

VII. Christian Stewardship in Biblical Perspective

Lifestyle Stewardship

“Found Faithful—On Message”

II Timothy 3:16, 17

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I'd like to look at two passages. One being II Timothy 3 and then our foundational text for these three studies on the stewardship of the church of its mission, message and ministry as it is so succinctly put together for us in Matthew 28. We'll start by looking at Matthew 28:16–20 which says [16] *Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.* [17] *And when they saw him they worshiped him, **but some doubted.*** [18] *And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.* [19] *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

Yesterday was Reformation Day. We take time on this day to remember what God did in His providence to revive, reclaim, and reform His church that had lost its way in terms of mission, message and ministry. We are currently in a series on the stewardship of the church, stewarding its mission, message and ministry. How are we to understand that and what are the interdependencies in its relationships? October 31, 503 years ago, in the town of Wittenberg a non-descript professor, Dr. Martin Luther, had risen early and taken what he had prepared over to the castle church. On the side door of the church either he or his assistant took out the nail and hammer and posted the 95 Theses. They had platforms in the 1500s which typically was a door rather than what we know of posting on social media. The 95 Theses were focused on one particular issue directed toward the community and the university, which had filled his soul, heart and life and it was the issue of how a man could be right with God. This is the repetitious statement in the book of Job. How can man whose evil always rises up every get right with God? That question is answered in divine Gospel terms but the church in that day had lost its way.

Across the river was a man that Luther wanted to make sure didn't get across that bridge in Wittenberg and his name was Johann Tetzel. Under papal decree Tetzel had a message and he even had a song to go with his message. Basically they would sell indulgences whereby a person could secure the release from purgatory of one's relatives and instead of them to possibly gain heaven through the works of purgatory they could be sent onto heaven by the person's offering and his little song stated that. The song went like this; ‘When the coin in the coffer rings, another soul from purgatory springs.’

Martin Luther's anger at such apostasy, its manipulation and deceitfulness so filled him that he was going to confront it, make sure it didn't come into to Wittenberg but more than that he called for a debate with the best debaters the church could muster. There were many issues they were dealing with but the foundational one at this moment was around justification – how can men who are sinners be right with God who is holy? Does the church save? How does one get saved? Is it by penitence, indulgences, relics, the prayers of the saints, the merits of the saints? What is it that actually secures salvation or can it be secured? For Luther, this was much

more than a theological debate and even much more than a pastoral concern for the hearts and souls where people would not be deceived and manipulated.

It was in Luther's own journey while even in his pursuit of ministry he would rail against God, whom he hated because he couldn't be right with Him and couldn't find the way to be right with Him. He had no peace and then in his assigned study by a wise mentor in the book of Romans there was Romans 1:16–17 which says, *[16] For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. [17] For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."* It is not my righteousness which is filthy rags from which I get no peace but the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. You access it by faith and once accessed it becomes the foundation whereby your faith begins to grow.

In other words, justification founded by faith in Christ and His righteousness then leads to a life of sanctification to become more like Christ because now you are set free to obey out of love for Christ instead out of fear wondering if you can do well enough to get to heaven. You have already heard that you can't get to heaven on your own merits but what you can't do God sent His Son to do for you. Now you have received Him by faith so you are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

Luther wanted to debate all the issues thus not just one thesis but he wrote 95 Theses. The debates began to go forward. There were three of them that took place in the coming months. After that came the definitive forum in which all of Christendom, the power of the state, the Holy Roman Empire and Charles V were all placed before Luther and his books. They called him to repent as Luther was under a sentence of death by the state and fire. He prayed through the night and then went before all the power that was arrayed against him saying 'Unless I am convinced by Scripture here I stand. It is not the power arrayed against me. It is not the threat of my death. The body they may kill but God's truth abideth still.'

Now we begin to see the true foundational issue of the Reformation. Yes the foundational issue was how a man gets right with God but how do you know that is true? As the powers before Luther responded they said 'Martin Luther, the counsels say, the fathers say, the creeds say' and Luther says 'Counsels, creeds, fathers and popes do err, but God's Word is true and there is where I rest my argument. While we thank God for the insights of counsels, teachers and leaders it's all measured by root and metric – is it faithful to God's Word. Unless I am convinced from Scripture, here I stand. I can do no other.' So that is, what becomes the crux which now brings us to our journey of examining stewardship not only personally but through the stewardship of the church.

God has given me the breath of my life so how can I be according to Your Word, the power of the Spirit and love to Jesus be found faithful with the time You have given me in this life? Redeem the time for the days are evil. God how can I be faithful with the talents You have given me? There are some amazing talents here at Briarwood. It is not only your mental talents, physical talents, your skills but your spiritual gifts. Everyone has a spiritual gift that God is developing that fits right into that glorious body of Christ that only you have. How is my gift to be used for the sake of Christ through His church to extend the Kingdom of God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

There is also the stewardship of our resources, our roles, our responsibilities and our relationships. God I will bring Your tithe in worship for I will not rob You and give You praise. I know God that You have calling on my life for offerings – maybe it's the faith promise offering or alms offering or whatever it might be. Here are my offerings – my mercy offering, my love offerings, my free will offerings. I want to be faithful in stewardship but the question is as you

bring that stewardship of time, treasure, and talent to Christ through His church, how is it to be stewarded by the church? That is where the church's stewardship is crucial. We have to be on mission, on message and in ministry.

Why was there such theological heresy, error and apostasy during Luther's time? The church lost its message because it lost its mission. In the 13th, 14th and 15th century the church had lost its mission for the church's mission began to be the church. The church existed for the church, accruing power, accruing wealth, accruing influence, accruing dominion of itself in the world. When you get attached to the world's power structures then corruption happens and that's what happened over those hundreds of years – corruption of the leadership, teaching, ministries, the doctrine, worship, sacraments etc. and then came invented doctrine. Every time the church gets off mission the new mission will soon define its message. So when the church exists for itself then the church comes up with exotic biblical doctrines like penitence, indulgences, relics, salvation by the church and not a church that teaches you salvation by Christ. They teach salvation by works so they can control those who are a part of it.

So how does the church get its mission where its mission is the church? Isn't that the way we are? Why did God make us? We have a catechism question that asks, what is the chief end of man? It is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, but when we are born in this world do we glorify God and enjoy Him or do we glorify ourselves and create a joy that exists to give me joy? That is what sin does, we make it all about ourselves. When a church gets separated from its fixation by faith and devotion to Christ then the church does the same thing where it becomes all about its existence and itself. Then the church begins to develop a doctrine that supports that and they lose the message.

We have learned that our mission has been given to us by Christ. Our mission is not cultural transformation. Our mission is sinner salvation and transformation. Praise God that when sinners get saved their lives change including their relationships and businesses and cultures get transformed as a result of us staying on mission. If the church exists to say you will be successful in life then the church's message will be changed to a prosperity gospel. If it exist for your self-esteem then the church will come up with a therapy gospel. If the church exists for growth the church will come up with a pragmatic gospel. I'm all for growth but that will be a consequence of staying on mission, on message and in ministry. So those are things that will begin to happen if the church's existence is all about the numbers, the nickels and the noise.

We have to stay on mission with target fixation – make disciples. God has given us four ministries to do this. One is the ministry of exaltation which is upreach to God – worship. Another is the ministry of evangelism which is outreach to the world. This is supported by the ministry of enfolding as people are being added to the body of Christ. Then Jesus tells us in the Great Commission to teach them all that He has commanded and this is where we get our message for we get all that God has commanded us to use to make disciples from His Word, beginning in Genesis and ending in Revelation.

Jesus said in John 17:17, [17] *Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.* Jesus says in John 6:63, [63] *It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.* The Spirit of God from Jesus works with the Word of God from Jesus to save sinners to the glory and grace of God for Jesus. To do the mission, we have to steward the message. That is why Paul, after three years in Ephesus, said to the elders in Acts 20:26–27 [26] *Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all,* [27] *for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.* Paul did this publically and to the house of God.

The message is the Bible. Why is it important for us to hold onto the Bible? It is because that is the Divine message. Now I'd like to look in II Timothy 3. I want to come at this passage maybe a little differently this time. II Timothy 3:16–17 says *[16] All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be complete (competent), equipped for every good work.*

This is Paul's last letter. He is about to die. He is in his second Roman imprisonment. Before he dies he gives these instructions to Timothy. After he tells Timothy about the Scripture he then tells Timothy in the very next verses, II Timothy 4:1–5, *[1] I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: [2] **preach the Word**; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. [3] For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, [4] and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. [5] As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*

Preaching is not the only means of getting the Word to people. We do a lot of means when we gather for worship on the Lord's Day. We sing hymns, psalms and spiritual songs. We have sung the Word of God. We confess the Word of God. We read the Word of God. We pray the Word of God. There are multiple means whereby we get to God's Word and God's Word gets to us but the primary means is the preaching of the Word. That is why Paul says in I Corinthians 1:21, *[21] For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God **through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.***

Today on Reformation Sunday I am wearing a reformation gown. What was the purpose of the gown? It was first of all to say that the preacher was no more special than all the rest who attend. So instead of all these multi-colored vestments, the preacher was dressed in black. Why? It is so the preacher is blacked out because it's not the preacher, it's the preaching. *[17] So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ* (Romans 10:17). It is through the foolishness of the message preached but notice it's not preaching that saves, it's the message preached that saves. That is why Satan loves to destroy the doctrinal integrity of churches. If he can get to the message then they can't do the mission or he'll get them off mission and that's another way he gets to the message which is the way you totally destroy the ministries of the church.

So our message is the Word of God. That is what we are to preach and this text in II Timothy 3:16–17 told us four things about the Bible, the message we are to steward. Number one is that it is a God given Word. All Scripture is inspired, breathed out by God. It is an interesting word here. It is the Greek word *theopneustos* – with *theo* meaning God and *pneustos* meaning breathed. In other words, the Bible is here because God breathed it out. The Holy Spirit – the breath of God – through holy men (Prophets from the Old Testament), Apostles from the New Testament) carried along holy men through which His Word comes. I like the way Peter says it – *ferried holy men.*

For instance, you don't hear the writers of Scripture say 'I've been thinking about God and I'd like to share this with you.' Isaiah would say 'Thus saith the Lord...' Now you have to figure out if he's crazy or is he telling you the truth. The other Prophets did the same thing. One of the Apostles, Paul when writing to Thessalonians says in I Thessalonians 2:13, *[13] And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.*

We saw what Jesus said in John 17:17 that Thy Word is truth so from Genesis to Revelation the church does not make the Bible. God makes the Bible and the church receives the Bible. So we receive from God His Word which has come from God to us and that Word is true at every point. The word all in the phrase 'all Scripture is breathed out' from II Timothy 3:16 means 'every one of' and sometimes in the Bible the word all means 'all kinds of' but that is not the word used in this verse. II Chronicles 5:13, I Thessalonians 2:1 are the Bible, God's Word. Whatever you pick from the Bible is God's Word. Hebrews 4:12 says *[12] For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.* Every single passage of Scripture is God's Word.

Secondly, we see from II Timothy 3:16 that God's Word is a profitable message and wherever you pick in the Bible, it's profitable. Numbers 3:4 is profitable and the reason I use that is because that is where when one reads through the Bible in a year one tends to stop in this book due to all the genealogies, but there is something profitable there. Why is God's Word profitable? It is because God's Word shows me my sin, my helplessness, my hopelessness and my need for a Savior. It shows me I cannot save myself. If we could save ourselves or a man-made religion could save us then why did Jesus go to that cross? He went to that cross to die an atoning death to pay for our sins and to provide for us a perfect righteousness.

I not only have a profitable Bible because it exposes my sin and my need of a Savior but it exalts Jesus as my Savior and Lord. It tells me who He is and what He has done so that my doubts can be sent away. From the passage I read at the beginning of the study, it said in Matthew 28:17–18a *[17] And when they saw him they worshiped him, **but some doubted.** [18] And Jesus came and said to them...* After we see that some doubted the very next verse is important because it said 'Jesus came and said to them' for it's the Word of Christ that sends our doubts away. Faith comes by hearing and hearing the Word of Christ that Christ through His Word begins to speak to your heart. Jesus says 'My sheep know My voice and they follow Me' (John 10:27).

There are some of you that need to be comforted and He is comforting you. There are some that need to be convicted and He is convicting you. As one preacher said 'Praise God that in the preaching of the Word He convicts the comfortable and comforts the convicted.' The same sermon will get both of them done in the lives of people. It's amazing what the Holy Spirit does with the Word of God. The Word of God does its work and it's so glorious.

I have bad news for you. I have been saying for a while now that come this January 2021 I'll be starting a series on the book of Romans. This last week I started reading the book of Malachi and I was so convinced that you all needed Malachi. Then one of my best friends gave me a commentary from one of my old professors on Micah and now I'm convinced you all need to hear from Micah. I plan to stick with Romans but when I read His Word I see how all of it is profitable. I'm just sorry I don't have enough life times to walk through it for God's people.

I used to avoid preaching like the plague. When I was converted I started looking up who was preaching where on each day of the week. The night I was converted I read through all of the New Testament. I just was so hungry for the Word. I was an athlete, young and eager to tell others about Christ so Faith Presbyterian made me the Youth Director. I didn't know anything about doing that. One night we were headed to this Bible study I had started on Wednesday night and it was growing like crazy but I didn't know what to say this night. It was like I had run out of things to say. My wife suggested some Old Testament Bible stories so she started reading one and explaining it to me while we were in the car headed to the Bible study that night. I had gotten so excited about what my wife was telling me that one it was unbelievable and two I had

something to tell the kids when I got in there. All Scripture is God-given and profitable for us and this leads me to number three.

Thirdly, God's Word is a life changing message. It will change the lives of believers. First of all it changes you because it assures you that your guilt and shame are gone because Jesus took it away. Romans 8:1 says *[1] There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* Then Jesus tells you that He will be with you all the way to glory. He will comfort you, convict you and help you grow. So it's not only a message of assured justification but it's a message of anticipated sanctification as you grow, not for grace but in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

It's a glorious life changing work. Look at those in the Bible. Moses, a murderer, Paul, a murderer and David, a murderer and yet they become stalwarts. Paul before coming to Jesus is a religious terrorist who kills Christians and then meets Jesus and becomes an evangelist. Paul who before destroys churches becomes a church planter when He comes to Jesus. This is what God's Word does in a believer's life. It changes lives.

Fourthly, God's Word is a sufficient message. It gives us all we need in Christ for life. It's an infallible Word. It's an inerrant Word. II Timothy 3:17 says *[17] that the man of God may be complete (competent), equipped for every good work.* It has all that I need to know to believe and live for Jesus. God has given me the Bible to read and study it. You can be a Berean Christian where they heard the Word with eagerness and they examined the Scriptures every day to see if it was so (Acts 17:11). Hearing the Word preached, examining the Scriptures and building the Word into your life is what helps us know God.

One of the reasons, historically speaking, we have this Bible that you can read while I'm preaching to make sure I'm not departing from it and then go study on your own, is because of these Reformers like Luther. For many of them the last sounds they heard were those pipes as they were being burned to death and most of them were burned to death so you could have a Bible.

Here is our takeaway. We have been given much from God through His people so let's stay on mission so we can stay on message so that we can stay in ministry of evangelism, worship, enfolding and disciple making. That is where we'll go. I'll confess I'm a historian and that is a romanticist by nature. I love to get insight while I'm onsite and I'll never forget the very first time I went to Oxford. Cambridge gave birth to the Reformers and Oxford burned them. I remember looking for the street that had the marble stones arranged in a cross because three of my great heroes died right there – Cranmer, Latimer and Ridley.

As soon as bloody Mary came to the throne and killed Lady Jane Grey she then went after the men who had written the Book of Common Prayer to elevate the Scriptures over the church, to build the church on the Scriptures, who had pastored Edward VI and who was engaged in what was known as the English Reformation. She put all three men on trial – Octogenarians, Thomas Cranmer, Nicholas Ridley (the bishop of London) and Hugh Latimer (the great preacher of the Gospel). Hugh Latimer with John Knox had evangelized the military compounds and all the places he would go. They convicted all three of them.

This happened 38 years after Luther. In October of 1555 they put Ridley and Latimer at the stake. As they were tying their bonds Ridley said to his captor, 'Tie my bonds tight for when the fire comes I do not want to leave my post for Jesus.' Latimer heard Ridley and said to him 'Ah Mr. Ridley, be of good cheer for today by God's grace you and I can light a candle for Jesus that shall not be put out in all of England. Play the man.' It would take hours for Ridley to die because the flames only burned his lower portions and he was literally pleading for the fire in the name of Jesus. Latimer went quickly, but when I stood there, the next thing I did was walk about

125 yards to the jail of Oxford where at the top of it they made Cranmer watch the burning of the two.

For the next five months they put Cranmer through torture scraping the ends of his fingers off because his church had baptized people and he was declared an apostasy. They shaved his head and made him go without sleep. They continued the torture and five months later in March of 1556 in the middle of the night he finally broke and signed an incantation of all that he had believed in the Reformation. They were going to make a spectacle of him so the next morning they brought him to the University chapel and carved a notch out of the platform as they were going to stand him there and ridicule him as he recanted. From the moment of his demise when he had recanted the courage of God filled his soul again so when they put him on that platform he began to recite the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed. Then he recanted of all of his recantations. He put his arm out and said 'I will put this hand forward that betrayed Christ that it might be burned first.' In anger they swept him away to that stake where his friends had died five months earlier. So in March 1556 it is there that Cranmer lost his life.

Why did these people do this? Most of them did it yes, to capture the Gospel but why we believe it is true is because of the authority and sufficiency of the message as they stewarded the message and that's why they died. They died so you could have the Bible in your hands. You can have a Bible in your hand in your own language. You can hear that Bible preached in your own language. You can examine that Bible to see if these things are so. They knew you can't get to the God of the Word without the Word of God. Thus God calls us – stay on mission, on message and in ministry. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You for the glorious Word of God and the contours of the Gospel that fill it. As we go throughout the Word of God we keep coming to Jesus for He's the Ark, the Offering, the Prophet, the Priest, the King, the Scapegoat who takes away our sins, the Lamb that makes an atonement for our sins so we hold to the whole counsel of God to teach all that You have commanded because all that You have given and commanded points to You, which is why when You preach they would say 'Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets He explained Himself in all the Scripture' (Luke 24:27). Jesus, keep us please, in this present distress, in all of this chaos, for the sake of what we desire to happen around us, on mission to make disciples, on message, the Gospel declared in the whole counsel of God and in ministry of upreach (worship), outreach (evangelism), inreach (loving and enfolding one another) and downreach, as we make disciples. God, please give us in this season of personal stewardship a renewal of our church stewardship. For God's glory Briarwood is committed to worshipping God, equipping Christians to worship God to reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ, in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

Found Faithful—On Message

- A God-Given Message
- A Profitable Message
- A Life-Changing Message
- A Sufficient Message

Life Takeaway

On Mission – On Message – In Ministry