

StewardCAST

A monthly e-newsletter of LCMS Stewardship Ministry

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Sincere Stewardship



Stewardship is one of those topics that most people THINK they know about. After all, if a person spends even a short time in a congregation, it becomes apparent that stewardship is important. But as a sainted middle school teacher at Edwardsville Junior High School was known to say, “a little knowledge is a dangerous thing.” In addition, stewardship has often been taught in congregations based on the kind of assumptions that remind one of a bad Saturday Night Live skit.

Shorthand knowledge and assumption are a bad combination. Few topics in the local congregation are more vulnerable to the damage of assumption than stewardship.

Combine that “little knowledge” and assumptions, and the steward and the steward leaders in a congregation can find themselves in dangerous places.

The pitfalls of a programmatic approach

While the testimony of Scripture rightly points out that every human being is created and redeemed to be a steward, if not taught clearly it can lead to devastating results. Short-hand, formulaic teaching has been one of the more serious challenges to stewardship in the local congregation. When stewardship gets reduced to a programmatic approach once a year in direct connection

to budgets and bill paying, the stage is set. Programs over the years have produced stair-step charts and slide-rule-like matrixes that make filling out the annual commitment card almost a thought-free process. This introduces the unintended assumption that the purpose of the individual steward's activity is to participate in the process of paying the bills. This opens the door to the idea that each steward is to pay their fair share toward to cost of doing the church's business.

This opens the potential for insincere stewardship. The steward is more concerned with bills than the Gospel. More to the point, the insincere steward is more concerned about paying more than their fair share of the burden of the work of the Gospel in the local congregation and at the district and Synod level. This puts the focus on the person and work of the steward. The steward's will and effort become the focus. This is ownership, not stewardship.

It is also hypocrisy. These are strong words, but they are true. When a steward, who has been created and redeemed to bear the image of God and His Son Jesus to the world, acts like an owner, they are flying under false colors. They are only acting the part of the steward. The mask of steward simply covers the sin-stained heart of the idolater. While the outward appearance seems godly, the inner heart is a whitewashed tomb. To allow this to go unchecked in the individual steward

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and in the corporate stewardship of the congregation is evil.

A new mindset

St. Paul addresses this in the “Stewardship
 Primer” that is Romans 12. The chapter
 sets the steward’s journey on the correct
 course by pointing to the mercies of God
 in verse one. The mercy of God resets the
 identity and, by extension, the activity
 of the steward. The Word of God which
 delivers the holy and all-powerful
 Law breaks the mask and
 exposes the owner-idolater
 for what they are. But
 the salve of the Gospel
 of Jesus Christ heals.
 God’s mercy shown
 to the undeserving
 sinner then opens up
 a new mindset for the
 activity of the steward.

This cannot be
 done formulaically.
 There can be no
 assumptions. This
 needs to be practiced
 authentically. That is
 what St. Paul says in
 Romans 12:9–18:

“Let love be genuine.
 Abhor what is evil;
 hold fast to what
 is good. Love one
 another with brotherly
 affection. Outdo one
 another in showing
 honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent
 in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be
 patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.
 Contribute to the needs of the saints and
 seek to show hospitality. Bless those who
 persecute you; bless and do not curse them.
 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with
 those who weep. Live in harmony with one
 another. Do not be haughty, but associate
 with the lowly. Never be wise in your own
 sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give
 thought to do what is honorable in the sight
 of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you,
 live peaceably with all.”

God’s Word does the trick

Read these words closely. The word that
 the ESV renders “genuine” is the word for
 “hypocrite” in the negative. There is no
 room for falsehood or insincerity in godly
 stewardship. When the mercy of God in the
 rightly distinguished Law and God is on
 display, hypocrisy is blown away. The steward
 cannot faithfully be about his or her will. It is
 always and only about the will of the Owner
 and the need of the neighbor. The remainder

of Paul’s primer points the redeemed steward outside of themselves.

Brotherly affection, honor,
 zeal, service, generosity
 and hospitality are the
 outward marks of the
 inner working of the
 Holy Spirit in the life of
 the steward.

Sincere stewardship
 needs to be accurately
 and intentionally
 taught. It flies in
 the face of the Old
 Adam that lives in
 all of us. Drowned
 in the waters of Holy
 Baptism, that sinful
 inner scoundrel proves
 to be a pesky good
 swimmer. Anyone
 with human flesh will
 have the desire to own
 and the disdain for
 stewardship. Without
 the clear teaching
 of stewardship from

the Scripture and Confessions, the steward
 leader will be forming hypocrites, and not
 faithful stewards.

But God’s genuine Word does the trick!
 When the steward is pointed to the genuine
 selfless love and mercy of God in the work
 of Jesus, amazing things happen. Souls are
 freed and stewards find joy in being who God
 made and redeemed them to be. There are no
 shortcuts. There can be no assumptions. The
 work of the steward leader is hard. It needs
 to be consistent and accurate. But when it is
 done, the Lord will indeed do amazing things!
 What He will do is create, redeem and send
 out sincere stewards!



*When the steward
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 genuine selfless
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