

**THE SERMONS, LECTURES, AND SONGS OF
SIDNEY EDWARD COX**

I Thessalonians – Sermon #1
A Church That Can Be Trusted
Tracks 1-8

Editorial Note: What follows are two different sermons, both on the book of I Thessalonians.

Although it is not known the exact date that these lessons were delivered, they were delivered to the Grace Bible Church in Detroit, Michigan where Sidney and Violet Cox resided during their retirement years in the 1960s. In 1962, Sidney and Violet retired to the Salvation Army retirement home in Detroit, “The Eventide.” Violet was in failing health and ultimately died in 1967. Sidney continued residency there until a late in life move to Birmingham in 1972.

During latter part of his life, Sidney Cox had developed a close relationship with the Christian and Missionary Alliance (“CMA”). CMA operates as a vast network of churches, similar to a “denomination.” Grace Bible Church was a CMA church to which Sidney and Violet belonged during their years in Detroit. Sidney was often asked to lead Bible studies such as this study of I Thessalonians, and often filled their pulpit to preach.

John Douglas Cox, grandson of Sidney Cox. December 29, 2008.

2nd Chapter of First Thessalonians. First Thessalonians, 2nd Chapter:

"For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain: But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention. For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts."¹

I read a little while ago that the greatest word in the scripture is the word, trust. Now think that over, because instinctively we say the greatest word in the scripture is, love. But you think that one over. You're told to love your enemies, you're not told to trust them. When you trust somebody, that's the ultimate - there isn't anything beyond that. And in this scripture we find, and we're almost afraid to look at it, that God not only loves us, he trusts us.

Now that's the ultimate. God trusts us - "As we have been approved of God to be put in trust with the gospel." Now when trust is seen as an ingredient in your life my dear, we call it, trust worthiness. The most valuable thing about anybody is not their ability of even their graciousness that we call love. The most important thing about anybody is their trust worthiness. If you don't believe that, ask the bank. If you don't believe that, ask your real estate agent. Your trust worthiness is the most valuable

¹ I Thessalonians 2:1-4

thing that we possess; and the thing that Satan will attack more vigorously and viciously than anything else. God was looking for folks who can be trusted.

Now my dear, right at the beginning of this book we have this theme before us. Chapters 1 and 2 of I Thessalonians emphasize this thought of trust worthiness - God trusting something to somebody.

Now, let me give you in a word or two how this appears, because the center of the thought of trust worthiness is seen in three ways.

One, a church that can be trusted. And two, a preacher who can be trusted. And a God who trusts both. Now in Chapter 1, you've got the picture of a church that can be trusted - a trust worthy church. And in Chapter 2, you have a picture of a trust worthy preacher. And overarching both of them, you have the picture that is almost unbelievable, that God will trust a trust worthy congregation and a trust worthy preacher, and He'll not only do it in an indefinite way, where we say, "Oh yes, I trust you" and it may mean nothing at all. But when God says it, it means something because in His act of trusting us, He actually puts into our hands the most precious thing He has. And a man stands in utter amazement. The preacher of a trust worthy congregation stands in utter amazement and says, "God has trusted me with His most precious possession" - this crimson colored something that we call the gospel.

The gospel has life in it because it costs life to produce it. And God takes the most precious thing He has and puts it into our hands and says, "You take care of this for me. I'm not looking at the skill of your hands. I'm not looking at the financial standing of your hands. I don't care anything about that. What I'm looking for in your hands is, can your hands be trusted? Can I trust you with it?"

And a man writes a letter to a congregation that could be trusted, and the congregation overflows with gratitude for a preacher that could be trusted, and a God delights in both of them and puts into their hands the most precious thing He has and says, "I'm going to trust you with the gospel."

Now my dear, sometimes, as we have said on a good many occasions, when we turn to one of Paul's letters, we wonder what kind of a Paul we're looking at, because we see him in various aspects of his character. We hear different tones of voice in the Apostle Paul. When he writes to the Galatians, he's one person. When he writes to the Philippians, he's quite another. What kind of a Paul is he? When he writes this letter to his friends in Thessalonica, what kind of a Paul is he? What kind of Paul are we looking at?

Just a few weeks, or months at the outside before this letter was written, a baby church had come into existence in that strange city called Thessalonica. Paul had given birth to a church. Out of his heart had appeared a church, and remember my dear, what you give birth to from your heart is much more important than anything that you give birth to from your body. One is temporal, the other is eternal.

Paul had given birth to a baby church, and what a baby it was. What a beautiful thing it was. What potential was wrapped up in this? And now he had been driven out of that place and had to leave the baby behind. And it was a matter of considerable disturbance to him. And he wondered and wondered and wondered, what's happening to the baby back there in Thessalonica? Who's looking after the baby there? Who's watching the baby there? What kind of food is the baby getting? Who's taking care of the baby?

And weeks afterward, after going to Berea and then to Athens and then to Corinth, Paul sends young Timothy back to Thessalonica and says, "You bring me word about the baby. Bring me word about this church in Thessalonica. Tell me how they're getting along. Tell me. Bring me news about it." And after a while young Timothy comes back and he says to the apostle Paul, "You don't need to worry about this church in Thessalonica, it's in better hands than you are. God is doing miracles to this church in Thessalonica. God is doing tremendous things to these folk in Thessalonica. God is doing wonders with their work of faith and labor of love and patience of hope, and everywhere they go, folks are listening to them. There's the impact not only of their words but of their lives. You don't need to wonder about them. And best of all, Paul, you can trust them. You can bank on them. They won't fail you. And they've faced tribulation and difficulty and problems of all kinds."

I wonder sometimes what we would do if we got anywhere near these things, or they came anywhere near us. What would we do? And yet here is a man who has received this word about not only the skill that is being developed in this church, not only the magnificence of their testimony, but their trust worthiness - who could reckon on them. And young Timothy comes back and says, "Paul, you can just trust these folks. They've got what it takes." The characteristic of the church of Thessalonica is not cleverness, it was trust worthiness. Now there's a church that could be trusted.

But don't forget at the same time my dear that that church had a right to look at its preacher, and say, "Just as you trust us, we want to know whether we can trust you or not." Now there was a reason for that because remember that one of the ways in which Satan attacked the early church, and still does for that matter, was in false teachers who went around with only concepts that seemed so right, and produced something that seemed so right, but in reality was so wrong. Now the mark of them was, they did what they did for personal glory in order that somebody would say nice things about them, or for personal gain. It was either one or the other.

Now, let me give you two places where you find that because we've been over that ground before. Do you remember what Paul said when he wrote the letter to Titus in that first chapter, when he pointed out these folks that were coming either from Judaism or from some other source? And how they were weaving their way into the church and into homes? And how they were doing what they were doing with them for 50 lucres sake, or, "What I get out of it." Now that was a danger in the church. Do you remember that John wrote a letter to a woman, the only letter, the only book in the scripture, if you call it a book addressed to a woman - there are other letters about women, but this is the only one that's addressed to a woman. And her name isn't given, she is spoken of as, 'the elect lady.'² Do you remember how John warns this woman about folks that are coming knocking at her door with false doctrine? False doctrine about the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that if she admits them, she becomes part and parcel of their iniquity. Evidently, this was something that was going on all the way around. And, one of the things that had been said about the Apostle Paul was, "He's just like all the others - teachers that are coming around here. He's got something to tell you, but what he's after is personal glory, or gain of some kind. Watch out for him." And his character and motive had been maligned in that way.

Now Paul must answer that, and so in his letter, he not only rejoices that he has a church in Thessalonica that could be trusted. Its outstanding mark was trust worthiness. But he must answer this,

² See The Second Epistle of John.

what was leveled against him. They must know, and so Paul bears his heart in two ways – his personal life and his public life. And he says to the church at Thessalonica, "You look at my private life and you won't find one skeleton in the cupboard. You look at my public life, and you won't find one moment where I ever did anything for personal glory, or in order that I might get something out of you - I have been doing just exactly the opposite." And, in the defense of his personal life and character, a strange little phrase appears, and you find it nine times in this little letter. He says this, "You know. You know. You know."

Now, if you want a bit of homework, go through your I Thessalonians and underscore every time you come to the word, you know. You'll find yourself on a very interesting little pathway there - it's only incidental, I know, and most of you will have forgotten it before you ever get out, but if just one person thinks of it, especially if you're the only one, it will be worth it. "You know." You know what manner of persons we were. You know what our words were like. You know what we said and did. You know.... you know what love we poured out of our hearts upon you, and not only that, but you know how we labored night and day while we were with you. And you know we would have given you our very lives if we could.

Did you hear it? Take a good look at the preacher, for that's what the Thessalonians were doing. And don't forget, the preacher is taking a good look at the Thessalonians too, and he likes what he sees. And so do they. So do they.

Now my dear, having received a message about a church like that, his heart overflowed. Here's the answer to the question, what kind of a Paul are you looking at? What would you think would be the expression on his face when Timothy brings this message? What about it? When Timothy comes and says, "You can trust them. And they know about you and they trust you, and God trusts both of you." What do you think would be the look on his face? And he says to him, "I've got to write a letter to them. I've got to tell them about it. This love that's in my heart is flowing, it must be expressed. I must put my commendation of them into words. I must write a letter. I must write a letter," - and so he does. And we take hold of it sometimes as if it was just a piece of waste paper and no more important than if it was a scrap of paper out of a newspaper heap. And here it is, a thing that's just flowing with his life for us. And a letter like this as he writes to them and goes over the ground of their reliability. He said, "I'm so glad that Timothy came back and told me that I could trust your labor of love, that I could trust your hope. I could trust you." My.

And a man writes a letter with a background like that, and puts it down on paper and God, the Holy Ghost takes it into His majestic hands and in His own marvelous way incorporates it into the Word of God and it comes into this room this morning, and here it talks to us. This word that's there.

One of the things that delighted Paul, you can see it all the way through, was not only that this church could be commended for this and that and the other, but he delights in the fact that they continued that way. One of the difficulties of the early church, and you can see it quite frequently, is that a church would go on for a little while and then fade out of the picture. Or that something essential in that church faded out, even a church like the church at Ephesus. "Thou hast left thy first love."³ Something had faded out. But in this church at Thessalonica, Paul found a continuing delight, not only their initial

³ Revelation 2:4.

faithfulness, trust worthiness, but a continuing trust worthiness. There was never one moment when they let him down. Not a moment. There was never one day when they let him down. Not a day. And an old man looks back at the church at Thessalonica and says, "I love you for this and that and the other, but over it all and through it all, the ingredient that holds everything together - I can bank on you. I can trust you." Did you hear it? I can trust you.

Now my dear - his personal life, his private life, what he is, what he does, and he dares to stand before them and say, "You know about this. You know about that. And not only do you know, nine times, but God knows too."

Now, the two marks of this man's life, the love in his private life, his personal life and the labor in his public life. Now they are inevitably the true marks of the real servant of God - the love that flows out of his heart and the labor that accompanies it.

Now my dear, I want you to take a look at a verse. And I want you to see the price that Paul was called upon to pay for being the person that he was. Look at verse two. Now here he's talking about his life and the persecution and suffering that he endured. And he was enduring it for their sake, remember. "But even after that we had suffered before," and he's talking about Philippi there. Remember, that when the Apostle Paul arrives at Thessalonica his back was still bleeding, because you don't get a whipping like that and then get over it in two or three days, or two or three weeks. The scars were still there on his back when he walked into Thessalonica. The agony in his heart for the insults that he had endured in Philippi was still there. And remember my dear, the insult to his heart was much more difficult to bear than the blows upon his body. That's a simple thing to bear. But when there is something precious within your heart that is insulted, then that is most difficult to bear. That's the most difficult thing to bear and the greatest pain there is.

Now what was there in the heart of Paul that was very precious that had been insulted there in Thessalonica? What was it? What was it? Well now, think with me carefully, and don't get off on some side track here. Let's keep in mind the fact that lie before us. The thing that he valued most so far as this life was concerned was his Roman citizenship. Now you can stop for a moment and say, "Well in the first verses of the third chapter of Philippians, he talked about how he valued his Jewish background." Yes, that's true. That's true. But do you know something happened there in Tarsus, happened because and in and through that Jewish background that was the crowning ill, and that was that in those Roman communities, the Jewish people were not allowed to become Roman citizens unless their family life was so beautiful, so magnificent, so unique, that upon these unusual, extraordinary views, the Romans conveyed the honor of Roman citizenship.

Now Paul belonged to a family like that. In that family there was the added glory, the crowning glory of Roman citizenship. And remember, that's the thing that had been insulted there in Philippi. It wasn't just that he was taken and thrust into jail because of some activity in which he was involved. Not at all. But there his life as a Roman citizen had been insulted. Do you remember that when he got out of that jail, that was the problem with the people in Philippi's case. "I don't want you to go with me, what you've got to answer for is the fact that I, a Roman citizen was treated in this way that is contrary to all the rights of Roman citizenship." That was his big problem.

Now my dear, here was something in which he had not only suffered physically, but shamefully. By the way, are you looking at your verse? Because if you are, you'll find the word there. You'll find the

word there, "Were shamefully entreated." Now that's the meaning of it. It was his Roman citizenship that had been insulted. Paul is a man who had stood the test of something like that. "You know that in spite of it, we came to you there in Thessalonica and brought not only our words, but our very heart as well. We trusted you. And we've been proving to you that you can trust in us as well."

Now just one final thought, and it comes right out of that verse of ours that's the center of our thoughts - "We've been put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak not of pleasing men" - there's the great danger of it. And remember the warning has been there over and over again, the good soldier of Jesus Christ has wonderful business in mind, to please Him who called you to be his soldier - not yourselves, not your friends, Him! He's the one. Now we've got the same thing here - pleasing God. Not pleasing men at all. Our business as soldiers of Jesus Christ is to please Him regardless. And here is the word now, look at it, and you'll find that God not only trusts us, but He does something else as well.

The hand God trusts, God tests. Did you hear it? "He trieth our hearts." Our hands are trusted and tried. And remember my dear, when God can find either an individual or a church, where the life is struck through and through with trust worthiness, and the hands are totally devoted to Him and to Him alone, into hands like that God can trust His greatest gift and through them can work miracles. And he never does it with any other kind of hands or any other kind of folks. God is in the miracle working business. If you expect God's going to work a miracle in or through you or with you, you better take a good look at both hands and find out if one can be trusted and has the other been tried; because when God can find a hand that can be trusted, and a hand that can be tried, into those hands God can put the things that He cannot trust anywhere else - might be the answer to some unsatisfactory Christian life, or some unsatisfactory church situation. Why? Why? Why? May be the answer is here, or here, or there.

A church that could be trusted. A preacher that could be trusted. And a God who's delighted to trust both of them with the greatest gift that He had to offer, the gospel of the grace of God.

Now, there's our portion of scripture for this morning, and I constantly think of it, and say in my own heart, "Lord, what do you want us to do with this? Did you gather us together just in order that we might feel a kind of word again? Is there something that you wanted to do with us before? Is there some kind of an impact that you could only make through a message like that?"

I don't know. I don't know what you'll do with what has been brought before us this morning. I don't know what I'm going to do with it. I don't know. I know what I feel like doing. And I suppose you do to. But none of us have got what it takes to do it, and that's to get down on our faces before God and confess our inadequacy and the fact that so often, so often, so often we have proved to be preacher and people together, untrustworthy. And it might be wise for us to think about it.

Our Father, in the name of the Lord Jesus, we come to the close of this part of our morning service, that which Thou didst entrust to us. We have given to these folks who are so dear to us to the best of our ability. Grant that we may be trustworthy, so there will never be a moment when we shall be ashamed of that which Thou hast entrusted to us. Grant Thy blessing upon us we pray through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.