

StewardCAST

A monthly e-newsletter of LCMS Stewardship Ministry

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Stewardship of Freedom

FREEDOM is a topic that is bandied about often in American society, but when the calendar turns to the month of July, freedom comes to the forefront. As easy as it is to discuss freedom, it is somewhat elusive to nail down just what freedom is from the perspective of the steward of God's goodness.

To be certain, an American view of freedom is hard to define. For too many, their understanding of freedom can be very shallow. It consists of wearing a red, white and blue shirt once a year on the Fourth

and perhaps donning an American flag tie for the worship service they attend closest to Independence Day, if there isn't another event that is more pressing. Freedom is so much more than parties and picnics, fairs and fireworks.

There are still others who define freedom by the ability to engage in an activity. The assembly of the local congregation for the Divine Service is an example of this. The congregation can gather freely, in large or small numbers, to receive the gifts which the Lord bestows in Word and Sacrament. This freedom, along with the freedom of

speech, the press and other freedoms that are guaranteed under the Bill of Rights expresses some of the rich blessings of living in a free society. Yet relying solely on free activity as a definition of freedom can cause one to assume that freedom is only about what benefits us.

The Cost of Freedom

At the same time however, it is well known that freedom isn't free. There are rows and rows of white grave markers indicating the high price of freedom at too many national cemeteries. Many men and women from

generations past bear in their bodies, minds and souls the horrors for the cost paid for the freedoms that too many rank and file Americans take for granted. At this very moment, at home and around the globe, there are even more men and women who are either training to be or currently are in harm's way. They do this all so that the freedoms so cherished, or better yet assumed, by Americans can be maintained.

Freedom is something that is to be stewarded! This is true of the political freedoms that mark the American republic. Freedom does not happen organically in the secular realm. It is purchased and won for others by sacrifice. That freedom, if not selflessly maintained, can be lost. This stewardship of freedom is always done on behalf of others. Not everyone has worn the uniform of the United States military. But there are those select and honored few who have been willing to do so over the years so that their countrymen can live free. Stewardship of this freedom takes sacrifice and effort. It is also always for the benefit of another.

Spiritual Freedom

Freedom is not only a political reality. The child of God is also a steward of freedom. St. Paul writes to the Galatians about this freedom: "For freedom Christ has set us free" (GAL 5:1). It is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which delivers to sinful, enslaved human beings freedom from the greatest tyranny of all human history. The British Crown had nothing on the dominion that sin and death held over humanity after the fall into sin.

This fall, which is really nothing other than the first stewardship crisis of creation, left Adam and Eve and all their descendants enslaved to the consequences of that event. But there was nothing that human beings could do to extricate themselves from the mess they had created for themselves. They had authored sin and death from which they could not escape.



The Real Path to Freedom

American political freedom wasn't won by the Declaration of Independence. In the same way, neither was our Christian freedom won with mere words. It would take the emancipation efforts of another to work the freedom of humanity. That is what Christ did. He, in the miracle of the Incarnation, assumed the place of fallen humanity. There was no other way that freedom could be won. It had to be won in battle.

That battle would take place during the earthly life of the Messiah. He would take the blows. He would be assaulted and tempted in every way that we are tempted and assaulted. But there would be one small difference. Jesus would come out of this battle without sin of His own.

God would make Him who knew no sin to become sin for us. He would walk through the sin-muddled waters of the Jordan and carry the burden of humanity. He would take it all the way to the cross. There He would give the greatest gift to all mankind. His death would grant life to all those who would believe in Him.

Political freedom was won by the shedding of the blood of many. Christian freedom is won by the shedding of the blood of ONE! That One is Jesus Christ!

The Free Gift of Freedom

This is the free gift of God to fallen, yet redeemed sinners. Like American freedoms need to be stewarded by the labor of the faithful governed and governing, as well as those who take up arms to protect and defend these freedoms, so also do the freedoms won by Christ need to be stewarded. The gift of the freedom we have in the Gospel is to be handled in the same way as any other gift from the Lord.

Remember why human beings were created. Genesis 1 tells of man being made in the image of God to have dominion over the good creation which the Lord had made.

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Genesis 2 further explains this dominion and really sets it in the realm of stewardship as dominion is shaded by the direction for Man to work and keep the garden (GEN. 2:15). This dominion which works and keeps the garden is to reflect the image in which the Man was created.

In the same way, the stewardship of freedom in the Gospel is to reflect the One who made and restored that freedom. At no point did Jesus seek His own will when it came to the freedom of salvation. His focus was on the will of the Father toward the wayward sinners that He was sent to set free.

Freedom to Receive

As receivers, and thereby stewards, of this freedom, we are called to bear the new and restored image that has been freely given in baptism. The steward of Christian freedom is one who is deeply concerned about stewarding their freedoms for the sake of others. It can never be about the steward, because freedom in Christ was never only about Jesus. It was always about the others.

If stewardship of freedom is to be a faithful stewardship, it also must be about the other. Here is where it flies in the face of American

freedoms. American freedoms focus on self. Christian stewards of freedom are called to a higher, sacrificial standard. This standard may even mean that the steward must bear the consequences of the exercise of others freedom. But this is done purely for the sake of the freedom that has been given in the Gospel. It isn't fair. But then again, what Jesus did to win our salvation isn't fair, either.

Freedom and Stewardship

What does freedom have to do with stewardship? Everything! God has in Christ set the child of God free from the burden of sin and death so that he or she may be the faithful steward of the freedom that is given in the Gospel.

The cost of this stewardship may be great. But it is borne willingly because this is what the Christian steward of freedom is called to do. In America, this stewardship of the freedom in the Gospel hasn't risen to the level of bloodshed ... yet. Someday it might. But for now, it is fitting that the steward of this freedom be faithful in their stewardship for the sake of the Lord and for their neighbor.

“God has in Christ set the child of God free from the burden of sin and death ...”

