckhardt, *The Exegetical Lectures of Dr. George Stoeckhardt on The Three Letters of St. John*, Translated by H.W. Degner, (no publisher listed, 1963), 49.

Where do we find consolation for our failures?

What sort of message does hatred and dissension and unresolved conflict within the church send to the outside world?

2 Cor. 5:14-15 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all have died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

How do we live for Christ by serving our neighbor?

Gal. 5:6b The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

Read I John 4:9-10: By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.²²

What comfort do you find in the above passage?

How is this done?

As children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit's help, we will:

- Emphasize that all activities of Christian stewards done in faith and love are properly Christian stewardship.
- Honor the choices God's people make as they exercise Christ-like love; and,
- Use only those approaches, strategies and methods that reflect the Gospel and build up the stewards' faith active in love.

As stewards we are managers. But we are doing this on the basis of who we are, namely, "the baptized in Christ Jesus." This becomes a matter of living out the baptismal life in relationship to Christ Jesus and in service to our neighbor within the given contexts of our many vocations.

²² NASB, 1160.

In regards to the last bullet point, correct dividing of Law and Gospel is essential in all teaching which takes place in the church.

As children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit's help, we will not:

- Employ techniques and fundraising methods that fail to emphasize God's love in Christ as the basis and motivation for Christian stewardship.
- Minimize the bringing of regular offerings as part of worship and a loving response to God's love for us; or,
- De-emphasize or set aside God's love and our responses in order to meet budgets, quotas and goals.

Often when churches have a budget crisis letters are sent out asking for funds. Some are written from the threat of the law, if you don't give, the church will close. Others threaten with personal visits from the Stewardship Committee. All correspondence in that regard need to be written from the perspective of the people being forgiven and being new creations in Christ Jesus.²³

VII. GOD'S STEWARDS ARE SERVED AND SERVING

What does this mean?

God's stewards recognize that their stewardship involves a Gospel-powered style of life which is demonstrated in servanthood within all arenas of life.

What does it mean to be served and to be serving? We are led once again back to the Church and to the Office of the Holy Ministry. It is through that office where God's people are served by Christ Himself. This idea is to be credited to Martin Chemnitz. The Pastoral office has the three-fold directive to preach, teach, and to serve. As a part of the body of Christ, therefore I come as the hearer, as the learner, and as the eater. I hear God's Word proclaimed in the sermon, both Law and Gospel. As I gather for Bible

²³ See the attached letters listed as appendix A for samples of stewardship letters previously written and use in my last parish.

study, I learn as that Word is taught. When I kneel at the communion rail, I become the eater, receiving Christ's Body and Blood, in with, and under the bread and wine for the forgiveness of my sins.

It is only as those things have occurred will I be fed and equipped to become the servant which God wants me to be! This again becomes a matter of living out one's baptism in all of life and in our various vocations in life. We are "salt" and "light" as Jesus points out in Matthew 5:13-16.

What does God's Word say about this?

Phil. 2:5-8 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus, who being in very nature God, did not consider equally with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—death on a cross.

How is the Christian life rooted in the cross of Christ Jesus?

Matt. 20:26b-28 Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (cf. 25:31-46)

Christ Jesus served all of humanity through His suffering, death, and resurrection. How does Christ continue to serve His Church?

John 13:3-5 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

How would you describe this act of servanthood of our Lord Jesus Christ?

John 13:15-17 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

How do we correctly divide Law and Gospel in this passage?

What does the Law always do?

What does the Gospel always do?

How is this done?

As children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit's help, we will:

- Recognize that service done for the benefit of the community and world is also part of Christian stewardship;

This is the managing of life and all of life's resources which our definition states. This is a matter of "being who we are in Christ Jesus!"

- Emphasize that just as Jesus came to serve, stewards are privileged to serve others through their abilities and resources; and,

In what specific ways do you serve others?

- Adopt the attitude of a servant in all our relationships with others.

How does this happen in the life of a believer?

As children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit's help, we will not:

- Set aside servanthood for the sake of merely reaching an organization goal;
- Fail to encourage stewards to be God's servants in any decision or action; or,
- Fail to challenge stewards to serve the Lord with personal acts of compassion and service as well as financial gifts.

Read [Matthew 25:31-46](#).

How is Jesus describing servanthood?

What is necessary for this to be pleasing to God? Read [Hebrews 11:6](#).

The *Small Catechism* states:

In God's sight a good work is everything that a child of God does, speaks, or

thinks in faith according to the Ten Commandments, for the glory of God, and for the benefit of his or her neighbor.²⁴

VIII. GOD'S STEWARDS LIVE WITH AN AWARENESS OF THE PRESENT AND FUTURE, OF TIME AND ETERNITY.

What does this mean?

God's stewards live intentionally in the light of the Lord's eternal purpose while being firmly committed to the here and now.

This final principle touches upon the idea of eschatology. I like to define eschatology as a "bringing to completion." This puts this into the perspective and realm of our Triune God who is bringing all things to completion in Christ Jesus.

Col. 2:9-10 For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority.²⁵

Rom. 8:20-22 For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.²⁶

God is bringing all of this to completion also.

What does God's Word say about this?

Matt. 6:19-21 Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

How does the above passage speak to principle VIII?

I Tim. 6:17-19 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our

²⁴ *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), 150.

²⁵ *NASB*, 1120.

²⁶ *ibid*, 1076.

enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

What specific warning does Paul give to us?

Do we have any Gospel in the above passage?

Phil. 3:12-14, 20 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.

St. Paul is writing from an eschatological point of view, that God is going to be bringing all of these things “to completion.” Yet, his writing is firmly set in the “here and now.” While we look forward in life, we are also rooted and grounded in the “here and now” of everyday life. It is in the here and now that we are fed through Word and Sacrament and we are living out our baptism on a daily basis.

Where do we first meet the Gospel in the above passages?

Do you see the reference to confession and absolution in the above section from Phil. 3?

I John 1:9 & 7b If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

Isaiah 44:22 I have wiped out your transgressions like a thick cloud, And your sins like a heavy mist, Return to Me for I have redeemed you.

Isaiah 43:25 I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake; And I will not remember your sins.

When Paul speaks about “pressing on” we again see the baptismal life being “lived out.”

We also have the eschatological emphasis in pointing out that our citizenship is in heaven. We are pilgrims and sojourners upon this earth, waiting for God to bring things to their completion and as Paul says, “We do eagerly await a Savior.”

2 Pet. 3:11-12a Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.

What kind of attitude is Peter promoting?

Rev. 14:13 Then I heard a voice from heaven say, “Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow [with] them.”

What comfort does the above verse give you?

I John 5:11-13 And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life.²⁷

What certain assurance do we receive from the words of St. John?

How is this done?

As children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit’s help, we will:

- Point out the eternal dimensions inherent in all that stewards decide to do or not to do;
- Pursue good planning for the present and future as part of stewardship education; and,
- Rejoice in knowing what God’s stewards do now can have lasting benefits.

The second bullet point could be applied in the areas of estate planning, planned giving, and church endowments. All if wisely structured can be of enormous benefit to the ongoing work of the Church. However, if endowments are not properly structured, they

²⁷ *ibid*, 1161.

can be almost a noose around a congregation and can destroy faithful stewardship and trust in a gracious God to provide for the ongoing needs of the congregation.

In that sense planned giving, endowments, etc. can have a lasting effect. However one needs to remember that ultimately it is only what God does which has lasting effects. His promises never fail and His resources are endless. Jesus said: “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.” Mark 13:31²⁸

As children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit’s help, we will not:

- Be so intent on the here and now that the possibilities for extending the kingdom after death are neglected; or,
- Be so intent on plans for the future that the possibilities for extending the kingdom here and now are neglected.

These last two bullet points need a little clarification. It is only the resources which we leave behind that are used within the context of Word and Sacrament ministry or for the training of church workers which can have a continued impact in expanding the kingdom. When our lives have finished their course our direct influence is gone.

The danger which I see in the second bullet point is that sometimes people are more concerned about preserving the building where the church gathers to receive the gifts of God than in extending Christ’s kingdom as we go forth into the fields which are white unto His harvest. In many cases the building could endure for centuries but the congregation could cease to exist as everyone will have eventually died. Death is complete in every generation. In that sense, the 8th principle is essential to keeping all things in proper perspective. To repeat: **God’s Stewards Live with An Awareness Of the Present and Future, of Time and Eternity. What does this mean? God’s**

²⁸ *ibid*, 963.

stewards live intentionally in the light of the Lord's eternal purpose while being firmly committed to the here and now.

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