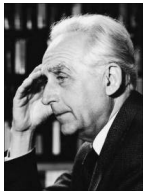


# CHRISTIANITY AND MONEY MC

Walter Sundberg

## Presupposition

“As the primary condition of union, we declare our joint, unanimous, and unreserved acceptance of all the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments, as a whole and in all their parts, as the divinely inspired, revealed and inerrant Word of God, and we declare our submission to this as the only infallible authority in all matters of faith and life.” *Constitution of the American Lutheran Church 1960*



- Gerhard Ebeling (1912-2001), *The Word of God and Tradition*, (1968) 11-31.
- Church History is “the history of the exposition of scripture.”
- Threefold form of the Word of God

Christ

the message about Christ

the canon

## Stewardship

Stewardship is an essential part of the gospel. Scripture calls Christians to be responsible for the mission and ministry of the church: “Like good stewards for the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received” (I Peter 4.10 NRSV).

We dare not shirk the obligation of placing before the people of God the duty of stewardship and inviting them to the privilege and joy of participation. When a well-to-do Christian layman living in Arizona was asked why he gave a million dollars for Robert Schuler’s Crystal Cathedral in California instead of his own church, the man replied, “Because he asked me.” How many opportunities have passed us by because we hate to ask for money?

Helge Brattgård, the Swedish theologian, defined the Christian idea of the steward this way: “that God in his goodness thinks so highly of the human being that he will trust him to administer that which belongs to God. The steward’s calling rests upon confidence.”<sup>1</sup> If we are to

be effective leaders in the church we must have this confidence that we are God's stewards. Hesitancy, awkwardness, defensiveness will not serve the mission of the church.

### Confidence???

#### **The Example of Paul: Fear of asking for Money**

(Chronology: Paul b. 5 bc-5 ad; d. 64-67; conversion 31-36; in Jerusalem 50; Thessalonians 51; Corinthians 54

Jesus b. 6-4 bc; preaching 27-29; crucifixion 30-36.

Augustus d.14, Tiberius 15 years into reign.)

**Galatians 2. 9-10:** <sup>9</sup> and when James and Cephas and John, who were acknowledged pillars, recognized the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. <sup>10</sup> They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do.

The context leading up to this passage is as follows. Among the many disputes at Corinth that confused members of the congregation was the matter of eating meat sold in the marketplace that was taken from animals that had been used for sacrifice in pagan religious ceremonies. Many Christians had scruples about eating such meat. Other Christians felt superior; their faith made them free of superstitious worry about such an issue. Paul argues for self-restraint. The matter is to him indifferent: "Food will not bring us close to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do" (I Corinthians 8.8). But how the fellow believer feels is the nub of the problem, the "weak believer" who is confused. The weak believer is also one "for whom Christ died" (v. 11). Therefore the strong believer must hold back even though he or she knows that the faith is not in danger because of eating such meat.

It is here in the letter that Paul reminds the Corinthians that although he is an Apostle with rights and privileges, he nevertheless practices self-restraint:

**1 Corinthians 9:3-15:** <sup>3</sup> This is my defense to those who would examine me. <sup>4</sup> Do we not have the right to our food and drink? <sup>5</sup> Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? <sup>6</sup> Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? <sup>7</sup> Who at any time pays the expenses for doing military service? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not get any of its milk? <sup>8</sup> Do I say this on human authority? Does not the law also say the same? <sup>9</sup> For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it for oxen that God is concerned? <sup>10</sup> Or does he not speak entirely for our sake? It was indeed written for our sake, for whoever plows should plow in hope and whoever threshes should thresh in hope of a share in the crop. <sup>11</sup> If we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits? <sup>12</sup> If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we still more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. <sup>13</sup> Do you not

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<sup>1</sup> Helge Brattgård, *God's Stewards* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963) 41.

*know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is sacrificed on the altar? <sup>14</sup> In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel. <sup>15</sup> But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing this so that they may be applied in my case. Indeed, I would rather die than that-- no one will deprive me of my ground for boasting!*

What we have here is a curiously ambiguous argument. Paul asserts on the one hand the right of the church leader to be taken care of for the work of preaching the gospel. He asks rhetorically: "If we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits?" (v.11). He calls upon a rule of animal husbandry—that an ox has a right to a portion of the grain it treads out (v. 9; see Deuteronomy 25.4).<sup>2</sup> But although Paul asserts the right to receive payment, he boasts that he does not use it: "Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ" (v.12b).

One reason for Paul's reluctance to ask the Corinthians for money was that he was proud of his financial independence. He did not want to be known as a money-grubber. In his view, no suspicion of the human agent was to stand in the way of the gospel preached by that agent. That this is an important matter for Paul is clear. He employs this same principle of independence in II Thessalonians 3.7-8: "For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, and we did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it; but with toil and labor we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you." In I Thessalonians 4.11-12, Paul commends this principle to the Thessalonian congregation. He exhorts them "to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we directed you, so that you may behave properly toward outsiders and be dependent on no one."

A second reason why Paul did not ask for money has to do with the problem of money itself: that it can become "an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ" (v. 16). While this does not have to happen, it commonly does happen. Money is an ambivalent force in our lives. It can be a source of good or bad.

The Bible shares our ambivalence about money.<sup>3</sup> There are passages in which money is portrayed positively. For example, Abraham is described as "very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold" (Genesis 13:2) and this is seen as part of his stature. King Solomon is famous for being rich; and his riches are explained in the Bible as the blessing of God: "I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor all your life; no other king shall compare with you" (I Kings 3.13). Proverbs relates riches to the duty of work: "A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich" (10:4). Whatever our hard work accomplishes, however, we must not forget that God alone is the source of our wealth: "But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today" (Deuteronomy 8.18). Being blessed with wealth

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<sup>2</sup> This same rule is referred to in I Timothy 5.18. The subject is the financial support of elders in the church. It appears that Deuteronomy 25.4, a law of the humane spirit, was one of the earliest principles of church management. It is a good agrarian image that might find special resonance in country congregations and farming states.

brings with it the obligation to care for those in need: "Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and will be repaid in full" (Proverbs. 19:17).

In the New Testament, there is, at least certain passages, a principled suspicion of money. Jesus tells us in that "No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth" (Luke 16.13). In I Timothy 6:10 we read: "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains." What the Bible teaches regarding money thus goes both ways: it is praised as a gift of God and condemned as the root of evil. "Money is a gift from God, a sign of his blessing. But it is not to be a god in itself. The Bible is not ascetic; poverty is not inherently virtuous, nor is wealth sinful. But true wealth, the Bible teaches us, is spiritual, not material." . Helge Brattgård p. 7

**Usury: Exodus 22.25:"If you lend money to My people, to the poor among you, you are not to act as a creditor to him; you shall not charge him interest".**

**Deuteronomy 23** <sup>19</sup>"You shall not charge interest on loans to your brother, interest on money, interest on food, interest on anything that is lent for interest. <sup>20</sup> You may charge a foreigner interest, but you may not charge your brother interest, that the Lord your God may bless you in all that you undertake in the land that you are entering to take possession of it.

In his encounter with the Corinthians, St. Paul found himself struggling with the biblical ambiguity concerning money. He thought he could resolve this struggle best by taking a high-road approach and not asking the Corinthians to support him financially in his preaching. As we shall see in the second passage, this approach did not work.

**2 Corinthians 11:7-11:** <sup>7</sup> *Did I commit a sin by humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I proclaimed God's good news to you free of charge?* <sup>8</sup> *I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you.* <sup>9</sup> *And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for my needs were supplied by the friends who came from Macedonia. So I refrained and will continue to refrain from burdening you in any way.* <sup>10</sup> *As the truth of Christ is in me, this boast of mine will not be silenced in the regions of Achaia.* <sup>11</sup> *And why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!*

*sulaou*—"to rob" (v. 8)

**Realize that from the beginning of the church, the necessity, the reality of raising funds for mission has been a difficult, controversial, fellowship-threatening matter, as divisive as doctrinal controversies, but even more insidious.**

**Acts 2.44-47:** <sup>44</sup> *All who believed were together and had all things in common;* <sup>45</sup> *they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.* <sup>46</sup> *Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts,* <sup>47</sup> *praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.*

**Romans 7:15-19** <sup>15</sup> *I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.* <sup>16</sup> *Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good.* <sup>17</sup> *But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.* <sup>18</sup> *For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it.* <sup>19</sup> *For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.*

## **The Collection**

The theology of the collection for the poor in Jerusalem is St. Paul's theology of grace directed to a specific issue. It is found in the "thankful letter" of II Corinthians. The premise upon which Paul makes his request for help is the vision that the church is a new creation: "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (II Corinthians 5.17). To be a new creation "in Christ" means to live in the grace of Christ's love who is "the one who has died for us all" (v.13). It is the experience of the freedom of the Spirit of Christ who is the Holy Spirit: "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (3.17). Because of this freedom, the church refuses to be satisfied with an understanding of membership that depends on legal or formal definition. To belong to the church is to experience intimate bonds of personal friendship and fellowship (*koinonia*). Thus, Paul calls the Corinthians to reject living according to a "written code" (3.6). Even if relationships are difficult at times—and Paul certainly had difficulties at Corinth—Christians will not rely on the letter of the law to get their way. The true church does not coerce; it persuades. It is not a pecking order of privileges, but a community of equals.

**2 Corinthians 4:1-2:** *Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart.* <sup>2</sup> *We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God.*

**2 Corinthians 4:8-16** <sup>8</sup> *We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair;* <sup>9</sup> *persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;* <sup>10</sup> *always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.* <sup>11</sup> *For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh.* <sup>12</sup> *So death is at work in us, but life in you.* <sup>13</sup> *But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture-- "I believed, and so I spoke"-- we also believe, and so we speak,* <sup>14</sup> *because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence.* <sup>15</sup> *Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.* <sup>16</sup> *So we do not lose heart.*

## **Four Rules**

*Rule 1) Trust the Example of God's People:*

**II Corinthians 8.1-5:** *We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia;* <sup>2</sup> *for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.* <sup>3</sup> *For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means,* <sup>4</sup> *begging us earnestly for the privilege of*

*sharing in this ministry to the saints-- <sup>5</sup> and this, not merely as we expected; they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us.*



**Mark 12:41-44** <sup>41</sup> He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. <sup>42</sup> A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. <sup>43</sup> Then he called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. <sup>44</sup> For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

*Rule 2) Christ first loved us. Therefore Obey the Commands of Christ.*

**II Corinthians 8:9:** *For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.*

Luther: "Christ himself died for his church, to preserve it and sustain it."

**Acts 4:11-12** <sup>11</sup> This Jesus is 'the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.' <sup>12</sup> There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."

**John 10:17-18** "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. <sup>18</sup> No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father."

As the recipients of his gift of salvation, we are called to obey Christ's word by following his example. As he gave, we give. We are not to build bigger barns, like the rich fool, to store our possessions in order to "eat, drink, and be merry." For God will say: "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you." (Luke 12.20). We cannot be like the rich young ruler who loved his money so much that he would rather be empty in spirit and sorrowful in heart than part with it (Matthew 19.16-30). We are to recoil at the example of the Unforgiving Servant who, although forgiven a fabulous sum that he owes to his master, demands of a fellow servant that he pay a paltry debt or be thrown into jail. How can we be miserly and ungrateful when the Lord

showers us with forgiveness and blessing? It is no wonder that the master punishes the unforgiving servant harshly:

**Matthew 18:21-35** <sup>21</sup> Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” <sup>22</sup> Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.<sup>[a]</sup><sup>23</sup> “Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. <sup>24</sup> When he began the reckoning, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents;<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>25</sup> and as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. <sup>26</sup> So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ <sup>27</sup> And out of pity for him the lord of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. <sup>28</sup> But that same servant, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii;<sup>[c]</sup> and seizing him by the throat he said, ‘Pay what you owe.’ <sup>29</sup> So his fellow servant fell down and besought him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ <sup>30</sup> He refused and went and put him in prison till he should pay the debt. <sup>31</sup> When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. <sup>32</sup> Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; <sup>33</sup> and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ <sup>34</sup> And in anger his lord delivered him to the jailers,<sup>[d]</sup> till he should pay all his debt. <sup>35</sup> So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

<sup>32</sup> Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. <sup>33</sup> Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' <sup>34</sup> And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. <sup>35</sup> So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

**Matthew 6:2-4** <sup>2</sup> "So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. <sup>3</sup> But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup> so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

**Luke 18:**<sup>9</sup> To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: <sup>10</sup> “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’<sup>13</sup> “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’<sup>14</sup> “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

**Matthew 5:23-26** <sup>23</sup> So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, <sup>24</sup> leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. <sup>25</sup> Come to terms

quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. <sup>26</sup> Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny..

### **Pietism: Faith through Obedience**



Philip Jacob Spener 1635-1705

Your God has given you Baptism, and you may be baptized only once. But he has made a covenant with you—from his side a covenant of grace and from your side a covenant of faith and good conscience. This covenant must last through your whole life. It will be in vain that you comfort yourself in your Baptism and in its promise of grace and salvation if for your part you do not also remain in the covenant of faith and good conscience or having departed therefrom, return to it with sincere repentance. Accordingly, if your Baptism is to benefit you it must remain in constant use throughout your life.

Pia Desideria, 66

There are extraordinarily many people who think only of discharging this holy [the Lord's Supper]work and of how often they do it. But they hardly consider whether their spiritual life may be strengthened thereby, whether they proclaim the Lord's death with their hearts, lips and life, whether the Lord works in and rules over them or they have left old Adam on his throne. This can only mean the dangerous error of the *opus operatum*. . .

Pia Desideria, 67



Henry Melchior Muhlenberg (1711-1787),

In 1746, two hundred years after Luther's death, Muhlenberg reported on his method of administering Holy Communion to his superiors in Halle. His letter dated 30 October was but one many he would write throughout his life, the so-called *Hallesche Nachtrichten* (Halle



*Reports*), describing the conditions and spiritual state of Lutheran churches in the New Land. The sacrament, writes Muhlenberg, is given twice yearly in each congregation. Those wishing communion would be expected to speak with the pastor the week preceding. "One talks with them about the inner feelings of the heart and looks for growth and also gives the necessary admonitions, encouragement and consolation as the situation requires." <sup>1</sup> Through this private encounter, Muhlenberg as pastor learned about the congregation: "one gains an understanding of inner and outer conditions and one also gets an insight into relationships in the estate of marriage, between neighbors, parents, children and friends." <sup>2</sup>

- 1 "Letter 58" (30 October 1746), *The Correspondence of Heinrich Melchior Mühlenberg, Volume I 1740-1747*, ed. and tr. John W. Kleiner and Helmut T. Lehmann (Camden, ME: Picton Press, 1993) 293-307.
- *Ibid.*, 296.

On Saturday evening a preparatory service of confession was held, the sermon being directed to repentance and the concerns and tribulations of parishioners: "Without reference to specific persons one arranges the preached word according to the concerns and circumstances one has noted in the particular conversation." After the sermon the parishioners "form a half moon around the altar." Those guilty of "public offense" are singled out. They are once more examined by the pastor in front of the gathered congregation and urged to "true repentance" and "improvement of life." Thus private confession as examination or *Verhör* and public confession are joined together. The congregation is urged to reconciliation with the offenders. Muhlenberg reports that most often parishioners readily forgive their brothers and sisters of public sins. "Then when everything has been settled members of the group bow their knees before God, and the pastor, kneeling in their midst, prays the confession." There then follows questions about faith and the meaning of the sacrament to the entire gathering.

### **Attitude of Charity; Freedom from Anxiety**

**Matthew 6:12** <sup>2</sup> And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

**Matthew 6:19-21** <sup>19</sup> "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; <sup>20</sup> but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

**Matthew 6:24 - 7:1** <sup>24</sup> "No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. <sup>25</sup> "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? <sup>27</sup> And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? <sup>28</sup> And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how

they grow; they neither toil nor spin, <sup>29</sup> yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you-- you of little faith? <sup>31</sup> Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' <sup>32</sup> For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. <sup>33</sup> But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. <sup>34</sup> "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.

**Matthew 6:26 – 29; 34:** <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? <sup>27</sup> And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? <sup>28</sup> And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, <sup>29</sup> yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. . . <sup>34</sup> "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.

God could easily give you grain and fruit without your plowing and planting. But He does not want to do so. Neither does he want your plowing and planting alone to give you grain and fruit; but you are to plow and plant and then ask his blessing and pray: "Now let God take over; now grant grain and fruit dear Lord! Our plowing and planting will not do it. It is thy gift." this is what we do when we teach children to fast and pray and hang up their stockings that the Christ Child or St. Nicholas may bring them presents. But if they do not pray, they will get nothing or only a switch and horse apples.

What else is all our work to God—whether in the fields, in the garden, in the city, in the house, in war, or in government—but just such a child's performance, by which He wants to give His gifts in the fields, at home, and everywhere else? These are the masks of God, behind which he wants to remain concealed and do all things.

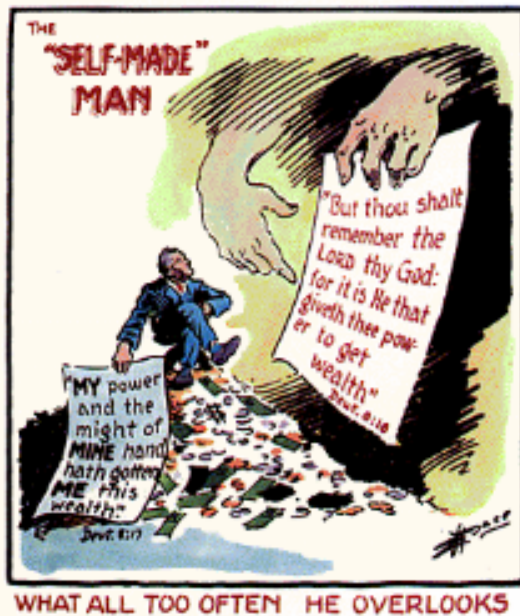
*LW*, 14, 114

**Matthew 7:12** <sup>12</sup> "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.

If you are a manual laborer, you find that the Bible has been put into your workshop, into your hand, into your heart. It teaches and preaches how you should treat your neighbor. Just look at your tools—at your needle or thimble, your beer barrel, your goods, your scales or yardstick or measure—and you will read this statement inscribed on them. Everywhere you look it stares at you. Nothing that you handle every day is so tiny that it does not continually tell you this, if you will only listen. Indeed, there is no shortage of preaching. You have as many preachers as you have transactions, goods, tools, and other equipment in your house and home. All this is continually crying out to you: "Friend, use

me in your relations with your neighbor just as you would want your neighbor to use his property in his relations with you.”

*LW 21, 237*



American Christian cartoonist, E.J. Pace (1880-1946)



*Martin Luther*, (1483-1546)

## Large Catechism

### The First Commandment.

#### **Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.**

That is: Thou shalt have [and worship] Me alone as thy God. What is the force of this, and how is it to be understood? What does it mean to have a god? or, what is God? Answer: A god means that from which we are to expect all good and to which we are to take refuge in all distress, so that to have a God is nothing else than to trust and believe Him from the [whole] heart; as I have often said that the confidence and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol. If your faith and trust be right, then is your god also true; and, on the other hand, if your trust

be false and wrong, then you have not the true God; for these two belong together faith and God. That now, I say, upon which you set your heart and put your trust is properly your god.

Therefore it is the intent of this commandment to require true faith and trust of the heart which settles upon the only true God and clings to Him alone. That is as much as to say: "See to it that you let Me alone be your God, and never seek another," i.e.: Whatever you lack of good things, expect it of Me, and look to Me for it, and whenever you suffer misfortune and distress, creep and cling to Me. I, yes, I, will give you enough and help you out of every need; only let not your heart cleave to or rest in any other.

This I must unfold somewhat more plainly, that it may be understood and perceived by ordinary examples of the contrary. Many a one thinks that he has God and everything in abundance when he has money and possessions; he trusts in them and boasts of them with such firmness and assurance as to care for no one. Lo, such a man also has a god, Mammon by name, i.e., money and possessions, on which he sets all his heart, and which is also the most common idol on earth.

“Be contented with being a human being, with being the humble one, the created being who can no more support himself than create himself. But if a human being wants to forget God and support himself, then we have to worry about making a living. It is certainly praiseworthy and pleasing to God that a person sows and reaps and gathers into barns, that he works in order to obtain food; but if he wants to forget God and thinks he supports himself by his labors, then he has to worry about making a living. If the wealthiest man who has ever lived forgets God and thinks he supports himself, he has to worry about making a living. Let us not talk foolishly and narrow-mindedly by saying that the wealthy man is free from worry about making a living and the poor man is not. No, only that person is free who is contented with being a human being and thereby understands that the heavenly Father feeds him—and this, of course, the poor can understand just as well as the wealthy.”



Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) *Writings* 15:177.

*Rule 3) Encourage the Mutual Upbuilding of the Saints.*

**2 Corinthians 9: Now it is not necessary for me to write you about the ministry to the saints, <sup>2</sup> for I know your eagerness, which is the subject of my boasting about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year; and your zeal has stirred up most of them.**

St. Paul had a host of problems with the Corinthians. So why does he boast of them to the Macedonians? The reason is the grace of God. Paul knew through his own experience as a sinner that God never gives up on us. Despite what we do, God stands by us and forgives us. This is the witness of the Bible: "If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1.9). It is God's purpose in forgiveness to hide our sin by covering it with the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Through the love of Christ, God resolves to see the best in us. In turn, we are called to look for the best in others. This is why even though Paul had great problems in Corinth, he still boasts of them to the people of Macedonia.

To see the best in others as God sees the best in us is the motivation for the upbuilding of the saints. This upbuilding is not naïve; it is not engaging in false compliment. To upbuild is to practice forgiveness. Upbuilding molds the church into its authentic character as the Body of Christ and brings comfort and encouragement to believers. In the words of Luther:

"We. . . believe that in this Christian Church we have forgiveness of sin, which is wrought through the holy Sacraments and Absolution, moreover, through all manner of consolatory promises of the entire Gospel. Therefore, whatever is to be preached concerning the Sacraments belongs here, and, in short, the whole Gospel and all the offices of Christianity, which also must be preached and taught without ceasing. For although the grace of God is secured through Christ, and sanctification is wrought by the Holy Ghost through the Word of God in the unity of the Christian Church, yet on account of our flesh which we bear about with us we are never without sin. . . Everything, therefore, in the Christian Church is ordered to the end that we shall daily obtain there nothing but the forgiveness of sin through the Word and signs, to comfort and encourage our consciences as long as we live here."

Upbuilding must be an essential theme of any stewardship campaign. Upbuilding harnesses the energy and good will of the community of faith for mission and good works.

*Rule 4) Seek the Cheerful Giver*

***Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.***

The word translated as "cheerful" in verse 7 is *hilarios* from which we get our word "hilarious". To participate in the mission of the gospel by giving of time, talent, and treasury is a privilege and a joy. Our thankfulness is a response to what God in his great generosity first does for us. God loves to give: "He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy" (Acts 14:17). We are to live our lives knowing that "Every good and perfect gift comes from above" (James 1:17).

To seek the cheerful giver should be the radical and uncompromising goal of any stewardship campaign. We cannot force people to give. One dollar put in the plate under duress is a dollar too much. Only joyful giving will pass muster in the Christian community. And joyful giving can have tremendous effect! A retired pastor I know started a home mission congregation in the Washington D.C. area as his first call out of seminary in the early 1960s. In the beginning, the congregation barely could pay its bills as it limped along with an offering of about \$700 per week. The pastor decided to preach the tithe—the classic Old Testament measure of giving a tenth of what one has established by the Law. He did not want to impose it as a requirement. He knew quite well that the New Testament pays scant attention to it. But he thought that if the congregation committed to it, *if only for one Sunday*, they would have the opportunity to focus their purpose in giving and see their potential in mission. They would become examples to themselves. The designated Sunday for the tithe arrived and the offering exceeded \$4000—a princely sum 40 years ago! The pastor said that he never had to make such a request again. In one Sunday of giving the congregation discovered who they were as God's people and what they were capable of. They were inspired, proud, and overjoyed. The little congregation took off and became one of the largest and most active congregations in the East.

### **Stewardship and American History**

Where to begin? In 1952 the German Lutheran bishop, Hanns Lilje (1899-1977), had this to say about the idea of stewardship:

To know that with all that we are and all that we have we are God's stewards is the answer to a particularly deep yearning of the time in which we live, namely the yearning for a *vita nova*, a complete renewal of our life. Here the insights of our American brethren in the faith have in the perspective of church history, something like the same significance as the lessons which the German Lutheran Reformation has taught us about justification by grace. . .

This is quite a statement. The context was this. It was less than a decade after the end of World War II. Germany was trying to rebuild itself from the bottom up. It was doing so with large doses of American money provided by the Marshall Plan, but also by private charities, the majority being Christian relief agencies. Who supported those charities? The answer is American Christians with their countless individual gifts. The Germans were surprised and overwhelmed by this generosity. It made them especially open to American ideas and ways of doing things.

And they needed new ideas. In Germany the church was traditionally paid for by the collection of taxes. Pastors were civil servants, churches public buildings. The sense of ownership and responsibility for the life of the church was very defused. 'How are we going to make the church new?' asked Lilje. Lilje and others looked across the Atlantic to the life of the church in the United States, especially the nuts and bolts of organizing and managing the church day to day. He saw how unique the American church was, how different from Europe. And this is the reason for the statement I just read.

In America, beginning with the time of our origin as a nation, churches have not been paid for by tax collections. There were exceptions but they did not last long. Churches refused government control. When Christians arrived in America in colonial times, there was no parish system in place, no church buildings, no pastors. If they wanted communal Christian life, they had to organize it on their own and build houses of worship by themselves. And they did. Their

principle of organization was the congregation. The chief decision-making body was the local church council made up of elders who took care of the property and deacons who were in charge of spiritual matters. American Christians took a liking to being in charge. In eighteenth-century Virginia, for example, where the Anglican Church had a concentrated presence, a proposal was made by the Church of England to appoint a bishop in residence in the colony. Anglicans all across the colony met in their vestries (that's what they call a church council) and said, 'No! We don't want an ecclesiastical official in a hierarchy telling us what to do. We are responsible for what goes on in this parish.'

To be sure, lay leadership in the church could cause problems for the clergy who, in Europe, were accustomed to being in charge. Realizing the power he had as a member of a church council to call a pastor, one colonial Lutheran had this to say: "Since we have to hire a preacher for money, let's have a jolly one." Trying to lead a congregation to follow the gospel is never easy; being dependent on a congregation for one's livelihood makes the task only harder. For the most part, however, the mission of the church prospered.



How well is described by the Englishman William Cobbett (1763-1835), influential journalist and political activist who fled to America with his sons in 1817 to escape political persecution for his radical views. Among the observations he shared by letter sent to his neighbors back home in the town of Botley, Oxfordshire was that in the new nation of the United States the Christian church seemed to prosper without the benefit of taxes imposed by the state:

I have talked to several farmers here [in America] about the tithes in England; and they *laugh*. . .they seem, at last, not to believe what I say, when I tell them that the English farmer gives, and is compelled to give [by law], the Parson a tenth part of his whole crop. . .They cannot believe this. . .But, my Botley neighbors, you will exclaim, "No *tithes*! Why, then, there can be no *Churches* and no *Parsons*! The people must know nothing of God or Devil. . .By no means my friends. Here are plenty of churches. No less than three Episcopal (or English) Churches; three Presbyterian Churches; three Lutheran Churches; one or two Quaker Meeting-houses; and two Methodist places; all within *six miles* of the place where I am sitting. And these, mind, not poor shabby Churches; but each of them larger and better built. . .with the church yards all kept. . .with a head-stone to almost every grave. . .

Christian churches thrived without the imposition of coercive giving by taxation. The laity had a stake in their congregations: they built them; they maintained them; they were responsible for mission. This mission included the building of schools, colleges, and hospitals. The educational and health care systems of America are largely the creation of Christian churches. American Christianity, especially Protestantism, fostered the understanding of Christians as stewards of the

gospel. This notion became an ideal that pertained especially to the life of the laity. The encouragement of lay initiative is essential to the purpose of stewardship.

## Property



“Being thus arrived in a good harbor, and brought safe to land, they fell upon their knees and blessed the God of Heaven who had brought them over the vast and furious ocean, and delivered them from all perils and miseries thereof, again to set their feet on the firm and stable earth, their proper element.”

“The failure of this experiment of communal service, which was tried for several years, and by good and honest men proves the emptiness of the theory of Plato and other ancients, applauded by some of later times, — that the taking away of private property, and the possession of it in community, by a commonwealth, would make a state happy and flourishing; as if they were wiser than God.”

William Bradford, *History of the Plymouth Plantation*,



James Madison (1751-1836)  
*Federalist Papers* Nos. 10 and 51





- 1) Commercial activities soften fanaticism. They teach compromise, prudence; they focus attention on small gains and losses. They protect what is noble without being themselves noble.
- 2) To focus energy on material objects rather than spiritual objects prevents bitter dissention. Material objects are divisible; spiritual objects are indivisible.
- 3) Commercial activities pit interest against interest and thus work against the growth of a dominant majority.
- 4) The greatest enemy of a republic is envy. The only way to defeat envy is when citizens of every class have a well-grounded hope for improving their condition. . .

#### “SELF ACROSS TIME”

- 5) The protection of property is crucial to the maintenance of rights for all. Property is the material art of living.

In its larger and juster meaning, [property] embraces every thing to which a man may attach a value and have a right; and *which leaves to every one else the like advantage*. . . [A] man has a property in his opinions and the free communication of them. James Madison, *The Papers of James Madison*, 14 (6 April 1791-16 March 1793), eds. Robert A. Rutland *et al.* Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983)

### **Definition of the Concept of Stewardship**

In light of this history, it is no wonder that the theology of stewardship is so identified with American culture and religious practiced. Stewardship is our major contribution to the discipline of Christian theology. The word itself has been in frequent usage since the beginning of the last century (i.e., 1900) to express the personal responsibility each Christian assumes in the voluntary association of the local congregation. While the notion of Christian steward may be expanded to include responsibility to care for such important matters as the environment and social justice, the common understanding of the term among lay people in the church relates to giving. The definition from the U.S. Council on Stewardship in 1946 is as good as one can find:

“Christian Stewardship is the practice of systematic and proportional giving of time, abilities, and material possessions, based upon the conviction that these are trusts from God to be used in his service for the benefit of all mankind in grateful acknowledgement of Christ’s redeeming love.”

The word “steward” comes from the Old English word *stigweard*. *Sti(g)* is of uncertain meaning but probably refers to a “house” or “hall”; *weard* means “warden” or “keeper.” In the King James Version, “steward” is used to refer to a higher servant who does not simply do the bidding of the master but has the authority to make independent decisions regarding the management of the household staff and the use of the master’s property. There are many such figures in the Bible.<sup>4</sup> The first we meet is “the steward (*asher*) of [Joseph’s] house” (Gen. 43.16), who receives the brothers of Joseph when, because of a famine in the land of Canaan, they are forced to go to Egypt to seek grain. Joseph’s authority is second only to Pharaoh. His servant, then, is an important figure in his own right and the brothers of Joseph address him with respect: “Oh my lord, we came down the first time to buy food. . .” (v. 20). In Isaiah 22, we meet Shebna who is the major-domo of King Hezekiah. He has overstepped his bounds by building an elaborate tomb for himself: “What right do you have here? Who are your relatives here, that you have cut out a tomb here for yourself, cutting a tomb on the height, and carving a habitation for yourself in the rock?” (v. 16). For his misuse of his office, he must pay:

**Isaiah 22:17-19** <sup>17</sup> The LORD is about to hurl you away violently, my fellow. He will seize firm hold on you, <sup>18</sup> whirl you round and round, and throw you like a ball into a wide land; there you shall die, and there your splendid chariots shall lie, O you disgrace to your master's house! <sup>19</sup> I will thrust you from your office, and you will be pulled down from your post.

Shebna teaches that with the privileges that accrue to the office of steward come responsibilities to obey the master and act according to one’s station. Failure to live up to those responsibilities entails harsh judgment.

In the New Testament, the understanding of the steward as manager is a stock figure who appears incidentally in the gospels (Matthew 20.8; Luke 8.3; John 2.8). But he also serves as an object lesson for Jesus’ teaching:

**Luke 12:42-48** <sup>42</sup> And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and prudent manager [*oikonomos*] whom his master will put in charge of his slaves, to give them their allowance of food at the proper time? <sup>43</sup> Blessed is that slave [*doulos*] whom his master will find at work when he arrives. <sup>44</sup> Truly I tell you, he will put that one in charge of all his possessions. <sup>45</sup> But if that slave says to himself, 'My master is delayed in coming,' and if he begins to beat the other slaves, men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk, <sup>46</sup> the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour that he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and put him with the unfaithful. <sup>47</sup> That slave who knew what his master wanted, but did not prepare himself or do what was wanted, will receive a severe beating. <sup>48</sup> But the one who did not know and did what deserved a beating will receive a light beating. From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.

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<sup>4</sup> See especially Hall, *The Steward*, 17-22.

The terms “steward” and “servant” or “slave” are used interchangeably in this passage. Stewardship has to do with readiness, watchfulness, obedience to the intentions of the master, authority for the sake of others under the steward’s care. In New Testament letters the idea of stewardship undergoes a development that has specifically theological implications: as servant charged with the responsibility to make known the revealed will of God; as pastor who oversees the affairs of the church; as mediators of divine grace to one another:

**1 Corinthians 4:1:** Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries.

**Titus 1:7-9:** <sup>7</sup> For a bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or addicted to wine or violent or greedy for gain; <sup>8</sup> but he must be hospitable, a lover of goodness, prudent, upright, devout, and self-controlled. <sup>9</sup> He must have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching, so that he may be able both to preach with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it.

**1 Peter 4:10:** <sup>10</sup> Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.