

Getting Personal

About Preaching and Teaching Stewardship

BY REV. RICHARD BOCHE



In addition to paying attention to our lives and ministry as faithful stewards, it is good that we get personal about the preaching and teaching of stewardship in the congregation. Far too often this comes off as self-serving, or merely focused on a distortion of stewardship of all blessings from God — i.e. “raising money for the church.” It often seems better not to even begin preaching and teaching on stewardship than to risk trouble and misunderstanding.

However the pastor is called and obligated to proclaim the “full counsel of God” in all its truth and purity. Since Jesus taught on stewardship about 40 percent of the time, and more than 2,000 verses in Scripture relate to stewardship, the pastor cannot preach and teach the full counsel of God unless stewardship is included on a regular basis. To provide some “personal” thoughts and ideas on how to go about that is what this portion of “Getting Personal” is about. How do we as pastors approach the preaching and teaching of the faithful stewardship life as a Christian?

First, include “context” whenever preaching or teaching stewardship. People need to see the focus of a particular text (talents, money, etc.) in the context of the larger, or full, complete stewardship picture; such as one’s relationship to the Giver of all blessings as His dear child; or stewardship of possessions in context of all five areas of blessings from God. In his book, *Pastoral Theology*, John H.C. Fritz makes this very point:

It is because we fail to stress the larger stewardship that we fail in the stewardship of money. Of the very poor Macedonians, who contributed liberally to the collection for the poor saints at Jerusalem, giving “to their power” and “beyond their power,” we are told; “This they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord and unto us by the will of God” 2 Cor. 8:1-5 ... The stewardship of money must have its roots in the consecration of the Christian to his God and to his Savior. It is the larger stewardship which needs to be emphasized first of all. “Ye are not your own,” says the apostle; “ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:19, 20; cp. Rom 12:1.) This lesson every Christian needs to learn; we and all we have, body and soul, time, talents, personality, money, opportunities, influence, all belong to God; they are His by right of creation and by right of redemption. We are but His stewards. As stewards we should

be found faithful. To the faithful steward God has given the promise of a gracious reward. (Gen. 1:1; Deut. 10:14; Ps. 24:1; Hag. 2:8; Acts 14:17; James 1:17; Rom. 8:31-32.)¹

Second, in preaching and teaching faithful stewardship, connect the new life of faithful stewardship to faith. A living, saving faith in Christ Jesus is not dead to works, but alive to good works. What this living, active faith looks like in everyday life becomes important to describe and portray when preaching and teaching stewardship. Luther writes: “Oh, a living, energetic, active, mighty thing is this faith. It is impossible for it not to do good incessantly. Nor does it ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is put; it has already done them and is forever doing them.”²

Beyond merely awe and amazement at such faith, Luther also said (of faith) in his commentary on 1 Peter 2:11ff: “This is the proper way to preach. First one must emphasize what faith does and what its power and nature are, namely, that it give us everything necessary to holiness and salvation, that we can do nothing except by faith and that through it we have all God has. Now ... what are we to do? Are we to live in indolence? I suppose it would be best for us to die. Then everything would indeed be ours. But as long as we live here, we should act on our neighbor’s behalf and should give ourselves to him as God has given Himself to us. Thus faith saves us but love moves us to give ourselves to our neighbor, since our needs have been met. This means that faith receives from God and that love gives to our neighbor.”³

Think about ways to preach and teach faithful stewardship as a response of faith keeping in mind that when Paul described various duties of a Christian, he also told Timothy and Titus, “I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works” (Titus 3:8 ESV). Again, “And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful” (Titus 3:14 ESV). Timothy was told to command the rich to be

¹ John H.C. Fritz, D.D., *ibid*, pp. 255-256.

² Ewald M. Plass (compiled), *What Luther Says: A Practical In-Home Anthology for the Active Christian*, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1959, p. 1491.

³ *Ibid*, p. 1505.

generous in 1 Tim. 6:16-18. Titus was reminded (2:11-14) that the grace of God appeared bringing salvation and “training us ... to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age ... to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.” Without doubt it is proper to preach and teach in such a way that people know what God would have them do in response to His love richly showered upon them in Christ Jesus and how to use their blessings to be a blessing to others as well as to the Lord’s work.

In preaching and teaching faithful stewardship, the pastor will certainly give attention to the proper distinction of Law and Gospel. The sins related to stewardship and the failures of the congregation to practice good stewardship will certainly be exposed in all their severity (Read R. Scott Rodin’s *Stewards in the Kingdom* and his thoughts of “false starts” regarding stewardship by the congregation and also *Stewardship Primer* by the Rev. Wayne J. Knolhoff for more ideas, especially Chapter 7 on “Changing the Stewardship Culture.”)⁴

You also will find ample law in Scripture itself about greed, coveting and hiding away what God has given instead of investing in God’s work, sloth, worrying about the future, but not eternity, using everything for self, none for others or the Owner’s purposes, dwelling on what one does not have rather than on what one has been given, being impressed by the size of the gift rather than realizing the gift is measured by what one keeps for oneself, storing up earthly treasure instead of investing earthly goods in eternal treasures, seeking first earthly treasures rather than heavenly treasures and much more.

Examine carefully 2 Cor. 8 and 9 sometime, noting how Paul cajoles, compares, rebukes and urges them to be genuine, to help others, be generous, make decisions, trust in God’s promise to provide, bless and bring forth thanksgiving for their generosity. It is a study in Law and Gospel application.

C.F.W. Walther in his classic, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, values the Law in training and even exhorting good works from Christian people: “Here we have a true pattern of the correct sequence: first the Law, threatening men with the wrath of God; next the Gospel, announcing the comforting promise of God. This is followed by an instruction regarding the things we are to do after we have become new men.”⁵

Note the sequence here: Law, Gospel, instruction. For a fuller treatment of this thought, read *Stewardship: A Theological Perspective* by Dr. Joel Biermann in the *Faith Aflame Congregational Stewardship Workbook*, Second Edition—Volume I.

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done for them (atonement — Eph. 1), but how this moves them to live as Christian stewards, joyful and cheerful, seeking the Lord’s will. A great passage that reminds us of this whole aspect is 2 Cor. 5:14-20. There the love of Christ (for us) controls us, compels us, fills the sails of our faith lives, like the wind propels a sailboat across the water, so we no longer live for ourselves but for Him who died and was raised. A proper application of the Gospel in preaching and teaching supports and invigorates the faithful stewardship life. How will you do this as you preach and teach stewardship and as you lead the congregation toward faithful stewardship focused on mission and ministry?

More questions to ask yourself and ponder:

- › What other periscopes lend themselves to preaching on stewardship?
- › What would be the best approach in your own parish?

A cursory glance yields these as possible stewardship focused texts:

- › Christmas I, Epiphany 8, Proper 14
- › Christmas II, Lent I, Propers 3, 8, 10, 27
- › Christmas 2, Easter 2, Propers 3, 13, 20, 21, 28
- › One Year — Good Friday, Easter 6, Trinity 1, 9, 11

How might you teach stewardship in Bible classes when references come up in new member classes and confirmation classes for adults and youth? How else will they know, be inspired to begin and be taught the basics? How will you take this word into the homes, teach the parents and children who may not learn it any other way? Could you take this from “house to house” (Acts 20:20) for the sake of teaching children as well as the parents so all participate and know the joy of serving the Lord with the firstfruits of His blessings invested in the work of Almighty God for the saving of souls?

How will you relate this to your congregation’s mission and ministry? How will you help them see the “larger stewardship” picture rather than only one brush stroke like money or the talents of people being used just to keep the congregation alive a bit longer? How will you preach and teach full participation as a goal rather than letting a few burn themselves out? How will you help the

⁴ The Rev. Wayne J. Knolhoff, *Stewardship Primer: A Guide for the Christian Congregation*, Stewardship Ministry, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

⁵ C.F.W. Walther, W.H. T. Dau (translated), *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1928, p. 93.

congregation look at mission and ministry instead of just a budget to pay the bills and encourage the congregation to invest, not only in the work locally, but outside, through the district and Synod? How will you help them see the connection to eternal perspectives (saving souls, investing in the Gospel) in what is done so all might rejoice with the angels over one sinner who repents and celebrate the great good things God is doing through them to carry out His work?

Here are some more questions that the congregation might consider together:

- › Are we unwilling to practice stewardship principles (firstfruits for missions, generous portion for district and Synod, the larger stewardship, etc.) that we are requesting from individuals?
- › Are we focused on yearlong stewardship, teaching and training continuously, or do we do it once a year and be done with it?
- › Are we focused on stewardship being taught and practiced in the home by every baptized member or only by “giving units” heavily focused on money?
- › Are we “stewarding” our leaders and participants (not overloading any one person with many responsibilities)?
- › Are we focused on the Lord’s mission and ministry, serving others, reaching others with the Gospel for their salvation or on ourselves and surviving?

- › Do we thank people for “investing” themselves and their gifts in the Lord’s work?
- › Are we Gospel-centered and motivated or merely Law-driven?

Are all people being invited to participate in the joys of living the stewardship life to the praise and honor of God? Does the congregation thank people for their gifts, participation, sharing of the Gospel and reinforce that these are “investments” for the sake of the Gospel and the saving of many? A good tool for helping congregations consider additional questions is found in Appendix 1 of the *Stewardship Primer* by the Rev. Wayne Knolhoff. The books by Kennon Callahan also provide good questions to consider.²²

A concluding thought from Fritz: “The Lord has made it the pastor’s business to see to it that Christian people do this most important work — build up Christ’s kingdom by means of the Gospel. In order that Christians may do it intelligently, willing and bountifully, the pastor is, as has already been said, *by virtue of his office, in duty bound continually to inform the Christians in his care where the Savior has need of their money* ... In doing so, he must overcome many an obstacle, not only as far as his congregation, but also as far as he himself is concerned.”⁶

6 John H.C. Fritz, D.D., *ibid*, p. 260.

