

Faithful Stewards: What God Requires of Those He Entrusts

“Put in Trust with the Gospel”

Stewardship of God’s Word

1 Thessalonians 2:3-4

In our study of stewardship, we began in 1 Corinthians 4:1-2, where the Apostle Paul defines what a steward is: he is not the owner, but one entrusted with something that belongs to another, and one the one requirement of a steward is faithfulness.

We then looked at 1 Corinthians 3:5-11, where the Apostle reminds us that the church is God’s building. Men plant and water, but God gives the increase. We saw that Christ is the only foundation and that the work is His — we are merely laborers in it.

With that foundation laid on stewardship, we are faced with a very important and foundational question: *What is the greatest thing God has entrusted to His church?*

- It is not money; it is not property; it is not position; it is not structure.
- The greatest thing we’ve been entrusted with is His Word.

In verse 4, Paul says, *“We were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel...”* That phrase explains everything else in the chapter.

The church began, as we will find, not with a constitution, not with officers, not with procedures, but it began with the gospel of God — entrusted, proclaimed, received, and obeyed.

As we continue in our stewardship series, I want us to see what stewardship of God's Word looks like in the church. In 1 Thessalonians 2, we see that:

- The Word founded the church.
- The Word was faithfully delivered.
- The Word was faithfully received.

And what began the church must continue to govern the church.

I. THE WORD FOUNDED THE CHURCH (VS. 1-2)

"We were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God..."

A. The church began with the Gospel (vs. 1)

1. The church then, and the true church now, exists because the Word of God was preached.

The idea behind "*not in vain*" is that it was, in fact, a fruitful time that the team had in Thessalonica, in spite of the opposition they endured.

2. The first act in Thessalonica was not organizing a church; it was proclaiming the gospel (found in Acts 17:1-4).

Before there was organization, officers, policies, procedures, there was the gospel of God. A constitution may define how we function, but the gospel defines why we exist.

1 Corinthians 3:11

¹¹ For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

B. The church was built through boldness (vs. 2)

1. *"Bold...to speak the gospel of God"* — opposition didn't stop them from doing what God gave them to do.

Romans 1:16

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

2. *"With much contention"* — if the gospel is given with boldness, it is going to be met *"with much contention."*

The word for "contention" (ἀγών) is a term that was often associated with the competition in the Grecian games of the day. "In the [New Testament], it is presented as the life task of the Christian" (Zodhiates).

Jude 3

³ Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort *you* that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

- If the Word founded the church, it must continue to define it.

II. THE WORD WAS FAITHFULLY DELIVERED (VS. 3-12)

A. Delivered in purity (vs. 3-6)

1. It was not *"of deceit"* (vs. 3a)
 - a) The Word of God must never be taught with any burden placed upon it other than the burden of obedience.

2 Corinthians 4:2

² But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

- b) The Apostle Paul arrived in Thessalonica on a mission to establish a church with people that received the gospel of the grace of God. He did not stray from that mission. His only desire was to preach Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2).

1 Corinthians 2:2

² For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

- 2. It was not of "*uncleanness*" (vs. 3b)

The Word of God in no way, and at no time, is to be taught or handled with any impropriety or uncleanness.

- 3. It was not of "*guile*" (vs. 3c)

There was no intent to mislead or deceive; no intent to cause an ungodly lifestyle; and no intent to use improper means to win converts.

- 4. It was not for "*pleasing men, but of God, who trieth the hearts*" (vs. 4b)

- a) Because they were entrusted with the gospel, they handled it the way they should (vs. 4a).
- b) Nothing that is done in church when it comes to handling the Word of God as good stewards should be done for the sake of pleasing people.

Galatians 1:10

¹⁰ For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.

5. It was not to flatter others — “*neither at any time used we flattering words*” (vs. 5a)

There was never a time when the people of Thessalonica, believers or unbelievers, were in any way influenced with vain promises of glory or riches just for following the Apostle Paul and his team.

6. It was not for a “*cloke of covetousness*” (vs. 5b)

His desire, and that of his missionary team, was to present themselves, and the gospel of Christ, clearly and openly so as not to be misunderstood. There was no other motive, no other intent than that.

7. It was not to seek “glory” from others for themselves (vs. 6) — it was not self-serving.

➤ Stewardship emphasis — the Word cannot be altered to fit preference or personality.

B. Delivered with sacrifice (vs. 7-9)

The church was treated gently at great sacrifice to the Apostle Paul.

1. “*Gentle...even as a nurse*” — most likely speaking of a nursing mother in this context (vs. 7).

The analogy of the kind of gentleness Paul used in relation to the believers is that of a loving mother who used love and tenderness in raising

her children. There will be the need for correction and discipline but always in love and tenderness.

2. They were willing to impart their own souls for the believers in the church (vs. 8).

It wasn't just the Apostle Paul that this is said of, but Silas and Timothy as well. They were seen as assisting him in his work, and by application today, if those in position of assisting in the ministry of the Word of God are not gentle and compassionate then the church will suffer for it.

3. Paul (and his team) refused financial support in Thessalonica so that no accusation could be used to discredit the gospel (vs. 9).

In Thessalonica — a brand-new church in a pagan, suspicious culture — he chose to forgo his right to support so that the gospel would not be discredited.

- Stewardship emphasis — leadership serves the Word; it does not wield it for advantage.

C. Delivered with accountability (vs. 10-12)

1. The example that was demonstrated in the lives of the missionary team (vs. 10):
 - a) "*Holily*" — their life was one of a right standing with God, first and foremost.
 - b) "*Justly*" — their walk as observed by those around them was one of righteousness.
 - c) "*Unblameably*" — they were not sinless but their

lives were lived so close to the Lord that they were viewed by those around them as being as faultless as possible.

James 3:1

¹ My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.

2. The church was taught how to follow the example (vs. 11).

1 Timothy 4:16

¹⁶ Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

3. The goal of the Word of God then, and still today, is that every believer *"walk worthy of God."*
- Stewardship emphasis — those who handle the Word will answer for how they handled it. And when the Word is handled faithfully, the church must decide how it will receive it.

III. THE WORD WAS FAITHFULLY RECEIVED (VS. 13-20)

A. Received as from God (vs. 13)

"Not as the word of men..."

1. This is the reason they were so receptive to Paul and his team; this is the reason they followed the example set forth by them; and this is why they were so eager to *"walk worthy of God."*
2. It was their acceptance of the Scriptures as coming from God rather than from the mind of man that was critical to their believing it as truth.

2 Timothy 3:16

¹⁶ All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

Psalm 119:160

¹⁶⁰ Thy word *is* true *from* the beginning; and every one of thy righteous judgments *endureth* for ever.

B. Received with endurance (vs. 14-16)

1. When the Word of God is the ruling principle of the church, opposition is going to follow.

2 Timothy 3:12

¹² Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

John 15:20

²⁰ Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.

2. The Thessalonians suffered just as the churches in Judaea had suffered (vs. 14b).
3. Those who opposed the gospel were opposing God's saving purpose (vs. 15-16)
4. They tried to forbid Paul and his team from speaking "*to the Gentiles that they might be saved* (2:16)." That was the heart of the matter.

- Stewardship emphasis — faithful stewardship does not retreat when the Word is resisted.

C. Received with eternity in view (vs. 17-20, primarily 19-20)

1. The stewardship of the Word of God produced believers — *"Are not even ye..."*
 2. The stewardship of the Word of God produced perseverance — *"...in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?"*
 3. The stewardship of the Word of God will produce eternal rejoicing — *"For ye are our glory and joy"* (vs. 20).
- Stewardship emphasis — how we treat the Word now will be revealed at Christ's coming.

Conclusion:

When Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, he did not commend them for their structured way of operating a church or their organizational skills. He thanked God that they received the Word of God as the Word of God and nothing else. That is the heart of stewardship.

As we found in this message that the church was born by the Word, nurtured by the Word, endured because of the Word, and the church will rejoice eternally because of the Word.

If that is true — and it is — then the Word must remain the ruling authority in the church. Not tradition; not preference; not personality; not even leadership.

In fact, leadership and congregation must submit to the Word. We are not owners of it — we are stewards of it. And one day, according to 1 Corinthians 4:5, the Lord will bring to light the hidden things and reveal the counsels of the hearts. How we handled His Word will matter.

So, the question for us is simple: Do we treat the Word as the foundation of the church? Do we handle it faithfully? Do

we receive it as divine authority?

As stated earlier, what began the church must continue to govern the church.

More importantly than whether you belong to a church or not is whether you belong to Christ or not. Church membership will have no bearing on your eternity in heaven — only trust in Christ does.