

StewardCAST

A monthly e-newsletter of LCMS Stewardship Ministry

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Debunking Stewardship Untruths

THE *CODDLING OF THE AMERICAN MIND*, a book that should be read by every teacher or parent of high school or college students, identifies three untruths that have shaped the modern situation on college campuses and are starting to spill into civil discourse, television and the internet. These untruths, that what doesn't kill you makes you weaker, that we should always trust our feelings, and that everything is Us vs. Them, are paralyzing modern education and will have lasting impacts on the nation and the church's ability to live and work together in generations to come.

The culture has a way of infiltrating the church. These three untruths that threaten modern education also give rise to three stewardship untruths that coddle the American steward. Stewards who have been called to follow the Way, the Truth and the Life that is Jesus Christ must come to grips with the fact that these three stewardship untruths can threaten their relationship with the Lord:

- 1 Stewardship is just between Jesus and me.
- 2 If I don't feel like I am a steward, I don't have to be.
- 3 My gifts are so insignificant that it doesn't matter if I use them or not.

Acceptance of these untruths in any form threatens the work of the stewardship of the Gospel of the crucified and risen Christ! God's Word revealed in Jesus Christ is always the answer to untruth! Using sections of 1 Corinthians 12, these untruths are quickly debunked.

DEBUNKING UNTRUTH #1: *Stewardship is just between Jesus and me.*

The first stewardship untruth is this: What I do as a steward is just between Jesus and me. It might strike one as odd that this would be identified as an untruth. It only seems odd because of the way the Church has taught stewardship over the last couple of decades. In too many instances it has been wrongly taught that stewardship is an individual decision.

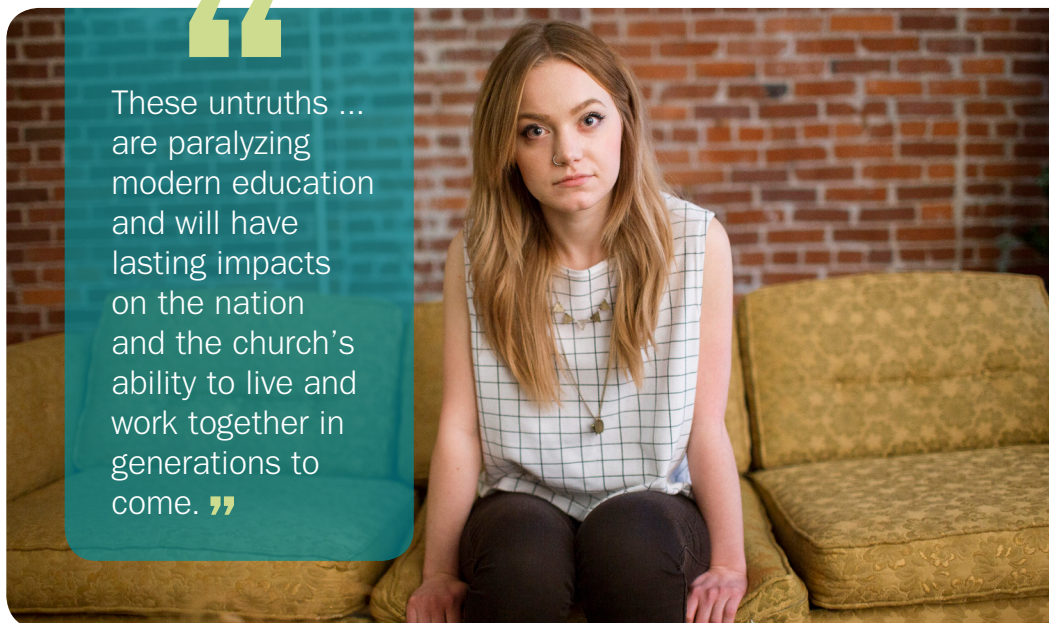
But what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12 challenges that concept directly: "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body

does not consist of one member but of many" (verses 13–14). While it is true that each steward is unique and distinct from others, it is not true that they are independent of one another. Individual stewards are joined to the body that is the Church of which Christ is the head! It is the head that tells the body what to do, not the other way around. In a body there is an interrelatedness that makes the human body and the church so much more than just the sum of its parts. The truth is that in the body of Christ, the whole is more critical than the parts! The parts work together for the sake of the whole!

The individual steward is created and redeemed to serve as the conduit of God's gifts. The steward employs the gifts God



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bestows in creation for the sake of bringing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to his neighbor. God bestows the gifts. The steward delivers those gifts for the sake of the neighbor. This truth eliminates any claim of individual or private stewardship. Faithful stewardship isn’t about the steward. It is all about Jesus and the neighbor! Serving, speaking and even giving, if they are to be faithful, need to be about what God wants for the neighbor. This flows from a heart that has been touched by the crucified and risen Christ!

DEBUNKING UNTRUTH #2:
If I don’t feel like I am a steward I don’t have to be.

The second stewardship untruth, If I don’t feel like being a steward I don’t have to be, is just as insidious as the first because of its private nature. This untruth strikes at the very purpose of the steward. The steward has been created by God to tend to all of God’s creation for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. What happens in the human body when one part is injured or ill? The entire body becomes weakened and ill. This is true of important parts like the heart. If the heart is weak or damaged, the entire body is weakened. But it is also true of more insignificant parts of the body as well. Know anyone who has had appendicitis or a gall bladder attack? These parts, which the body can live without, make it very sick when they are not doing what it is they have been created to do.

Paul highlights this by saying, “God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together” (1 COR. 12:24–26). When a steward in the body of Christ decides not to be who the Lord has made them to be, the body of Christ is not as healthy as it can be. And when the body of

Christ isn’t healthy, it can’t do what it is given to do; that is, be a steward of the Gospel! How the steward uses the gifts of God individually and collectively has a direct impact on the body’s work together. While stewards may have weaknesses and sins, under the headship of Jesus Christ, they have the love-driven ability to do amazing things for the glory of God and the sake of the neighbor! But this can only happen when the whole body is working together!

DEBUNKING UNTRUTH #3:
My gifts are so insignificant that it doesn’t matter if I use them or not.

This transitions well to the final stewardship untruth: My gifts are not important enough to share. This is a lie that the devil wants each steward to believe. Some stewards can sing better than others. Some have gifts of leadership. Many are blessed materially and can be more financially generous than others. This is a truth that can’t be disputed.

But it isn’t supposed to be disputed. God has put together the body of Christ in this place in a specific and wonderful order. No part of the body in this place is dispensable. St. Paul highlights this unique nature of the body of Christ, saying, “If the whole body

were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body” (1 COR. 12: 17–18). God has assembled the body of Christ with this in mind!

Stewards assembled into the body of Christ are called to reject these untruths! Left unchecked, they devastate the work of the Gospel. But God’s Word only speaks truth. Stewardship is about all the body. Stewards are created to use their gifts for the Gospel. Stewards have gifts that really matter! This is stewardship’s Gospel truth!!

