

Addendum To "Christian Stewardship: Our Part In God's Plan"

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*NOTE: The preceding paper defines **Christian Stewardship** as "our whole-life response to God's grace in giving us a part in His eternal plan."(p12,f11) As this definition implies, Christian stewardship is very closely related to Christian sanctification (narrow sense), so much so that what is said about one may also be said about the other. For the sake of convenience, then, this Addendum will make frequent reference to "**Christian S/S**." The reader will kindly understand this to mean "Christian sanctification/stewardship."*

I have been asked to offer some further clarification of several points made in the preceding paper, particularly in Part VII. "What Motivates Christian Stewardship?". A number of questions and comments have been raised regarding the right role of God's grace in Christian S/S. This is a broad and fascinating area of study, one well worthy of its own conference essay. Since, however, the questions came up in relation to what my paper has said about stewardship **motivation**, I will limit my remarks here to the role of God's grace as a motivator.

On page 23, paragraph 5. of the original version of this paper, the statement appeared: "Without doubt, the Christian steward follows his part in God's plan *by grace alone*." Some concern was expressed that this statement may seem to deny to the Christian a cooperative role in the exercise of his Christian S/S, due to the historical/confessional understanding of *sola gratia* as it is normally applied to the doctrine of justification. I personally do not share this concern and I believe that a strong case can be made for the statement as it stands. However, since the statement was made in the limited context of stewardship motivation and was intended to apply directly to the role of God's grace in motivating the Christian steward, I have gratefully accepted the suggestion of the Cypress Conference Study Committee to re-word the statement to read: "Without doubt, the Christian steward *is motivated to follow* his part in God's plan *solely by God's grace*." (NB: Other similar statements in the paper have been similarly revised.) The intent of this revision is to retain the exclusive role of God's grace in motivation while yet allowing for the believer's subsequent cooperation in the exercise of his Christian S/S.

Even this re-wording will not satisfy some, however, for they will contend that the statement still disregards other motivating factors in addition to God's grace that may effect the Christian steward. They say, "As a Christian, am I not also motivated to function as a steward by my love for God, by my gratitude for His blessings, by my compassion and concern for my neighbor, by the evident needs of my church?" It is the chief aim of this Addendum to address those concerns.

I am convinced that the key to a correct understanding of stewardship motivation lies in keeping in **mind what** it is that we wish to motivate.

If our concern is chiefly to move Christian stewards to produce a certain pre-determined response—to achieve a certain goal, to meet a certain need, to support a certain program—then we may well become so focused in on the methods that produce the desired response that we may lose sight of whether that response is truly Christian stewardship. If, however, our desire is to motivate Christian stewardship, that is, to move "every believer to serve the cause of the Gospel by living his life within God's world according to God's will as revealed in Christ Jesus" (p10,115)—then our focus will not be centered on methods that produce specific responses but rather on motivation that produces godly living.

Godly living is a fruit of faith. Where there is faith there will also be fruits of faith (Ja 2:17). Therefore, it follows that what produces faith also produces its fruits. Faith is solely and directly a product of God's grace that works in human hearts through the Means of Grace (Eph 2:8+9; Ro 10:17). Thus, it is fair to say that fruits of faith are likewise produced, instigated, motivated in Christian lives by that same grace of God through that

same Gospel in Word and sacraments. The portions of Scripture to be considered in this Addendum will bear out that what truly motivates Christian S/S is God's grace.

In addressing the issue we need to recognize that in speaking of the **motive** for Christian S/S we are speaking of motivation in a specialized sense. Generally, when we seek to "motivate" a person i.e. "to cause him to act; to stimulate action; to prompt him to act with a sense of purpose," (p20, 11) we assume that the person already possesses the capability to act as we desire. For example, if we wish to motivate our child to do better in school we must first believe that he or she possesses the academic talents to do better.

When it comes to Christian S/S, however, there is no one who possesses the ability to act faithfully and fruitfully...on his own. Innately, man is sinful and can do nothing God considers good. Even as forgiven sinners, alone we still lack the ability to do good even though we may desire to do it (Ro 7:14-23).

For this reason, motivation for Christian S/S must supply not only the willingness but also the ability to act. Graciously, that is just what God does. In encouraging the Philippian Christians in their sanctification and urging them to "*continue to work out (their) salvation,*" Paul reminded them "*it is God who works in you to Will and to act according to His good purpose.*" (PhiZ 2:13) About this verse Lenski writes:

It sounds paradoxical when Paul substantiates his admonition by the fact that "God is the One working in you both the willing and the working in behalf of His good pleasure." A superficial person may conclude, "If God does it why do we need to exert ourselves?" ...The apparent paradox is non-existent. If God is the One who works in us both the willing and the working, then we Christians must ever go to God whose continuous grace will move us to will and also to translate the willing into deeds. i.e. into work. How else shall we be able to heed Paul's admonition that we ever keep on working out the salvation of ourselves? (N.T. Commentary, Vol. 7. p799)

The motivation of the Christian steward calls first for a dramatic spiritual transformation, just the sort of transformation that God promises to bring about for His people in the words of His prophet, Ezekiel: (*The Sovereign Lord declares*): *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.* (Ezekiel 36:26-27)

That transformation the Holy Spirit carries out in us by His grace, working through the Word and sacraments. Through those means, God leads us to a growing awareness of, appreciation for and confidence in His forgiveness. As our faith in God's forgiveness grows, so do our fruits of faith in response to that forgiveness likewise grow. As Jesus said of the woman who anointed Him: *I'm telling you that it's because her many sins are forgiven that she has shown this great love. But the one who is forgiven only a little shows only a little love.* (Lk 7:47 Anderson) With those words, our Lord was drawing a direct cause/effect (motivation/motion) relationship between God's gracious forgiveness and the Christian's loving response.

By grace, through faith, God leads us to see ourselves as the objects of Christ's self-sacrificing love. In Christ's love for us we discover a totally unique motive force, one that addresses itself not merely to certain things that we do but that profoundly alters the entire way we live. As Paul writes: *Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all and, therefore, all died. And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them **and was raised again.*** (2 Co 5:14+15)

As, by grace, God brings the sinner to believe that he is forgiven because of Jesus' life and death for him. At that same time God plants in his heart the motive and impulse to live for Christ and do what He desires. Commenting on God's words in this regard through the prophet Jeremiah, the Apology states:

Because faith brings the Holy Ghost and produces in hearts a new life, it is necessary that it should produce spiritual movements in hearts. And what these movements are the prophet, Jer. 31:33, shows when he says: *I will put My Law into their inner parts, and write it on their hearts.* Therefore, when we have been justified by faith and regenerated, we begin to fear and love God, to pray to Him, to expect aid from Him, to give thanks and praise Him, and to obey Him in affliction. We begin also to love our neighbors, because our hearts have spiritual and holy movements (there is now, through the Spirit of Christ, a new heart, mind and spirit within). (Apology, III, Trig. p157 - underlining mine).

Only such "spiritual and holy movements," that is, motives that come from God, by grace, can result in actions that are truly **fruits**. Our Christian S/S is acceptable to God only because and in so far as it is connected to and drawn from His grace. Apart from grace, it is nothing (Jn 15:4-5; He 11:6a, 13:20-21; Ro 14:23b 15:15-16).

The fact that we may be Christians does not make our efforts as Christian stewards any less sinful, any more godly. As Luther noted. even as Christians we still sin in everything we do. Even our "good" works are still tainted with sin; our righteousnesses are still filthy rags to God. the only reason God accepts what we do out of faith as "fruit" and sees it as good is because God's grace connects our Christian thoughts, words and deeds to Christ and sees them as His. This is why Paul said of his own Christian living: *...I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. (Ga 2:20)* This is why the apostle had to confess that his entire sanctification was solely the product of God's grace: *By the grace of God, I am what I am, and His grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. (1 Co 15:10)*

It is in this dynamic, life-altering sense that we speak of the unique role God's grace plays in motivating Christian S/S. I believe this conforms to the understanding of grace in Christian S/S that is reflected in the Lutheran Confessions and related writings. Let a few representative quotes suffice:

...the truly believing, so far as they are regenerate, render [good works] not from coercion or the driving of the Law, but from a voluntary spirit; because they are no more under the Law but under grace, Ro 6:14. 7:6, 8:14. (FC, Epit., IV.5, Trig. p799) ((Of this statement, Prof. C. Lawrenz noted: "Grace, not law, supplies the motivation and thus frees us from the control of sin. [2 Co 5:14])

After a man is converted, and thereby enlightened, and his will is renewed, then he wills what is good, in so far as he is reborn or a new man, and he delights in the law of God according to his inmost self (Ro 7:22). And immediately he does good, as much and as long as the Holy Spirit movitates him, as St. Paul says: *For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. This impulse of the Holy Spirit is no coercion or compulsion because the converted man spontaneously does that which is good, as David says, *Your people will offer themselves freely on the day You lead Your host.* From this it follows that as soon as the Holy Spirit has initiated His work of regeneration and renewal in us through the Word and holy sacraments, it is certain that we can and must cooperate by the power of the Holy Spirit, even though we still do so in great weakness. Such cooperation does not proceed from our carnal and natural powers, but from the new powers and gifts which the Holy Spirit has begun in us in conversion, as St. Paul expressly and earnestly reminds us. *Working together with Him, then, we entreat you not to accept the grace of God in vain.* This is to be understood in no other way than that the converted man does good, as much and as long as God rules him through the Holy Spirit, guides him and leads him, but if God should withdraw His gracious hand man could not remain in obedience to God for one moment. But if this were to be understood as through the converted man cooperates alongside the Holy Spirit, the way two horses draw a wagon together, such a view could by no means be conceded without detriment to the divine truth. (FC,SD,II,63-66, BkCon, p533-534)*

The Holy Spirit so brings about our renovation so that man himself cooperates through the powers of grace which he has. ...Therefore, the reborn man is involved in his renovation, subordinated and moved by God, so that through the powers received supernaturally he renovates himself daily. Indeed, the ability to do good, the first power and the first acts of generation, the Holy Spirit generates in man without the aid of man, but man concurs in the secondary acts or the exercise and continuation of sanctification, being introduced (ie. instigated, motivated - MPM) through the Holy Spirit; this not through natural but supernatural powers; thus through powers divinely conferred man becomes a helper of God in continuing his own renovation. (SemDogNotes. p126, 2a. Quenstedt) ((Of this quote, Prof. S. Becker noted: "The actum primum in sanctification is the bestowal of the spiritual power to do good by the Holy Spirit. The actum secundum is the exercise of those powers. In the first, man does not cooperate. In the second he does, solely through the powers that are bestowed. That "power" is the grace of God."))

According to Scripture the only motive for good works is the pure grace of God, which we have experienced in Christ Jesus. Paul knew of no other incentive to good works: *I beseech you by the mercies of God that ye present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God...* (Ro 12:1; cf 2 Co 8:9). The more boldly we teach good works the way Scripture teaches them, the more definitely do we keep the grace of God in the foreground. Yea, if we follow this method of teaching good works strictly and persistently, the result as to the quantity of good works produced will, in spite of the deficiency for which the flesh is responsible, often be astounding. (Pieper, III. p48)

All underlining in these quotes is my own.

The common voice of all these references from Scripture, the Confessions and the other writings tells us that it is God and His active, benevolent power working in us—that is, His grace—that is solely the source, the instigator, the enabler, the motivator of our Christian S/S. It will not do to speak of grace only as the main source or the **foundation** of our S/S, while other influences may serve as "secondary motives" or motives "rooted in the Gospel." To describe those other influences in the same terms as God's grace is to suggest that they serve the same purpose or function in the same way (albeit to a lesser degree). This simply is not the case. There is no other force in our Christian living that deserves to be placed on common ground with God's grace or to be described as serving a similar function. To do so could only serve to reduce the role of grace in our Christian S/S and to rob God of the full credit He deserves for the good that we do.

But what, then, of those other apparent influences on the Christian steward that were mentioned earlier? How do our love, gratitude, fear, etc. fit into the picture of our Christian S/S if not as motives? I believe they fit in this way:

The grace of God, made evident in its saving gifts (the Savior, forgiveness, reconciliation, eternal life, all revealed and communicated to us in the Gospel) initially **motivates in the Christian certain** basic, characteristic, **inward responses**: fear (reverence) of God (Ps 130:4); love for God (1 Jn 4:19); gratitude to God (Col 3:15-17); confidence in God (Phil 1:6). These inward responses to the motivation of God's grace then reveal themselves outwardly.

For example, our praise to God is not motivated by our fear (reverence) of Him; rather, praise is the outward expression of our inward fear (reverence) of God that is motivated by His grace. Likewise, our obedience to God's commandments is not motivated merely by our love for God; rather, our obedience is the outward exercise of our inward love that is motivated by God's love for us. This is why John could write that love for God is obeying His commandments (1 Jn 5:3). Similarly, our offerings to God of time, talents, treasure, are not motivated by our gratitude; those offerings are our grace-motivated gratitude taking outward, tangible form. Our offerings of self are our spiritual worship, says Paul (Ro 12:1).

The point is that many of the spiritual impulses that from a human perspective might appear to be motivators of Christian S/S (e.g. love, compassion, pity, fear of God) actually ought properly be viewed not as motivators but as responses to the motivation of God's grace in Christ Jesus, responses that find a means of outward expression in actual works of Christian S/S.

The danger inherent in separating our outward works from our inward responses to grace is that we may begin to see our own love, concern, gratitude as the source of those works. From there, it is a short step to assuming that all we need to do to produce the outward works we desire is to find a way to tap into the Christian's inner feelings. The fact is that this approach is often effective in getting results but it is of no spiritual value, can lead to no spiritual growth, no maturing in Christian S/S because it effectively by-passes God's grace.

It is good to remember that some of the most loving, compassionate, concerned people in the world are unbelievers. Hence, we have not necessarily succeeded in motivating Christian stewardship just because we've led our people to feel love, compassion, gratitude or concern for others. We need to get people to the real source, to make sure that the branches on Christ's vine are connected to God's cultivating grace. Only then will we have reason to be confident that the results produced are truly "fruits."

But what of our so-called stewardship **methods**? Do we not **move** Christian stewards to act by presenting them with specific needs, by making them more aware of their means to respond, by pointing out the examples of other Christians, by instructing them in God-pleasing approaches to giving and serving?

I contend that such methods may certainly guide the Christian steward, they may instruct or educate him, they may assist him in determining the timing and direction and form and degree of his stewardship response. But they do not, they can not **motivate** him.

Permit an illustration: My lawn may require mowing (the Need). I may own a working, fully-gassed mower (the Means). I may have considerable experience in mowing lawns (the Instruction). My neighbor may even be out mowing his lawn (the Example). But if I am determined to spend the afternoon as a couch potato, watching the ball game—if I am not otherwise motivated to mow—all the needs and means and instructions and examples in the world won't budge me off my couch. If I am otherwise motivated, those circumstances may assist me to put my motivation to work by making it possible for me to mow my own lawn with my own mower rather than having to wander aimlessly about the neighborhood looking for a lawn to mow. But the circumstances themselves can not move me.

Likewise in the exercise of Christian stewardship, but to a far greater degree. If God's **grace** has not worked in me to will and to act according to His good purpose, all the stewardship methodology in the world is wasted effort. It won't produce a single genuine fruit (even though it may get "results"). On the other hand, if God's **grace is at work in me** through the Word and sacraments, then no other motivation is necessary. All I need is direction and guidance on how, where and when to put my God-given, grace-driven faith to work.

I think we find the perfect example of this in the often-cited words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. In those chapters, Paul (by inspiration) employs numerous "methods" to guide, instruct and encourage the Corinthian believers in their Christian S/S. specifically in regard to the offering for Jerusalem. He recalls the need (8:4,14; 9:5,7). He advises (8:10-11). He informs (8:1f; 16f). He instructs (8:13-15; 9:5,7). He cites examples (8:8; 9:2). He encourages (8:7,24). He applies the Law to squelch the Old Adam (9:4).

But the thread that Paul consistently weaves through his entire presentation in these chapters is **the grace** of God. Six times he mentions it specifically (8:1,6,7,9; 9:8,14). Even more in evidence are God's promises to His stewards in Corinth (8:9,12; 9:6,8,10-11,13-14). God did not owe these promised blessings to the Corinthians. Neither were they rewards to be earned by their faithful deeds or generous giving. God's promised blessings were, rather, the tangible evidence of God's continuing grace to His people, grace which Paul know would supply **the motivation for the** Corinthians' stewardship response.

The gracious promise here mentioned by Paul that I believe gives special joy to the Christian steward, the promise I hoped to showcase in the preceding paper, is the promise Paul uses as the climax of his appeal. In 2 Corinthians 9:12-14 (the closing verses of the chapter), Paul assures his readers that God would graciously allow their faithful stewardship to serve as a confession of their faith, a confession that the Holy Spirit would employ to lead others to praise God and give thanks to Him for His surpassing grace. In other words, through their Christian stewardship, the Corinthians (as we) would be permitted by God to play a part in God's plan.

The practical impact of all this for us in our roles as stewardship leaders is to impress on us the need to learn to use the tools God gives us to do the jobs for which they are intended. It we wish to guide, to instruct, to inform, to educate. then by all means let us use the methods that will serve those ends—whether that be the presentation of needs or statistics or information or examples. And let us learn to use those tools effectively and well.

But when our task is to **motivate** Christian stewards, let us not waste our time cutting down trees with butter knives or driving screws with nine-pound sledges. Let us get the right tool for that job, too, and learn to use it effectively.

When we rightly recognize the role of **God's grace** as the **sole motivator** of Christian S/S, we will be far less likely to develop stewardship messages, methods, presentations and programs that take the Gospel for granted, that simply assume they are addressed to motivated Christians, or that inadvertently confound the working of God's grace by confusing it with other earth-bound motivations. We will keep the cross of Christ

always clearly in view at the center of all our stewardship presentations. We will make our members' growth in faith the principle goal of all our stewardship programs. And we will make the means God has given us—the Gospel in Word and sacraments—the first tool we reach for in all our stewardship efforts, fully confident that through that tool the Holy Spirit will do what we can not do, motivating Christian stewardship by the grace of God!

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