



STEWARDSHIP GETTING COMPLETELY WET

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HAVE YOU HEARD THE STORY ABOUT THE BAPTISM OF THE GAULS? THE GAULS WERE A FEARED, WAR-LIKE PEOPLE WHO IN ANCIENT TIMES INHABITED WHAT IS NOW FRANCE AND BELGIUM. BY THE TIME OF THE CHRISTIAN ERA THEY HAD BEEN CONQUERED BY THE ROMAN EMPIRE AND WERE SUPPOSEDLY UNDER ITS CONTROL. THE EXTENT OF THIS CONTROL VARIED, AND THERE WERE NUMEROUS GALLIC UPRISINGS.

A number of Christian missionaries ventured into Gallic territory and many of the Gauls were baptized. Further, when a converted warrior was baptized in a river or stream, he would hold one arm high in the air as the missionary dunked him under the water. This seemed a peculiar custom and the missionaries soon learned the reason. When the next battle or skirmish broke out, the war-like Gaul could proclaim: "This arm is not baptized!" He would then grab his weapon and ride off to destroy his enemy.

STEWARDSHIP IS ABOUT GETTING COMPLETELY WET

The reason I share this story is because I find it compelling: the picture of someone trying to keep one part of their body, one aspect of their identity, free from the influence of baptism. Another reason I share the story is because stewardship, like baptism, is about getting completely wet. It is about looking at ourselves, discovering

what it is that we would like to keep dry, and then immersing whatever that is in the waters of Holy Baptism.

KEEPING OUR MONEY DRY

Stewardship is about giving to God. It is about turning total control of our lives over to God. But when we hear the word *stewardship*, what is the first thing that we think of? Many people say, "Money," and there may be two reasons for that. First, there is a lingering misconception among many Orthodox that stewardship is just a fancy word for "fund-raising." But stewardship is not fund-raising. It is a way of life. Second, in today's world, *money* is the one thing that many of us would most like to keep dry. Many of us want to go under the water with that outstretched arm clutching ... not an ax or a war-hammer, but a purse or wallet. *That* is why, when we talk about stewardship today, we often talk about money more than we do about anything else.

STEWARDSHIP INVOLVES LOTS OF THINGS

For some years now we have been trying to get peo-

ple to realize that stewardship is not just about money. Someone came up with the phrase “time, talents, and treasures.” There is also the whole matter of “stewardship of the earth,” taking proper care of the planet that God has given us (Genesis 1:26; Psalm 8:6): conserving water, recycling paper and aluminum, preserving wetlands and rainforests. Or we might speak of “stewardship of our families” (Exodus 20:12; Proverbs 22:6; Mark 7:9–13; 1 Timothy 5:8): nurturing our marriages, raising happy and healthy children, caring for elderly parents. In truth, stewardship involves lots of things.

Properly speaking, stewardship is about all of life, about giving ourselves to God and using all that God has given us in grateful and appropriate ways. Yet we talk mostly about money because more than anything else we find money to be the greatest challenge.

know: what the Bible teaches about stewardship is *good* news! When we come to understand and practice what the Bible says about stewardship, we will live happier, more fulfilled lives.

PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP

1. Give cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7): “Let each person give as his heart tells him, not grudgingly nor under compulsion, for the Lord loves a cheerful giver.”
2. Give with gratitude (Chronicles 29:13–14): “We thank you, our God, ... for all things come from you and we have only given back what is yours already.”
3. Tithing (Malachi 3:10): “Bring your whole tithe, that there may be food in my house, and try me

“You cannot serve God and mammon”

(Matthew 6:24)

IT INVOLVES TALK ABOUT MONEY

The Bible reports Jesus as saying, “You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24); mammon refers to money and the things that money can buy – material possessions. Jesus might have said this about “God and politics” or about “God and sports” or about God and any number of other things that might become obsessions, but he didn’t. He said, “God and mammon” – money.

The Bible also presents the Apostle Paul as saying, “The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil” (1 Timothy 6:10). Paul might have said this about “the love of status” or “the love of power” or the love of any number of other things, but he didn’t. He said *money*.

Money and material possessions are especially prominent candidates for idolatry, and are chief contenders for unwarranted affection. A Christian writer said that humans need to experience three conversions: (1) a conversion of heart, (2) a conversion of the mind, and (3) a conversion of the purse.

IS YOUR MONEY OFF-LIMITS TO SPIRITUAL INSPECTION?

Even baptized people like to keep their money dry. In fact, many of us try to rope off this one area of our life as “off-limits” to spiritual inspection. “It’s nobody’s business what I do with my money,” we say, not realizing just how foolish that sounds. It’s God’s business, isn’t it?

Yet here is something that many people do not

in this, says the Lord of hosts and I shall open for you the floodgates of heaven, to pour blessings upon you without measure.”

4. Giving is spiritual: there are 2,450 passages in Scripture about money – more than those on prayer, salvation, heaven, hell, mercy or any other topic.
5. Stewardship is a call to discipleship (Romans 12:1): “By the mercies of God offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.”
6. Everything comes from God (Psalm 24:1, Psalm 104:24, Nehemiah 9:6–8): “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.” “Great are you Lord and in wisdom you have created all.” “You, Lord, have made the heavens, the highest heavens, the earth and all that is upon it, the seas and all that is in them.”
7. Give of “first fruits” (Proverbs 3:9): “Honor the Lord with your first fruits.”
8. Give liberally (2 Corinthians 9:6): “He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows abundantly will also reap abundantly.”
9. Give regularly (1 Corinthians 16:2): “Upon the first day of every week lay aside a sum of money for the ministry of the church.”
10. Give without show (Matthew 6:3): “Don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.”

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