



Those who know me well know I feel strongly that financial stewardship lies at the heart not only of an individual's relationship to God (do they serve God or mammon?) but at the heart of the macro issues facing our culture and the world — the environment, the poor, war, and conflict. For example:

Environment: It would be hard to imagine that the fact the U.S. spends more on trash bags than 90 other countries containing nearly half the world's population spend on *everything* (a stewardship issue) doesn't have implications for the environment.

The Poor: We're told that the top 20 percent of the world's population reaps almost 83 percent of the world's income and the bottom 20 percent receives only 2 percent. That's a stewardship issue and seems unconscionable from a Christian perspective.

War and Conflict: The growing gap between the rich and the poor (a stewardship issue) underlies a great deal of the social unrest and conflict in our world.

And recently I became aware of the way in which stewardship relates to another major issue in our culture — the value of human life.

David Henderson, a pastor in W. Lafayette, Indiana, wrote an article in his church newsletter stating that the very value of human life has been diminished as we think more and more in consumer and commodity terms. I draw heavily from his comments in the following paragraphs.

Human life is sacred, has value, because it comes from the hand of God. But when we largely remove God from the equation and allow commodity categories to take over, the *quality* of life, not life itself, matters most.



More than Just Money

In the American mind, as in the American city, says Henderson, the mall has displaced the sanctuary as the central piece of architecture. "We think in consumer categories, weighting benefit against cost, value against outlay, money gained against money spent ... Things that don't meet our needs, we take back — or throw it away and get a new one.

And it is more and more as consumers, not as created beings, that we view each other, weighing the value of human life in utilitarian, bottom-line terms. We value spouses ... if and only if they meet our needs. We esteem friends ... on the condition that they make life better for us. We welcome children ... if they don't prove too great a burden. We honor our elders ... so long as they are careful to honor us."

"When we view each other through consumer eyes, we come to value only those who benefit us, and we grow to lament those who cost us, even if only a little."

And so we see the seemingly ever-present concept of stewardship permeating the major issues of our culture. There is truth in the statement, "For a Christian, *all* of life is stewardship."

I hope those of you who are stewardship leaders aren't overwhelmed by the magnitude of the impact of stewardship. Rather, I hope it puts fire in your bones regarding the importance of your ministry in a much larger context than just helping people manage money well.

In an article entitled "An Obituary For Jesus" which appeared in the *Economist* some years ago, the following quote appeared: "Nearly two billion people unblushingly call themselves Christians, happily breaking almost every commandment should the occasion arise, serving mammon and goodness knows who else."

Let's unabashedly and energetically be about whittling that number down, one life at a time, through effective stewardship ministries! |w