

StewardCAST

A monthly e-newsletter of LCMS Stewardship Ministry

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The Stewardship Struggle



“This struggle is rooted in the fact that we are at the same time saint and sinner.”

Stewardship and struggle. They go together like peanut butter and jelly, bacon and eggs, or summer and mosquitos. While this struggle has always been a part of the life of a Christian steward, it was not designed to be. Peanut butter and jelly were destined to be together. But the combination of stewardship and struggle is not pleasing at all. It leaves a bitter aftertaste. This combination is a byproduct of living in a world that was marred by the sin of creature/stewards claiming ownership over what belongs to the Creator/God.

This struggle is rooted in the fact that we are at the same time saint and sinner. Created

by God, blood-bought and Baptism-claimed, the steward embraces a task of managing all of life and life's resources for the glory of God and the benefit of the neighbor. Marred by sin, the steward faces the daily temptation to take hold of God's good gifts and claim that they are owned not by the Master who created them, but by the steward who possesses them. Time, talents and treasures are so often qualified by the possessive pronoun "my." But as Ps. 24:1-2 reminds us, *"The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers."* Diligently search the Scriptures and you

will find no transfer of title or ownership from God to the steward. The struggle with stewardship is rooted in human sin!

Two types of struggles

At a recent DOXOLOGY event on generosity some interesting light was shed on this ongoing struggle. The Rev. Dr. Scott Bruzek presented a wonderful insight regarding the concept of "struggling with" versus "struggling against." Because of our sinful nature and the claims that various God-given vocations can lay on the steward, there will always be a "struggle with" stewardship. This struggle is part of carrying out the pre-fall vocation of steward in a post-fall world. The steward knows what God asks of him, but also what is demanded of him elsewhere. This "struggle with" creates the discomfort that drives the faithful steward back to Jesus and His Means of Grace. The steward knows that he falls short and needs Christ's gifts! But the steward that "struggles against" is the one who refuses to be what God has called him to be for the sake of the neighbor and God's glory. The steward who "struggles with" stewardship is repentant. The steward who "struggles against" stewardship is in willful sin. One leads to repentance. The other leads to much more serious spiritual problems!

Pastor Bruzek was speaking specifically about tithes. There has been much ink spilled over whether the tithe is something that is commanded or simply extolled by God. Bruzek's idea is this: The real issue that confronts any steward is the "with/against"

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challenge. From the financial stewardship standpoint, it cannot be denied that the Lord has indeed given the steward the injunction to provide for the ministry of the Gospel. Proportional giving that is done freely and willingly, which may or may not be ten percent, is how this provision is carried out. This is done not by compulsion but from faithful response to God’s radical generosity in the gift of Jesus Christ. The steward reflects the generosity which flows from the heart of God through his own generosity, which flows out to others for the sake of the Gospel. Sinful stewards, as we all are, will always “struggle with” this because this kind of generosity goes against who they are. But it is willful sin to “struggle against” it even in the face of God’s direction.



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A matter of pastoral care

For this reason, steward leaders need to see the formation of stewards as a matter of pastoral care. From Genesis on, the task of the steward is presented in Scripture as a God-given vocation. But in light of the cross and empty tomb, the stewardship struggle needs to be addressed not formulaically

or under some sort of mandated percentage chart. Rather, stewardship formation must be handled pastorally. Acknowledge that in the sinful, broken world the struggle with stewardship is real. Use the Word of God to call stewards to repentance and speak works of absolution to stewards who are struggling with their stewardship. Save the harsh word of the Law for the steward who struggles against faithful stewardship. These willful sinners seek to excuse their failure to be a faithful steward of the created order because

they are not under any compulsion to give. Call out this idolatry. This too is a pastoral matter, because their soul is at stake!

Struggling against stewardship is willful sin which threatens the soul. Struggling with stewardship is the natural process of a sinner/saint steward. Seeing the difference is essential to being a pastorally sensitive steward leader. Through this distinction, the steward leader rightly distinguishes and applies Law and Gospel. The struggle is real. The call to stewardship is real. But only the Gospel can make it really joyful, even amidst the struggle.