



**CANADIAN CONFERENCE**  
of Mennonite Brethren Churches

**ARTICLE 15 [MB Confession of Faith]**

# Stewardship

## COMMENTARY

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Stewards are persons who hold something of value in trust for another through care and management, and who give an account to an owner. In the widest sense, humanity has a stewardship responsibility for Earth. Moreover, the church is distinct from all other human agencies in that it holds in trust the treasure of the gospel (1 Cor. 4:1). In the narrowest sense each individual is accountable as a steward of God's gifts.

### **Stewardship of the Earth**

#### Divine Concern for Creation:

Christians are obviously included in the "creation mandate" which calls for humans to "have dominion over the earth" as illustrated in the Garden of Eden by Adam, who was mandated to till the ground and guard it (Gen. 1:28-31; 2:15). God, the undisputed maker and possessor of all (Gen. 1:1; 14:19; Ps. 24:1) has compassion for the land and its creatures and cares for all His creation (Jonah 4:11; Ps. 104:10-30; 36:6; Joel 2:22). The prophets envision a time of harmony between humans and animals (Isa. 11:1-10; cf. 65:25; 35:1-7,9; Hosea 2:18). God's salvation plan also includes the eventual creation of a new earth (Isa. 65:17; Rom. 8:20-22).

#### Human Responsibility for Creation:

To be a steward of the earth means to manage well such natural resources as water and forests, and to tend plants and animals with the same compassion God shows. Examples from biblical law substantiate this. Bird nests are not to be destroyed (Deut. 22:6-7). Animals are to be cared for (Deut. 25:4; Prov. 12:10). Limits are put on the use of trees for war (Deut. 20:19). The ground, which produces what creatures need, is not to be exploited—a teaching made clear in the provision that the land be left fallow every seventh year and also during the year of Jubilee (Lev. 25).

#### Morality and the Environment:

There is a strong link between the moral life of a people and the condition of the natural world. Humanity's violence brought the Noahic flood (Gen. 6-9). Havoc on the earth will be the consequence of human evil (Hos. 4:1-3). Jeremiah paints a scene not unlike a nuclear winter, an outcome, as the larger context makes clear, due to human wrongdoing (Jer. 4:23-26). It is in large part because of human greed that land becomes a desert due to deforestation, soil deteriorates with overuse of chemicals, fish and birds die from water pollution. The conclusion follows, positively stated, that the earth will be helped by unselfish, compassionate, and responsible living by its human inhabitants.

### **Responsible Living**

#### Realigned Perspectives:

Responsible living includes a full acknowledgment that life, time, abilities, opportunities, and material goods are from God. God is the source and rightful owner of all (Ps. 24:1). He is the origin of human life (Gen. 2:7; 21-23), and gives the gift of procreation whereby human beings come to life (Ruth 4:13; 1 Sam. 1:27). God gives the power to get wealth (Deut. 8:18; 1 Chron. 29:12), as well as abilities such as craftsmanship (Bezalel and Oholiab in Exod. 36:1) and insight (Solomon in 1 Kings 3:10-12). The land is



repeatedly designated as “gift” or “given by God” to Israel. Deuteronomy alone has 30 such statements (e.g. 5:31; 9:6; 26:9). It was God to whom patriarchs such as Abraham and Isaac and Job owed their material prosperity (Job 42:10). God is the giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17).

God’s generous gift-giving calls for the human response of thanksgiving to the Giver. Believers are warned against an attitude of arrogance (1 Tim. 6:17-19). The successful and well-to-do are to resist the temptation to boast (Deut. 8:11-17). The attitude instead is to be one of gratitude. Moreover, since God’s gifts are in the nature of “trusts,” humans are accountable for the way these gifts are managed and used.

#### Managing God’s Gifts:

All God’s gifts—abilities, wealth, time, the environment—are to be managed well. The gifts of life and its pleasures are to be enjoyed (1 Tim. 6:17). Neither Old nor New Testament censures the rich for being rich, but both give ample instructions on the use of wealth and warn against temptations that come with wealth.

Jesus condemns selfishness but not all self interest. Wealth is to be used as an investment to “store up *for yourselves* treasures in heaven” (Matt. 6:20, emphasis added). One cannot serve God and wealth (Matt. 6:24). Intent on seeking first the kingdom of God, Christians will order their finances according to that priority (Matt. 6:19-21, 33). Every spending decision, it has been said, is a spiritual decision.

A repeated exhortation is for people to be mindful of the poor. God expresses a preferential outlook toward the poor. The prophets have sharp words for those who exploit the poor (Isa 3:15; Amos 2:6-7). The poor are not to be shunned but helped (Deut. 15:7-11; Prov. 17:5; 19:17; cf. Eph. 4:28). The early church cared for the poor and took offerings for them (Acts 6:1-7). Believers are admonished not to neglect the poor (James 2:14-17; 1 John 3:16-18).

#### Counsel on Wealth:

Amos strikes hard at the rich, noting their penchant for lavish expenditures for furniture, food, entertainment, and cosmetics. Luxurious living becomes wrong where there is an unconcern for the “ruin of Joseph”; in other words, inattention to the physical or spiritual impoverishment of others (Amos 6:4-7). The “urge to splurge” should be curbed. Instead of “conspicuous consumption,” Christians should be known by “compassionate concern.”

Materialism is the eagerness to have and to hold possessions and the preoccupation with money for self-advantage. Materialism, according to Jesus, is both foolish and sinful (Luke 12:13-24). A third of Jesus’ parables deal with economics; in these Jesus insists on accountability and warns against selfishness which utilizes abilities and money only for enhancement of the self to the exclusion of others. Paul warns against the love of money (1 Tim. 6:6-10). Contentment is urged, as is simplicity of life (Phil. 4:11; 1 Tim. 6:8).

Covetousness is prohibited (Exod. 20:17) and strong warnings are given against grasping and greed (Luke 12:15; Jude 11). Israel at Kadesh Barnea, when trying stubbornly to grasp the promised land, was denied it (Num. 14). Elijah the prophet severely reprimanded King Ahab for wanting to seize Naboth’s vineyard (1 Kings 21). Gehazi coveted...and lost! (2 Kings 5:20-27). Grasping is a twin to coveting. The seriousness of coveting, accompanied in this instance by deceit, is demonstrated in the story of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5).

## Generous Giving

#### Motivations:

Teaching about generous financial giving is concentrated in 2 Corinthians 8-9 where Paul lists reasons for generosity. First, generosity follows the self-giving model of Jesus (8:9). Second, our contributions bring good to the lives of others, through which God is glorified (9:12-14). Third, generosity brings large benefits to the contributors (9:6, 14; also Luke 6:38; Gal. 6:7). Fourth, giving follows the example of others who model spiritual maturity (8:1-5). Fifth, giving helps achieve the goal of equality (8:14). Sixth, generosity is the tangible response of gratitude to God (9:15). It is sinfully self-serving and contrary to



kingdom living to be tight-fisted or so attached to things (cars, properties, money, stocks, homes, expensive vacations) that finances are unavailable for God's kingdom ministry. It has been well said: "We are voting for God's rule when we give."

**Guidelines:**

Paul urged regular, systematic, and proportional financial contributions (1 Cor. 16:1; cf. Deut. 16:17). The tithe represents a standard (Matt. 23:23; Num. 18:26; Mal. 3:10), but Christian giving goes beyond the tithe (1 Cor. 16:1-2; Luke 21:2-4). In the words of another: "Tithing is not God's plan for raising money, but his plan for raising his children." Generosity is the antidote to the sin of covetousness. Christian giving calls for administrative prompting and planning (2 Cor. 8:16-9:5). With many noble causes competing for a Christian's generosity, the believer will rely on prayer and the Spirit's guidance in money-matter decisions. The principle of storehouse tithing, interpreted as supporting financially the agencies of the local church and the denomination, is sensible and sound (Mal. 3:6-10). For the Christian, giving should not be burdensome. The believer has good reason to give cheerfully, with joy, even exuberance.

