

## God's Stewards: Singular Yet Plural

People With A Purpose #1 – 01/31/21 – Mt. Calvary Luth.  
Text: Romans 12:1-8 Pastor Keith Besel

vv. 5-6a “...so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them...”

### Introduction

- ✘ As we begin our *People With A Purpose* journey today, I know the whole concept of a sermon about Christian stewardship brings with it different reactions for different people. But then the idea of three stewardship sermons – back to back to back – can crank up those thoughts and feelings to a whole new level!
  - ➔ Some people view stewardship with a less than positive eye. Even as they know that the Bible teaches these things, they proclaim, “That stuff is only between me and God and no one else”, or “it’s only an excuse that the church uses to get at my money”.
  - ➔ Other folks are real fans of stewardship sermons, not because they believe the message is anything that they personally need to hear, but they revel in the idea that “Yes, it’s about time that those other folks three pews up or the ones in the back of the church hear this message. If only everyone else was as good of a steward as me, then God would really be pleased with our church”.
  - ➔ And of course there are a few folks who appreciate stewardship messages because they know that they need a refresher from God’s Word every once in a while to help them humbly reflect on where they are at in their own life of stewardship and to give them guidance regarding God’s gifts of grace they’ve received and how they can joyfully use those gifts according to His mission of *Sharing God’s Word* and *Serving All* as His *People With a Purpose*.
- ✘ The basic Stewardship principles that we have talked a lot about in recent years still apply as foundational starting points for the principles I hope to have us focus upon a little bit deeper in our series this year.
  - ➔ Those basics are things like the fact that you and I serve God as His stewards only because God has created us and given us all that we have – from life itself to all of the material things we own and the talents that we possess. They are not ours, but God’s possessions given to us to use according to His purpose.
  - ➔ This means that we’re not the owners, but “stewards” who have been entrusted by God with life and life’s resources to manage for Him.
  - ➔ And of course, as in all things, when we apply God’s teaching to our lives we must always remember that all of God’s stewards live every day as both saints and sinners. As sinners, we fight sin and its consequences every day. But we also rejoice in and live out what Christ has won for us through the cross – that we are forgiven and wrapped in His righteousness today and into eternity.
- ✘ St. Paul has all of these foundational principles in mind when he teaches us in Romans, chapter 12 that as God’s Stewards, striving to “present our bodies as a living sacrifice...to God” (v.1), each one of us is at the same time uniquely singular and yet profoundly plural.
  - ➔ So, it’s crucial, as God’s stewards, that we all recognize that our lives are not just solo performances, but instead personal responses to God; lived out within the community of faith to benefit the whole world. Yes, we are singular individuals – each redeemed by Jesus as a gift.

But we are gathered together by His gift as well into a group; a family; one body; as Paul says, “individually members one of another”.

## **I. We’re each unique members of the Body**

- ⌘ The family analogy that the Bible uses to describe our reality is a good and helpful one.
  - ➔ A similar picture that rings especially positive to my way of thinking is that of an athletic team. You pick your favorite sport and team. I’ll just go with the local ones for the sake of the illustration. Can you imagine if members of, say, the Broncos, the Nuggets, the Avalanche or the Rockies didn’t work together for one purpose. The team would become so dysfunctional that they’d have no success and they’d eventually fall apart. The point of a team is that each member must use his/her individual, unique skills and talents for the common team goal; for the mutual benefit of one another.
  - ➔ That’s also true of the Church. But the Church is much more because it is not a man-made entity. It is the creation of God; the Holy Christian Church; “the communion of saints” as we confess in the Apostles’ Creed. And according to Scripture, the Church, which is the sum of all true believers, is the Body of Christ, and the Lord Jesus is its Head (Eph. 4:15).
- ⌘ God created each of us. He gave us life and He re-created us in Baptism where He filled us with the Holy Spirit and His gifts. You, and you and you are each unique; a valuable individual; fearfully and wonderfully made by God as a special and differently outfitted member of Christ’s Body.
  - ➔ The Lord has gifted each one of us with special talents and privileges to use in correlation, or interdependence, with all of the other members. Only by this unique individuality is the entire Body able to function as God has designed it to do; as a healthy unit that’s able to carry out God’s individual and collective purposes.

## **II. Good Stewardship is using our gifts for the whole.**

- ⌘ The struggle that we all face in this though is that our flesh is still completely infected by sin. We are, by nature, self-serving. We instinctively want to operate autonomously. We fight against admitting the truth, that we are all far more “me-oriented” than “we-oriented”.
  - ➔ That’s why so many people argue and fight to say that stewardship is really a personal matter between just themselves and the Lord and no one else. But I challenge anyone to find that false teaching in Scripture, because it’s just not true.
- ⌘ Paul writes in verse five, “so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another”. As we said a moment ago, there is a singular component to our Christian lives and stewardship that involves a very personal response to God’s grace and love. In a couple weeks we will exercise that aspect when we fill out and bring forward our own, personal commitment cards in sealed envelopes.
  - ➔ But at the same time, there’s a reason that we set that activity within the corporate worship service of the body of Christ, because true Christian stewardship serves the community; the common unity; the one Body, of which we are all members.
  - ➔ If you truly are a Christian, then you are part of the Body of Christ and you are intrinsically connected to, and a part of, the other members of the one Body. Biblically, there is no such thing as Christian who is an island by him/herself; who is not a member of Christ’s Church. In Romans 14:7-8 Paul explains, “For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself.

For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we (notice the plural) are the Lord's”.

→ And in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, Paul continues to teach, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price”.

✘ Just as your own body is one unit, made up of many parts, you can't take just one arm by itself and say that you have there a body. That's the way it is with Christ's Body, the Church. Paul reminds us that we were all baptized by one Spirit (the Holy Spirit) into one body – whether our genealogy is Jew or Gentile, black, white, Latino, or Asian; whether you're a Rockies fan or a Cardinals fan; from Colorado or Wyoming, we were all given of the one Spirit to drink. And in our second reading this morning, Peter teaches us in verse 10 that “each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace”.

→ As I look at you and I think of those listening online as well, I know that God has gifted each of you individually. We function each day according to those gifts, but they weren't given to you to keep those gifts to yourselves; not to use them at all or only to use exclusively for your own benefit. No, God gave you those gifts to be used responsibly to God's glory first – that means in the manner that He intended and in a manner that gives Him the credit for the gift. But also He gave you those gifts to use to benefit the one Body, of which He has made you a member.

→ He has gifted you with time, talents, and treasure to provide for the earthly and personal needs of your family; and yes, even for your pleasure. But that's not all dear Christian. He gave them as well so that you will serve the needs of the common society; for the good of mankind and for you to use in service to the Body of believers of which He has blessed you to be a part by virtue of His undeserved kindness in His Son's life, death, and resurrection in your place. This Body of which God made you a member is eternal, which means it will go on living, functioning, and serving long after all those other things and groups of this earth have passed away.

✘ But Christ's body works as God intends only when each member actively employs the diverse ways God has outfitted him/her to function in the one Body. When this happens, then all members of the Body benefit.

### **III. Every member of the Body is blessed.**

✘ Paul teaches in 2 Corinthians, chapter eight that part of the idea of giving and serving the Body of Christ isn't so that other members will do well while you suffer. No, the intent is so everyone will get along well. It may be that a time will come when you're the one who's physically or spiritually in need, and those who are healthy or who have more resources are then called by the Lord to help provide for your needs. Then, when you are healthy or your resources are more and someone else in the body needs help, that's when you are blessed to help them as members of the same Body of Christ.

→ Each member and each person's contributions of time, talents, and treasure are important to the Lord. Some may be more visible or of a different degree in quality or quantity, but in God's eyes all are equally important! It's vital folks that we all give; that we all serve in order that Christ's ministry of Word and Sacrament may continue here and elsewhere. Every function of the body is important, whether it's support for the Sunday School, our outreach events, Bible studies, care of the homebound, maintenance of the building, handling the books, singing in the choir and more.

- ⌘ Let's make sure though that this point is very clear: we don't do what we do as Christians in the Body of Christ to earn God's favor or to achieve His being pleased with us, do we? No, because God is already perfectly pleased with us on account of Christ Jesus' life, death, and the new life He gives us through faith. We can't earn anything from God; Jesus earned it all for us already! Rather we do what we do because of who we are and whose we are. We love because He first loved us; because His love is in us.

## **Conclusion**

- ⌘ So remember this as the first part of our stewardship journey this year friends. The Body of Christ consists of eyes, ears, and all its members...and you are each one of those members.
  - ➔ As God's stewards, you are each uniquely singular, yet profoundly plural. Even as your relationship with Jesus is a personal relationship, you are never alone in your faith. So it is with your stewardship as you live now for Christ and the mission of His Church in which He has grafted you into His body. You are blessed to be in His community of believers to serve the community in which we live for Christ and for the salvation of souls!
  - ➔ What a blessing from God, to be singular yet plural as God's profound *People With A Purpose*. Amen.