

Stewardship: Discover This Word and Love It!

Stewardship of the Church

Acts 20:13-38

When Paul left the people of Ephesus, he gave them this instruction: “Be shepherds of the Church of God which Christ bought with his own blood.” That’s where I want to land today. We are stewards of Creation. We are stewards of the Gospel. We are stewards of the Church.

Some might question that. The Church has been torn apart by splits and schisms for centuries. Paul warned of wolves without and worry warts within. The Church has its problems, and it always will, because the Church is composed of people like you and like me.

Christians took up the sword in the Crusades. The bloody stains of the Inquisition remain in our history. The splits between East and West, Catholics and Protestants persist today. The Church continues to be hesitant to end racism, some are still reluctant to let women in the pulpit and judgmental of LGBTQ+ persons who want to join.

Samuel Stone was right when he wrote:

Though with a scornful wonder we see her sore oppressed,
By schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed,
Yet she on earth hath union with God the Three in One,
And mystic sweet communion with those whose rest is won.

The fact remains, if you want to find God, if you want to speak with God, if you want to worship God, church is a pretty good place to start. Think about that this week when you complete your Commitment card.

When God comes to church, hearts are touched, and lives are transformed. Sins are forgiven and relationships are restored. Hope is gained and healing happens.

When Peter and the Apostles were arrested for healing people in the name of Jesus, the Sanhedrin was ready to kill them. But Gamaliel stood up among them and said, “Wait a minute. If their purpose is of human origin, then it will run its course and die. But, if it is of God, who can compete with God?” The Church is of God and shall be preserved to the end of time for worship for the edification of believers, for the salvation of the world. I count it a privilege to be a member of a church, how about you?

“Be shepherds of the Church of God, which Christ bought with his own blood.”

Jesus said, “Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, whoever loses his life for me and the gospel will save it.” Have you learned that principle of inversion? You can win by losing; you can gain by giving; and you can live by letting go.

Most of us believe in the ethic of “Get all you can, in every way you can, whenever you possibly can,” so that you can eat drink and be merry in your retirement. That is the American way!

What would have happened if Jesus had lived by the motto of self-preservation? How can I make a lesser sacrifice when Jesus gave his all?

Write six words on your bulletin. Work, Family, God, Sports, Travel, Others

Now rank them from one to six with regard to importance. Rank them from one to six with regard to your practice and then think about your priorities in relation to God and the church.

Tony Dungy, coach of the Indianapolis Colts, in his book, *Quiet Strength*, tells about getting his priorities right when trying to make it as a Pittsburgh Steeler back in 1978. Tony came down with mononucleosis. He was scared to death that he would be cut from the team. One of Tony’s teammates said to him, “All the Lord is trying to do is find out what’s first place in your life and right now it looks like its football. Tony says that Donnie was right. “For the first

time I was able to look at a football as something that God was allowing me to do, not something that should define me. I couldn't take my identity from this sport. I had to consciously make sure that God was in first place."

Somebody asked William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, the secret to his amazing Christian life. Booth replied, "I told the Lord he could have all there was of William Booth." Can God have all there is of you?

The Church is a Community of Faith, Passed On from Generation to Generation

The dictionary defines church as an association of people who share a particular belief system.

Paul's association with the Church of Ephesus had been deep and meaningful. There he made friends, preached the gospel and worked for a living. There he belonged. No wonder the parting is emotional. The fellowship of kindred minds does that for you.

Letting go is hard to do, but it is necessary. There comes a time to say, "Goodbye." Paul's parting words are these in Verse 32, "Now I commit you to God, who can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified."

Today I ask you for \$200,000, not for my sake, not for your sake, but that those who come behind us will find us faithful. This church is not about you, it's not about me; it's about the Gospel communicated from generation to generation. It's about boys and girls being formed in the faith and taking that foundation with them for a lifetime. We are doing that – but we can do it better.

Christ is Counting on You. Are you Counting on Christ?