

The image restored--the rise of the godly steward. Part 2

On the second level, Christ came to restore our relationship with our self and to reclaim for us a holistic understanding of who we are as his children.

In Christ we are citizens of his kingdom, even more, we are children of the King! As God's beloved children we have a vocation (work to do), a future and a role. We know why we are here, what our purpose is in life and where we are going. That's what it means to be a Christian. All that was lost in the Fall, including our self-perception and worth, has been fully and completely restored to us in Christ.

By redeeming our relationship with God, Jesus offers us back our self-understanding. We can once again know who we are because we know whose we are. We can put aside the distortions that sin would bring into our self-awareness, and we can see ourselves--body, mind and spirit—as belonging to the God who created us for fellowship and redeemed us in his Son.

Jesus Christ bore our distorted self-image, our egocentricism (all about me), our self-hatred, our aimless quest for purpose and our self-delusion. We are now invited back into a right relationship with ourselves through our participation in the ministry of the one who redeemed us and through whom we have access to our Creator. The process of nurturing, strengthening and guarding the relationship we have with ourselves in the power of the Holy Spirit is the work of the godly steward, and the steward leader.

We have also been reconciled in our relationship with our neighbor. With the Great Commission, the Great Commandment now calls us back to love one another and to take care of our neighbor. We've been called to the ministry of reconciliation, peacemaking and servanthood. We are able to love our neighbor properly because we can now love ourselves as God's beloved--and redeemed--creation.

By redeeming our relationship to God, Jesus calls us into this right relationship with our neighbor. The enmity and strife that was evidenced immediately in Eden, that was confirmed just as immediately by Cain and that now characterizes so much of our nation and our world was also assumed by Christ. His "becoming flesh" meant his assumption of this discord.

- His death for the sins of the world meant His overcoming this conflict.
- His resurrection meant that we can now participate in His work of reconciliation.

He has taken back our brokenness, assumed it (carried it to the cross), redeemed it and now calls us to himself to be children in his kingdom, where we are empowered to live in right relationships with our neighbor.

Relationships are gifts bought with a precious price and returned to us to be stewarded with obedience and joy. Finally, we have a redeemed relationship with creation. We see ourselves once again as both the "crown of creation" and one with creation. We are again given back our true calling to care for and rule over the world with a loving and godly rule. This impacts our use of time, talents and treasures, and it calls us into a true stewardship relationship with our resources and our environment. It is in the area of resources and the

environment that we struggle the most to retain our true calling as stewards and not owners. Evangelical Christians have been slow to join in this process.

For too long they have isolated the redemptive work of Christ to the first level only. Focusing only on the restored relationship between God and mankind. It is time to reclaim a more holistic, biblical understanding of Christ's redemptive work, which includes all of creation," for God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross"(Colossians 1:19-20).

We were created as caretakers of creation, and in Christ we have been restored to that high and holy calling. How else could God's redeemed people respond than to love and care for God's beloved and restored creation? It is simply bad theology that would lead us to believe that God does not care about his creation and so passes on to us the right to exploit and abuse it for our own good. It is equally bad theology to believe that caring for creation is less important to God than other parts of our calling.

There is no hierarchy of responses for the godly steward. Caring for creation does not take a back seat to our other responses as God's redeemed people. It is not just some kind of add-on activity, done only in our spare time after we have finished doing the more important work of the kingdom. Godly stewards are called to respond to Christ's redemptive work at all four levels. We are either stewards of them all or we fail to be the obedient stewards God created

us to be. We fall back and play the owner and the lord when we choose which of our responses is more important or more central to the gospel.

God has called us to be obedient stewards on all four levels.

[Last week we saw that Christ's redemptive work on the cross was complete, but some will reject it and some will receive it. Our restored relationship to God is the key relationship to providing the opportunity to take advantage of the other restored relationships but many times we do not act on them.]

- **We can** once again know who we are because we know whose we are.
- We are now **invited** back into a right relationship with ourselves through our participation in the ministry of the one who redeemed us and through whom we have access to our Creator.
- We've been called to the ministry of reconciliation, peacemaking and servanthood. **We are able** to love our neighbor properly because we can now love ourselves as God's beloved--and redeemed--creation.
- Relationships are gifts bought with a precious price and returned to us to be stewarded with obedience and joy.
- It is time to reclaim a more holistic, biblical understanding of Christ's redemptive work, which includes all of creation," for God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things,
- Why is this true? "It is simply bad theology that would lead us to believe that God does not care about his creation and so passes on to us the right to exploit and abuse it for our own good. It is equally bad theology

to believe that caring for creation is less important to God than other parts of our calling.”

- Godly stewards are called to respond to Christ's redemptive work at all four levels.