

CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP DEFINED

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Original Bible Languages

The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew; the New Testament in Greek. There are a number of translations. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has not officially endorsed any of them. Lutheran theology is based on texts from the original languages of Hebrew and Greek. To Biblically define a Christian steward, it is important to consult the original languages of the Bible.

Old Testament Hebrew

The Hebrew word for a head person in charge is “sar”. Used 381 times in the O.T., it involves the management roles of princes, governors, officials, captains and stewards. For example, Eliezer was Abraham’s steward. In Gen. 15:2 (KJV) Abraham declares: “The steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus.” Childless, Abraham was prepared to leave his estate to Eliezer as an inheritance. (Gen. 15:3)

New Testament Greek

The Greek word for steward is “oikonomos” which means: “the manager of a household or household affairs.” In Biblical times, a steward could be either free-born, a freed-man or a slave to whom the master of the house entrusted the management of his affairs. The New Testament word for stewardship is “oikonomia” and refers to the role a steward played in managing the estate of his master. This would include the responsibility of receipts and expenditures, overseeing a landed estate, managing servants and even caring for his master’s children not yet of age. As you can see from the above, stewardship has to do with more than money in the Church. Drop the “ship” in the word “stewardship” and you end up with the word “steward” - someone entrusted to care for someone else’s possessions. In the Christian sense, we are managers of God’s possessions, which include everything!!!

Christians Are Stewards of God

Consult the internet to research the word “stewardship” and you will find its overwhelming use is in taking care of things but not correlated with an assignment from or a responsibility to a master or powerful authority.

However, God is the Master of the House, not us. Our role as stewards is to heed the will and instructions of God, the powerful, almighty ruler of the universe. To consider ourselves as Masters of the House is to make horrendous secular humanists of ourselves - an abomination to God, the Master.

Three Kinds of Stewards

1. Self-centered Stewards - These are those who, for example, in the realm of health stewardship, eat right, sleep right, exercise and stay away from the bad stuff - but not for God’s sake, but for their own sakes.

2. Humanistic Stewards - These are the “do-gooders” who take care of things for the sake of others - but not for God’s sake. In 1961, I saw a Marxist slogan in the town square of Ljubljana, Slovenia, exemplifying humanistic stewardship: “Everything for man, from man, for man’s sake.”

3. Christian Stewards - These are those who, for example, practice good health stewardship recognizing their bodies as gifts from God which should be in the best of shape to serve God by caring for their families and others sharing the air around them.

Stewards As Mirrors of Christ

In love with Christ, Christian stewards are gracious givers of their time, treasures and talents to accomplish God’s goals in the world. They are mirrors of God’s grace reflecting Christ’s image. When the world beholds Christian stewards at work, they see Christ doing things. Martin Luther once remarked: “Christians are Masks of God.” A Christian steward professes with St. Paul: “For me to live is Christ” (Phil. 1:21). John E. Herman put it this way: “Christian stewardship is a way of life.”

STEWARDSHIP DEFINITION

Christian stewardship is the free and joyous activity of the child of God and God’s family, the Church, in managing all of life and life’s resources for God’s purposes.