

Faith Aflame: 360 Degrees

Stewardship Conversations



Session Three – Number Four

Talking about Corporate Stewardship

Corporate or congregational stewardship is the faith of the church in action. As God's people are equipped for mission and ministry they are helped to show their faith and love to each other and to those within the community and the world as they proclaim the Good News of Jesus in mission.

Harry G. Coiner, writing in *The Secret of God's Plan*, makes the following observation: "The new life in Christ is not a solo performance. It is true that each believer sustains a direct and personal relationship to God as real as if he were the only Christian in the world. But the exercise of personal faith in Christ paradoxically destroys individuality. By his baptism he is moved from a corporate involvement with sin and death to a corporate involvement with redemption and life. By faith he is identified with Christ and with all believers, and his life of faith thrusts him ultimately into commitments which are corporate. Christian discipleship is membership in a divinely ordained community, and the stewardship of the Christian is an action which becomes mutual and corporate because of the very nature of the church." (pages 27-28)

- *How does the mistaken notion that the new life in Christ is a solo performance show itself in the Christian Church?*
- *How can believing that the new life in Christ is a solo performance hamper what God calls the church to be and to do?*
- *In what kind of "commitments which are corporate" does the Christian find himself/herself involved?*

Waldo Werning writes in *The Stewardship Call*, "The unity of believers in Christ involves such a close sharing of life that no one can be allowed to create his own personal universe apart from membership in the body. Other people's weaknesses and strengths are every Christian's business, and the individual's problems and blessings are the concern of other Christians." (page 97)

- *How does 1 Corinthians 10:24 speak to this issue?*
- *How about 1 Corinthians 12:7?*
- *And what about 1 Corinthians 12:26?*

H. G. Coiner continues, “When Christians recognize that their earthly goods are God’s gifts and, like the gifts of the Holy Spirit, are to be utilized for the good of the whole, their stewardship becomes the management of God’s wealth for His family’s benefit. 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.” (page 28)

- *Where is faithfulness to God to be exercised according to Matthew 25:34-46?*
- *Where is the focus of “doing good” to be according to Galatians 6:1-10?*
- *What important truths about giving are found in 2 Corinthians 9:11-14?*

The corporate nature of stewardship doesn’t show itself only or even primarily in the area of financial stewardship. Coiner writes, “The mutual stewardship of Christians joins at many points as they share their common life in the Gospel and their responsibility under the Gospel....What God gives the church to do is a corporate task, and what Christians in one congregation or a group of congregations or a synod are led by God to undertake becomes the corporate decision and the common objective of the church...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.” (pages 29-30)

- *What are some of the “many points” where Christians share their responsibility under the Gospel?*
- *How does “Christian concern for other people” show itself in your congregation?*

The corporate nature of stewardship also touches on the way in which congregations have chosen to organize themselves. John E. Herrmann wrote in *Chief Steward*, “The decision to organize was a voluntary one. Despite the obvious advantages of having a Synod, and despite the apostolic example for such an arrangement, it was freely conceded that an organization such as Synod was of human origin and that membership could not be forced as a divine ‘must.’ But the arguments for joining were so valid, logical, and compelling that the little group of six thousand souls and their twelve pastors joyfully took the important step. Synod, it was said by our spiritual forefathers, is the door of opportunity through which we who are united in a common faith can carry on the Father’s business to best advantage for Him and for us.” (page 94)

- *What responsibilities does the Synod have to congregations?*
- *What responsibilities does the congregation have to Synod?*

