

StewardCAST

A monthly e-newsletter of LCMS Stewardship Ministry

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Stewardship Essentials: Faithful Humility



ST. PAUL'S EPISTLE to the Romans is such a catechetical gem. Paul, as he introduces himself to the church in Rome, lays out a very systematic display of the Christian faith. In this wonderfully inspired work, there is a clear exposition of the fallen nature of creation and its crown, humanity. Even more beautifully, the system clearly illustrates the depths to which God would go to redeem creation and her fallen stewards. While this redemption is complete in Jesus Christ, there continues to be a struggle. The struggle is real in each redeemed steward. But as Paul reiterates, there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God ...”

This state of “no condemnation” that comes to us in the Gospel is where the steward lives and moves and has their being. Here is where Chapter 12 of Romans becomes the primer for the faithful life of the steward. The chapter begins with Paul appealing to

the brothers based on the Gospel. *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God ...* The activity of the stewards is governed and driven by the mercy that has been shown to them in Jesus.

The stewardship essential

There is no intrinsic worthiness or merit in the steward. That was forfeited in the first stewardship crisis of Genesis 3. It is only through the mercies of God which flood over the redeemed steward in the Gospel that stewardship is even possible. Yet the sinful nature continues to assert ownership over creation. The steward may even use the right vocabulary, but their ownership behavior remains on full display. The sinful, failed steward speaks of “my time,” “my talent” and “my treasure.” Certainly these are trusts which the Lord of creation has bestowed upon them. But the way they are spoken of, and the way this “stewardship” is practiced by many, betrays a spirit of ownership. When a steward claims ownership over trusts which belong to God, it is not just theft, it is idolatry.

Romans 12:3 points us to the stewardship essential: faithful humility. “For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.” This faithful humility is driven by the mercies of God mentioned in verse one. Were it not for the mercies of God,

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the steward would have nothing to offer, let
 alone steward. The steward who thinks more
 highly of himself or herself is perpetuating the
 failed idolatrous stewardship of Adam and
 Eve. Thus faithful humility, illuminated by the
 mercies of God, begins with daily contrition
 and repentance.

As the steward stares intently into the
 Law of God, what is reflected back is not
 pretty. The clear image shows that modern
 stewards are no different than their ancient
 predecessors. Yet when this condemnation
 falls through the Law, the mercies of
 God shine brightly. In Christ
 the steward is restored. And
 this restoration is not
 to some minor, lesser
 task. Full stewardship
 of the mercies of God
 is involved! While
 the steward is not at
 all worthy, the Lord
 declares them worthy
 through the blood of
 Jesus Christ! This great
 mercy sets the steward
 back to the task of
 stewardship.

Created by God for diverse roles

This has two great
 implications. The
 first is that stewards
 in themselves are not
 “all that and a bag of
 chips!” The steward
 is created for and
 redeemed for a task for which they are
 completely undeserving. A humility formed
 by Holy Spirit-wrought faith displays this.
 When the steward manages all of life and
 life’s resources for God’s purposes, there
 is no room for the steward to even begin
 to claim ownership. There is no room for
 selfish pride in faithful stewardship. But that
 temptation is always there. In the Concordia
 Publishing House *Commentary on Romans*,
 what Michael Middendorf rightly asserts
 can be applied to stewards: “While they have
 a renewed mind and mindset, they must
 continually be on guard against lapsing into
 the negative attitude expressed in 12:3.”

Faithful stewardship is always about God
 and the other. When God’s Law and God’s
 Gospel speak rightly to the steward and
 about the steward, there is faithful humility
 on display.

Paul also spells out a second implication in
 this reality of faithful, humble stewardship.
 It is found in the words “according to the
 measure of faith that God has assigned.”
 Individual stewards have unique and diverse
 gifts. Luther says as much when he writes
 in his Romans commentary that “Believers

who have one and the same faith
 nevertheless possess a different
 measure of gifts.” In order

for the body of Christ in
 a given congregation or
 even the church at large
 to faithfully steward the
 Gospel of Jesus Christ,
 humble stewards
 eagerly accept their
 role. Not everyone
 can sing in the choir.
 Not everyone’s gifts
 are to work with small
 children, or youth, or
 adults. But when that
 faithful stewardship
 isn’t present, the
 body is weakened
 and the stewardship
 of the Gospel is
 compromised. No one
 should be allowed
 to minimize their
 own stewardship, or
 the stewardship of a
 fellow steward, as not
 important or needed.



**When the steward
 manages all of life
 and life’s resources
 for God’s purposes,
 there is no room
 for the steward
 to even begin to
 claim ownership.**

Steward leaders are to teach this stewardship
 essential: faithful humility. It starts with the
 confession of daily failed stewardship, of
 overestimating their worth to the kingdom.
 Then, thus forgiven and restored in Holy
 Baptism and Holy Absolution, the redeemed
 steward is sent forth in faithful humility to
 serve in the roles which God has granted
 them by grace through faith in Jesus.
 Faithful humility starts with a confession
 of Christ and that He has made us. This
 faithful humility then leads to faithful
 stewardship of all that God had entrusted
 for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.