

STIMULATE STEWARDSHIP WITH LOVE

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St. Bernard of Clairvaux, an influential French ecclesiastic and eloquent preacher-writer (1091-1153 AD), wrote a tremendous treatise about love. Four statements summarize his thoughts:

- 1. There are those who love themselves for their own sakes.** These are the selfish self-centered egotistic introverts, repugnant to both God and mankind.
- 2. There are those who love others, but only for their own sakes.** These are the “do-gooders” motivated for their personal self-satisfaction. Such do good deeds to obtain the inner good feeling which comes from doing good.
- 3. There are those who love others for the sake of others.** These are the “humanists”. Rejecting the reality of God, they help others out of pity and concern for the sake of humanity for mankind’s sake.
- 4. There are those who love God, themselves and others for GOD’S SAKE!** These are the “Honest to God” Christians who love God because in faith they have embraced His love, grace and salvation. Cleansed from the guilt of their sins, they find themselves attractive before God and as a result love themselves. In response to God’s love for them, they love others and endeavor to do good.

They endeavor to feed the hungry, quench the thirst of the faint, show hospitality, clothe the needy, care for the sick and comfort the distressed (Matt. 25: 35-36). On the Last Day, the King of Kings will declare: “I tell you the truth; whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.” (Matt. 25:40)

The Christian stewardship of giving is more than generous gifts and glorious works for good causes. Many are known for their philanthropy who do not have a love

relationship with Christ. Christian stewardship is the response of faith in Christ to love God and do His will for His sake. Without a Christ relationship, deeds, though acknowledged by mankind as good, are not recognized by God. Hebrews 11:6a states: “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” Isaiah 64:6 calls the “righteous acts” of the unclean (the unrepentant, non-believing)... “filthy rags”. In God’s sight motivation is critical for acceptance.

The motivation God seeks in the stewardship of giving is love - His kind of love - Agape Love.

While the English language has one word for love, the ancient Greeks had six.

- 1. EROS:** sexual love.
 - 2. PHILIA:** social love; affection of friends
 - 3. STORGE:** parental/family affection.
 - 4. PHILADELPHIA:** love between brothers and sisters.
 - 5. PHILANTHROPIA:** kindness toward humanity.
 - 6. AGAPE:** showing love by helping.
- The Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Old Testament (280-130 BC), translates the O.T. Hebrew word “ahabah” with the Greek word “agape”. The New Testament uses the word extensively. For example in 1 Jn. 4:8 (“God is love”), the word for love is “agape”. Agape Love is unconditional. It seeks help with no strings attached. It forgives and forgets and endeavors to do good even to those who don’t deserve it. God demonstrated this kind of love in our redemption through Christ. “God so LOVED the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (Jn. 3:16)

Stimulate your stewardship with Agape Love. Imitate God’s style of loving. Be a motivated helper by caring the way He cares. Proper love motivation is critical for God’s acceptance of your stewardship!