

### ***The image restored--the rise of the godly steward. Part 1***

For the past 2 weeks we looked at the 4 relationships that were broken when Adam and Eve sinned against God. The relationship between man and God, the relationship between man and himself, the relationship between man and his neighbor, the relationship between man and creation. To spend so much time on these topics may have left us feeling uncomfortable or troubled but there is a good reason for us to have a good understanding of how broken, lost, and separated from God we are/were if we are not saved by Jesus sacrifice on our behalf.

By having a good understanding of our problem, it will make our salvation to have an even greater impact on our lives if we have a proper perspective. And what makes that perspective proper, is having a proper fear of God.

I'm not talking about the fear of God that is preached in Prosperity Gospel churches, that if you don't give properly that God will be angry with you, that is a lie and a sign that those who preach that, they themselves do not have a proper fear of God.

A proper fear of God is having a deep and correct reverence and respect for God, and the deep reverence and respect comes from having a deep understanding of who God is, who we are in relation to God, the broken relationship we had with Him, and how much He loved us in providing a solution that could solve the problem of that broken relationship, that led to the other 3 broken relationships. This week and next week, we will look at the restoration of our relationship to God, and the other 3 broken relationships.

***Proverbs 9:10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.***

***The image restored--the rise of the godly steward. Part 1, our relationship to God***

Praise be to God that the restoration Christ accomplished through his blood was even more holistic or comprehensive than the affect of the Fall.

Paul tells us that, although one transgression brought sin into the world, how much more the blood of Christ covers all sin (see Romans 5:9-15). He also proclaims "As in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22). And we are assured that, while sin brought condemnation on the one man, so the blood of Christ brings redemption for all humanity (see Romans 5:12-15). In short, all that was lost in the Fall was fully and completely restored in Christ! Just as sin brought brokenness on all four levels, so Christ's redemption brought healing and reconciliation on all four levels.

In Jesus' life we have demonstrated the right relationship we seek with God, our self, our neighbor and our world. Jesus lived the life we could not live. He was obedient where we were disobedient; he was faithful where we were faithless; he was a neighbor when we passed by on the other side, He knew who he was, why he was here, what his ministry was to accomplish. He knew his place before God, in the world and among his people. He did all this while bearing our humanity!

He completed in his life and confirmed in his death and resurrection the full requirements of the original relationship between God and his creature. By doing so Jesus Christ redeemed our relationships at all four levels a holistic

understanding of Christ's atoning work assures us that our relationship with God was reestablished. Through the life, death and resurrection of Christ, we have been reconciled to God.

The book of Hebrews rejoices that in this newly restored relationship with God in Jesus Christ we now "approach the throne of grace with confidence" (Hebrews 4:16). There is an important place for our response in this overwhelming grace. **Our response to grace does not undermine the fact that our relationship to God has been fully restored in Christ.**

But the freedom of response does mean that, while we cannot undo what God has done, we can deny it, reject it, and live in rebellion against it. We can act as children of the devil, we can side with evil, we can scorn our mediator, but we cannot undo the cross or resew the torn curtain of the Holy of Holies.

The blood of Christ has atoned for all humanity, and therefore God's relationship to us is forever changed. We can choose against that grace, we can choose for hell and our own destruction, but that does not change the work of God for us in Christ. Our choice affects how we will respond to God's grace and gracious calling, whether we participate as children of God or rebel as children of the devil. However, it does not add or take away from the completed work of Christ or the redemption won for all humanity on the cross.

**That is why our lifelong response is the work of the steward and not the owner.** [Proper fear of God] That is why grace is truly grace and not merit.

I ask you to stick with me in these next few paragraphs. This understanding of our redemption in Christ as outlined here is critical for our work as steward

leaders. We need to be sure we grasp the full nature of what Christ has done for us and what we, as steward leaders, are called to do in response.

We are called and empowered by the Holy Spirit to participate in the redeeming work of Christ through our acceptance of this incredibly gracious act and through our lifelong commitment to steward this precious relationship established for us in Christ Jesus. As we do, we must never, not for one moment, allow this work of stewardship to become solely our work. We cannot act the savior ourselves. We cannot stand on our own before the throne as if it were now our right apart from Christ. Everything that transpires between us and God in this new covenant does so solely through our participation in the already completed work of Christ. Our relationship to God bears a triune image. This is why we pray to the Father, in the name of and for the sake of the Son, and in the power of the Spirit. That is why our worship is directed to the Father, in the name of the Son and in the Spirit. It is also christocentric-Christ centered. It has a direction, calling us to a life of service to God in Christ.

When we talk about being stewards of this first level of relationship with God, broken by our sin and reconciled and restored by the work of Christ, we must speak about it as participation in the work of Christ. This is the work of the godly steward that is attested to throughout Scripture. It is not an autonomous (self-directed) act somehow glued onto our profession of faith, but the one act of accepting what has been done for us in Christ and participating, through prayer, worship, devotion and service, in the work of the one we now call our Lord and Savior.

Here then is a critical moment for our understanding of the godly steward who is called to lead. Our salvation and our understanding of our call to be stewards are based on our participation in a gracious act already completed for us. This critical truth, in turn, shapes the battle between the two competing views of leading- as stewards or as owners-that operate at all four levels of relationship in which we were created.

We can be tempted to fall back into old ways that don't affirm and grasp this amazing priority of grace that ought to permeate our whole life. If we shift our response to these reconciled relationships from joyous to required effort, we move from being a steward to acting as an owner.

We shift from being the gracious recipient of a gift to be treasured and stewarded to thinking of ourselves as owners and co-creators with legal rights and the ability to control and use these 4 relationships to our benefit.

- Whether it is the understanding of the grace of God for us in Christ,
- our place and vocation as the creatures of God in this world,
- our fellowship and communion with our neighbors,
- or our standing and relationship with God's created world in which we live,

...our call to be stewards is based on our acceptance of each of the 4 relationships as a gracious gift, and our rejection of the temptation to play the owner.

Each level was broken by sin and has been redeemed and given back to us in and through Christ Jesus. Each is a gift that needs nothing added to be

"complete." Each calls to us to accept this redemption with humility, to participate at each level with joy, and to enter into our call to steward each relationship with gratitude and passion.

Each calls for a free and joyous response and not a legal agreement based on mutual conditions and obligations. The prior gracious working of God in Christ serves as the foundation for a theology of the godly steward, and from it flows the calling and work of the steward leader. Everything I have said and will say stands or falls on this point.

- **Paul tells us that, although one transgression brought sin into the world, how much more the blood of Christ covers all sin (see Romans 5:9-15) Sometimes, we think of some sins less forgivable than others, usually this happens when we compare ourselves to others.**
- **He did all this while bearing our humanity! Sometimes we may find it hard to understand how Jesus, being fully God and fully man could truly have the ability (in His humanity) to sin. But that would have to be true if He were able to be our substitute in His death.**
- **Our response to grace does not undermine the fact that our relationship to God has been fully restored in Christ. - We can choose against that grace, we can choose for hell and our own destruction, but that does not change the work of God for us in Christ.**

- **That is why our lifelong response is the work of the steward and not the owner. [Proper fear of God] That is why grace is truly grace and not merit.**
- **Each level was broken by sin and has been redeemed and given back to us in and through Christ Jesus. Each is a gift that needs nothing added to be "complete." Each calls to us to accept this redemption with humility, to participate at each level with joy, and to enter into our call to steward each relationship with gratitude and passion.**

**Bible verses are below.**

**Romans 5:9-15** Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. <sup>10</sup> For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. <sup>11</sup> More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Death in Adam, Life in Christ

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— <sup>13</sup> for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. <sup>14</sup> Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

<sup>15</sup> But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.

**1 Corinthians 15:22** For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

**Hebrews 4:16** Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.