

# A Steward of the Mysteries of God – 2 Tim 3:16-4:2, 1 Cor 4:1-2, Rom 1:16-17

**Introduction** – The Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century gave the church many gifts, not the least of which was the recovery of the doctrine of the Word of God and the power of that Word preached to the nations. It was a combination of Sola Scriptura, the declaration that the Scriptures are our only ultimate and infallible authority for faith and practice, and the recovery of a high view of the pulpit and the preached Word. Out of the Reformation came the translation of the Scriptures into common languages and the expository preaching of the Scriptures to the people from the pulpit. The world is still reeling from this reformation.

**The Preacher and the Word** (2 Tim 3:16-4:2) – The Reformation was not a newfangled religion but a return to the Word and the doctrines of the apostles of Jesus Christ. Paul declared that the Word of God was the exhaled breath of God and that it is potent. How potent? God speaks and light, solar systems, plants and animals, and man, is created (Gen 1). Jesus speaks and dead men come to life (John 11). Paul tells us that Scripture is powerful *“that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work”* (v17), and in the following verses we see who this *“man of God”* is that Paul is referring to. Speaking to Timothy, the preacher and minister ordained by Paul and the church, Paul commands him to *“preach the word”* and to do so when it is seasonable and when it isn’t. It is not enough that the Word be read; rather it must be expounded and applied through the work of preaching.

**Our Response** – We are to have a high view of preaching, praying and expecting God to do what His Word promised (1 Tim 3:16) for the people of God. The Spirit instructed Ezekiel to preach to dry bones and promised that through preaching, the dead would be raised (Ezek 37).

**The Servant and Steward of the Word** (1 Cor 4:1-2) – While we are to have a high view of preaching, we are not to exalt preachers as something more than mere men. Even Paul, an apostle, fought against any sense of personality-cult status he or others were receiving in Corinth (a city not unlike our Hollywood in many ways). Such personality-worship produced divisions that were undermining the unity of the church (1 Cor 1:10-17). There was to be no boasting in men, but rather in Christ, His gospel, His power, His church (1 Cor 3:18-23). And so Paul carefully labels himself and the other preachers with two terms – a servant and a steward.

**A Servant of Christ** – The Greek word behind *“servant”* was literally, *“an underrower”* or *“a subordinate rower”* and referred to the lowest rowers on the ancient Triremes. This is the word often translated *“minister.”* Paul would also refer to himself as a bondsman of Christ Jesus. A minister is a servant, an attendant, to his King.

**A Steward of the Word** – This word, *“steward,”* is a good translation, but often does not evoke enough in our minds. This steward in ancient times was the servant whom the Head of the house had entrusted the management of His affairs, the care of receipts and expenditures, the management of the other servants, the care over all the household and especially the children not yet of age. He had nothing of himself to give, but brought out of the storehouse of the Landlord things appropriate for those entrusted to him. Jesus would say that the faithful scribe *“...instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old”* (Matt 13:52). It is not required of the steward to be brilliant, innovative, or novel. It is required of the steward that he be faithful to his Master and to his calling (1 Cor 4:2).

**Our Response** – We are to honor the office of elder and pray for the preacher, but he is not to be thought of as made of something different than us. One of the other blessings of the Reformation was the removal of the idea of *“secular”* vs *“sacred”* vocations. All of life and every vocation is sacred, to be performed as servants of Christ and to the glory of His name.

**Power in the Preached Word** (Rom 1:16-17) – Paul desired to come and preach to the church in Rome (1:13-15), not because he was *“something”* but because the preached Word was something. The gospel of Christ (and I believe Paul has in mind not only a system of doctrine but the preaching of that doctrine) is the power of God to salvation. Can we put these things together and understand more of this power?

**The Word of God is Living** (Heb 4:11-13) – The preached Word reveals who we are to ourselves. It acts like a mirror and cuts to our hearts. It leaves us undone.

**The Word of God is Life** (1 Pet 1:23-25) – Buried by the preached Word, dead bones are raised to life by Life in Christ declared through the gospel.

**The Word of God Preached is Jesus** (Rom 10:14) – This life and sustenance is not a direct work of the preacher. It is the work of God through His *“underrower”* but by His Holy Spirit to sound forth the Voice of God Himself in Jesus Christ speaking to our hearts, granting faith, and re-creating who we are.

**Our Response** – We are to hear the words of the preacher and, by faith, hear the voice of Jesus. He calls us to Himself. He offers His gospel promises to us. He declares His Lordship over the nations. We are to hear and believe.