

Faith Aflame: 360 Degrees



Stewardship Conversations

Session Three – Number Two

Talking about Facing the Stewardship Task as a Congregation

Harry G. Coiner writes in *The Secret of God's Plan*, "A restive search is going on today, and almost everyone is engaged in it. The search is for meaning in life, for significance, for purpose...The search for meaning in life must begin with what God has done and is still doing over against His creation. The apostle Paul affirms that all of human life and the world which contains it is centered in Christ according to God's plan, His *oikonomia*. ("The special meaning of *oikonomia* here," writes Coiner, "is that God is the Master of a great household, and He is wisely administering His rule over it, and this He is doing through the person of His Son.") (Page 2)

Coiner continues, "In the plan that God is working out through Christ in His people, Christian stewardship obtains its highest meaning and strongest theological foundation. That is to say, the responsible activity of God's people must always be related to God's active and gracious purposes for His people and through them for the world. Only when men believe in God can they perceive meaning in human existence and live above despair to the glory of God." (Page 3)

Coiner then suggests a number of ways the church faces its stewardship task:

First, the church can help every member see that Christian stewardship is an activity which must be understood and accepted in faith as an abiding principle that inheres in the creating, redeeming, and sanctifying activity of a gracious God.

From Creation...we learn to know God's sovereignty and derive our trusteeship and responsibility over against life's orders and all that we personally have received from the hand of God.

From Redemption...we are assured that we are restored into the fellowship of God and that our union with Christ makes operative the dynamic power in our lives by which we are able to give our lives back to our Father in love and to do His will.

From Sanctification...we learn that we are given both the gift of faith and the power to exercise our faith to draw upon what God gives that we may bear fruit in obedient and holy service.

- "There are no shortcuts to Christian stewardship," writes Coiner. What do you suppose this means for us as individuals? For us as a church?

Second, the church helps the people of God know and understand that God calls consistently for their total life. “The total life is involved in what Christians offer to God and in His name to others. Their bodies, minds, abilities, time, personalities, and property may be related consciously and consistently to those activities which edify the church and serve their neighbors.” (Page 24)

- St. Paul suggests in Romans 12:1 that, “in view of God’s mercy,” we offer our bodies as living sacrifices. What are the implications of doing that? How can the church help?

Third, the church helps the Christian understand the battle which he/she is fighting and sustains him/her in that battle. “The Christian, even though forgiven, lives out his service to God and the neighbor in the tension of his flesh (self-rule) against the Spirit (God-rule), a tension which exists as long as he lives...In this fight the Christian clings to the promises of God in the audacious trust that God is holding on to him. He lives his life in the turbulent peace and agonizing joy of daily rebirth as he struggles to become what God has already declared him to be...The church stands by him in the fight through the ministry of Word and sacrament, which bring the new man to life and enable the Christian to surrender himself to God.” (Page 26)

- Coiner writes, “(The Christian) has been freed from the dominion of sin, but he still has to strive against sin in his life. And man himself is the battleground on which God and Satan are fighting for his eternal allegiance.” How does being a “battleground” show itself in the life of the Christian? How can the church help?

Fourth, the church must affirm that Christian stewardship is a corporate action. “The new life in Christ is not a solo performance...We are not our own stewards in the sense that we are generous to our neighbors out of our greater wisdom or wealth; we are God’s stewards, acting for God and handling God’s wealth to fulfill God’s purposes...Our Lord shows us that our relationship to our neighbor is precisely the place where our faithfulness to Him is to be exercised.” (Pages 27-28)

“The definitive issue in the life of a local church is not whether it is raising its budget or enlarging its membership rolls but whether its members have Christian concern for other people.”

- Coiner writes, “The outward signs of success mean nothing if there is no inward desire for obedience to God and love for their fellowmen.” What are the “outward signs of success” for us as individuals? For the church?
- How can the church help every member develop an inward desire for obedience to God and love for their neighbor?

