

Stewards by God's Design: The Three R's of the Christian Steward

Relationships – Responsibilities - Resources

My Responsibilities in Society

Goal: That participants would understand their stewardship responsibilities in society and live them out in everyday life.

Introduction: Ask participants to define “politics.” Ask them why politics is often such a divisive issue.

Note: Politics is defined as “the activities associated with the governance of a country or other area, especially the debate or conflict among individuals or parties having or hoping to achieve power.”

Background: In *The Genius of Luther's Theology*, Kolb and Arand write, “The third order within the structure of human life addresses temporal government...In his later years he (Luther) recognized the human need for organization in society. And so, against some Anabaptists of the sixteenth century, the Lutheran reformers stressed that ‘legitimate civil ordinances are good creations of God and divine ordinances.’ Christians could serve as princes, judges, and even soldiers. Good government (politicians and citizenship) protects the peace, punishes crime, promotes the common good, and supports the church, family, and other institutions. In the twenty-first century we would expand this to include the public life of citizenship and voluntary associations. This order also includes voluntary roles, such as coaches and athletes, volunteers in all areas of public service, and other aspects of life, such as friends simply doing things together. In his treatment of the fourth commandment, Luther points out that through civic rulers, as through parents, ‘God gives us food, house and home, protection and security, and he preserves us through them.’ Where peace exists, we have ‘our bodies and lives, wives and children, houses and homes, all our members—hands, feet, eyes—and all our health and liberty.’ Conversely, where ‘dissension, strife, and war prevail, there daily bread is already taken away or reduced.’...Overall, Luther identified at least three central responsibilities of temporal governments. First, temporal rulers must secure justice for those who fear God. Rulers are to provide the conditions under which God's Word can flourish within their lands. Second, government authorities need to help the poor, the orphans, and the widows find justice and thereby further their cause. This virtue includes tasks that range from establishing good laws and customs so that people live together peacefully, to endowing hospitals and filling community chests. Finally, rulers should protect and guard their people against violence and crime. For all these reasons, Luther in explaining the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer suggested that princes ought to emblazon on their coat of arms a loaf of bread instead of a lion in order to remind everyone that their office is one of providing peace and protection, without which bread could not be baked or eaten in peace.” Pages 61-62.

God created us to live in community. The forgiveness we have in Christ frees us to serve our neighbors in these communities. This order also includes government and how we, as stewards, are involved in this important part of society.

Ask participants what the role of government is to be in society. After they have had an opportunity to answer read the following quote from Kolb and Arand:

Robert Kolb and Charles Arand write in *The Genius of Luther's Theology*, "Good government (politics and citizenship) protects the peace, punishes crime, promotes the common good, and supports the church, family, and other institutions. In the twenty-first century we would expand this to include the public life of citizenship and voluntary associations. This order also includes voluntary roles, such as coaches and athletes, volunteers in all areas of public service, and other aspects of life, such as friends simply doing things together." Page 62.

In his Small Catechism Martin Luther identifies the following Bible passages as they relate to this order. What do each of these passages have to say to our lives in society as stewards by God's design?

Of Civil Government:

Romans 13:1-4 *Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.*

Comment: Timothy J. Wengert writes in *Martin Luther's Catechisms: Forming the Faith*, "Luther's point was to define and limit governmental authority. First, he defined it as directly instituted by God, a major shift from certain medieval models that argued that all authority, spiritual and temporal, was given to the church (with the pope as its head) and then through the papacy was transferred to secular authorities...Luther and other early Lutherans insisted that God had established government to maintain order and justice. Even this definition, however, implied a limit of sorts to governmental authority. It was as if Luther were saying to these officials, 'You are not self-appointed but God-appointed. Therefore, you must follow God's will and not your own.'...Luther did not simply argue for the God-given authority of government, but by including a portion of Rom. 13:4 he also defined its purpose: to execute punishment against evil doers. This simple definition, of course, implied for him that two things were simultaneously forbidden by this text: punishment of the innocent and exculpation of criminals. Thus, in his comments on the seventh commandment in the Large Catechism, he expressed dismay at the way the big shots, who were by far the biggest crooks, often got off scot-free." Page 159-160

Of Citizens:

Matthew 22:21 *Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.*

Comment: John T. Pless writes in *Praying Luther's Small Catechism*, "The Christian lives in God's kingdom inwardly and in the world's kingdom outwardly." Pless continues by quoting Martin Luther, "Christ himself made this distinction, and summed it all up very nicely when he said in Matthew 22:21, 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's' Now, if the imperial power extended into God's kingdom and authority, and were not something separate, Christ would not have made this distinction. For, as has been said, the soul is not under the authority of Caesar; he can neither teach nor guide it, neither kill it nor give it life neither bind it nor loose it, neither judge it nor condemn it, neither hold it fast nor release it. All this he would have to do, had he the authority to command it and to impose laws upon it. But with respect to the body, property, and honor he has indeed to do these things, for such matters are under his authority."

Pless adds, "Gerhard Ebeling nicely summarizes Luther's stance as it is reflected in the Table of Duties: 'Caesar must be given no less, but no more either, than what is Caesar's.'" Page 133-134

Romans 13:5-7 *Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. ⁶ For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. ⁷ Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.*

1 Timothy 2:1-3 *First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior,*

Titus 3:1 *Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work,*

1 Peter 2:13-14 *Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.*

Comment: John T. Pless writes in *Luther's Small Catechism: A Manual for Discipleship*, "Disciples are mandated to pray 'for kings and all those in authority, that they may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.' Hence Luther cites 1 Timothy 2:1-3, reminding Christians of our liturgical duty to serve as intercessors on behalf of those who rule over us, making, administering, and judging the laws of the land. Good government is a gift of daily bread for which Jesus teaches His disciples to pray. The inclusion of Titus 3:1 and 1 Peter 2:13-14 serve to echo and reinforce the truth of Paul's argument in Romans 13." Page 166

Christians are called to be model citizens. What does a model citizen look like?

Answers will vary. At the very least a model citizen should be informed, invested, and involved. Gene Edward Veith writes in his book, *God at Work*, “Christians live in the same communities as non-Christians. They not only typically work side-by-side with nonbelievers—they are citizens of the same nation. They have the same civic responsibilities as their non-Christian neighbors. Voting, getting involved in politics, agitating for causes, and trying to make their communities the best they can—all of these are part of the calling to be good citizens. Serving in the armed forces, pledging allegiance to the flag, loving one’s country, and other exercises of citizenship are also part of the Christian’s vocation.” Page 97

In his book, *The Ethics of Martin Luther*, Paul Althaus writes, “The people belong to God. Rulers ought never to forget this and treat the people as though they were their own property. They must view the people in the fear of God and in humility. The people ought to view their rulers in the same way...For the political authorities are also an order created by God.” Page 113.

How does the fact that we (and the government) belong to God impact how we steward our responsibility to society?

Answer: The fact that God is the Owner of everything means that the government belongs to Him. We take our stewardship responsibilities seriously whether they involve home, work, church, or society (government). Our desire is to be faithful, wise, and fruitful stewards over everything God has entrusted to our care and that includes our role in society. Veith writes, “But Christians do have a vocation to be good citizens, in every way that implies. They are to see God’s authority as looming behind the secular authorities who govern their nation. This includes obeying their rulers. In a democratic republic, however, the ultimate rulers are not officeholders but the people who elect them and to whom they are accountable. American Christians thus have the unusual vocation of being subjects and rulers at the same time.” Page 96-97

What do the following verses say about government?

Psalm 22:28 For kingship belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations.

Answer: God places rulers into positions of authority. As such they are to do His will. They are accountable to Him. They are to treat the people under their authority as God would treat them—with justice and love.

Job 12:23-24 He makes nations great, and he destroys them; he enlarges nations, and leads them away. He takes away understanding from the chiefs of the people of the earth and makes them wander in a trackless waste.

Answer: God is the one and only Owner of all that exists. As the Owner He has the right to make a nation great or bring it down. He does as He wills according to His design and purpose.

Acts 5:29 But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men."

Answer: God is the ultimate authority. If an earthly authority makes laws or tells us to do what is contrary to God's clear will, we are to obey God above all.

Jeremiah 29:7 But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

Answer: We are to pray for our communities, states, and country. We do so at God's command so we can flourish as He intends us to flourish.

Read the quote from Alvin Schmidt in the left-hand column in the participant's guide. Ask participants to react to his statement.

Conclude with this quote from Martin Luther found in *Devotions on the Small Catechism* (CPH 2019), "Nonetheless, worldly government is a glorious ordinance and splendid gift of God, who has instituted and established it and will have it maintained as something men cannot do without. If there were no worldly government, one man could not stand before another; each would necessarily devour the other, as irrational beasts devour one another." Page 130

Prayer: Dear Father, you have established governments in our world to protect us and to allow us to worship You in peace. Guide and direct leaders to look to You for wisdom as they go about their tasks. Help us to be faithful, wise, and fruitful stewards as we carry out the responsibilities You give us as we live in our communities and nation. In Jesus name, Amen.