

STEWARDSHIP AS INTERPERSONAL

Virgil Warren, PhD

Christian stewardship belongs to the interpersonal system. In relationships, people do not live to themselves or die by themselves even as in marriage the right over one's body does not lie in the one alone but in the other also (1 Corinthians 7:4). In social relationships, each gives of self for the joy of the others. In that same fashion, God has given of himself in creating, sustaining, and redeeming us. We are not our own; we have been bought for a price, so to speak, so life itself is ours as a stewardship to glorify God with. We give ourselves to the Lord, who first gave himself for us (2 Corinthians 8:5).

In being stewards of ourselves, we are stewards of all aspects of ourselves, including our natural capacities, our developed skills, and any supernatural endowments. Capacities and skills become gifts of the Spirit when we bring ourselves under the reign of Christ in the Spirit. There is interdependence between people variously gifted for the unity and welfare of the whole body of believers. The stewardship of self to other selves puts stewardship in the context of relationship.

If we are stewards of ourselves rather than self-determining individuals, then what we "possess" we manage, because our possessions are extensions of our selves. It is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35) because it expresses relationship; and persons are more fulfilled ("blessed") when they express themselves relationally.

Interpersonalism puts stewardship on a qualitative basis. Questions about amount pose the wrong question. Jesus observed that the widow's mite represented more than all the other gifts that day in the temple (Mark 12:42-44). It was not the quantity of her mite, or the percentage of her giving; the gift was evaluated in interpersonal terms. Paul's comments on the special offering in 2 Corinthians 8-9 are awash with interpersonal elements: God loves a cheerful giver. Paul appreciated the gifts sent by the Philippians because they were a sweet savor to God (Philippians 4:18). No portion of the whole belongs to the Lord any more than the whole belongs to him.

When we encourage people to give, we do so relative to the degree of their faith (Romans 12:3) in response to the degree of God's grace (Romans 12:6). Trying to press people to give beyond that or aside from that moves stewardship off its interpersonal foundation. We need to live out every aspect of our Christian walk by the correlation between faith level and performance level; otherwise, the level is apt to lower.

Our motivation for giving also stems from interpersonal factors. The example of other people spurs us on (2 Corinthians 8:9; Mark 12:42; Philippians 4:14 + 19). Our gratitude to God and our brothers calls forth similar efforts on our part (1 Corinthians 15:55-58 + 16:1; Ephesians 1:6; Matthew 10:6). We give because we care about the people we help by our gift (2 Corinthians 8:7-8). We give relative to the need that exists and the purpose for which we give.

We give ourselves (2 Corinthians 8:7-8) to meet people's needs (Philippians 4:14) because Christ has given so much to meet our need.