



SILVER STREET MISSION

Regular Sermon 2006

Patterns to follow

I Thessalonians 2: 1 – 16

Rev. Peter R Green, Sunday morning, 15 Jan, 2006

LAST WEEK we saw that one of the secrets of the Thessalonian church was that it had models to follow. It didn't rely wholly on instruction, nor did it rely entirely on inspiration. It watched others and did as they did.

I have had to learn a bit about carpentry, just so that I could fix things around the house. I am not very good at it, but I make do. Sometimes I'm even proud of the results!

I learnt a bit by watching my father. He was an architect. Most architects are competent with building and building trades. But I really didn't pay as much attention as I should have.

I also learnt by reading. I have sometimes bought those books on *How to build a deck* or *Bird shelters for pleasure and profit*, and have taken note of the techniques.

Once I even worked by inspiration. I had to secure an old house. The roof had been tiled without strengthening the structures and was pushing the walls apart. I had to make sure that the walls didn't fall over in the wind.

There are no manuals about how to do that. I worked out a method, and anchored the walls. I couldn't pull them back upright, but I stopped them falling apart. I felt inspired when I did that, and I can tell you that I did do a lot of praying when I was doing it!

But it's never the same, doing something from a book or from inspiration, and doing it because you have worked alongside someone who knows what he is doing.

For years, the manse has needed a lot of renovation, but the church couldn't afford it, and neither could we.

But we have done a few things recently. We replaced the carpet, and put in a new stove. In July, we got a new handbasin and cupboard in the bathroom, because the old cupboard had taken in a lot of water and was falling apart.

I got a plumber in. You should have seen how quickly he worked! He knew *exactly* what to do. I would have taken all day: he did it in a few hours. It makes all the difference when you have been shown exactly what to do. And he showed me a few tricks I wouldn't have thought of, tricks to ensure that the new cupboard lasts longer than the old one.

That's why we need models in life.

How can a young Christian learn how to do what Christians do? As a 16-year-old, I watched those grown-up 18-year-olds, to see how they lived their lives in Christ. I learnt good things. I also acquired some bad habits, because they didn't always live the best way themselves.

Jesus gave us the best model. He taught others by his example. They taught us, and we, too, must pass it on.

Paul was one of the three apostles who went to Thessalonica. He reminds them what kind of model he and the others were.

Last week we saw how the Thessalonians imitated Paul and his companions and the Lord. Chapter 2 shows us specifically what it was that they imitated.

There are three essential characteristics:

- **integrity**,
- **care** and
- **constancy**.

They correspond with **work**, **labour** and **endurance**. Last week, we saw how these are es-

sential characteristics of the church. They are characteristics of Jesus himself.

INTEGRITY

Do you want to be respected and listened to? Integrity is an essential quality to grow, It is also one of the most difficult to cultivate. But integrity is catching. Have you ever worked with a person of integrity? You know how that encourages you to lift your own game.

I used to work with a chap who was a man of integrity. We'll call him "George".

Another fellow — we'll call him "Mark" — didn't like George all that much. But Mark once told me, "One thing I will say about George: he is a straight player. He has integrity." That's how it often is. People might not like you, but they will respect you.

Paul was really knocked around in Philippi. He and Silas were beaten and thrown into gaol. They were ready to go quietly in Thessalonica. But they knew their calling, and they hid nothing from the people.

Here's how Paul describes their visit:

¹Thess 2:1 You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. ² We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition. ³ For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. ⁴ On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. ⁵ You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed — God is our witness. ⁶ We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else.

I overheard two pastors of ethno-specific churches. One told the other, "When you share buildings with an older Anglo congregation, you will see that they are small, lacking resources, and with limited vision. You will say to yourself, 'Why should they have all this, when I could do so much more with it?' And you will be tempted to look for ways to take it over. That temptation always comes from the devil, and you have to resist it. It is a matter of integrity for you."

I thought those were very wise words.

That's what we mean by integrity. Paul and his companions didn't come to Thessalonica to exploit people, or to gain something for themselves. They came to give — to give Jesus; to give life. Their words and actions aligned.

The ultimate example is Jesus himself. He faced the most awful choices. He was innocent in a way that you and I will never be innocent, yet he chose to trust the promises of his heavenly father, even as he faced the cross.

*On the cruel cross
He sealed my pardon;
Paid the debt
And set me free...*

I knew a pastor once who had a good reputation. But in a new church, he didn't take as much care as he should have.

He was an excellent visitor, particularly to one old lady, who left him nearly everything in her will. He ended up in court, it was a very public case, and, although the court didn't find that he had openly persuaded the lady to give him so much, it did find that he had compromised his position, and it overturned the will. He didn't maintain his integrity, and he paid a high price. He lost his church, he lost the inheritance, and he lost his reputation.

Integrity is part of how we work for Jesus. Paul said that faith is the background to work — we saw that last week.

Integrity means that the work we do is done properly; our words and our actions line up.

It takes faith to do that. Faith says, "God is looking after my situation. I don't have to put my self-interest first."

Faith says, “I will seek first God’s Kingdom and righteousness, and all the other things will be added to me.”

CARE

The second thing about the model the apostles gave the Thessalonians is their care. Care is a manifestation of love, and love is the mainspring of labouring in the Lord.

Some Christians think that all they have to do is to share the gospel with non-Christians. They wouldn’t dream of sharing anything else.

Look at the contrast with Paul!

As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, ⁷ but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. ⁸ We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. ⁹ Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.

Years ago, there was a Christian movie called *The Gospel Blimp*, about some Christians looking for a way to spread the gospel to their neighbours. They decide that the town is too big for them to impact by themselves, so they get a great big blimp, a semi-rigid airship, and fly it all over the neighbourhood, showering their neighbours with Christian literature.

They were keen, but they didn’t show basic care, and that was what their neighbours and friends really needed. They needed Jesus’ kind of loving care.

Technology is no substitute for basic love.

Here’s Paul’s description:

^{1TH 2:10} You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. ¹¹ For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, ¹² encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

Paul and his company put their effort into caring for the Church as Christ cares for his own — as a father deals with his children. And it worked. They learnt to lead lives worthy of God, and suited to his glorious kingdom.

CONSTANCY

Just as we saw in Chapter 1 how necessary endurance is as a manifestation of hope, in this chapter, Paul details how the Thessalonians stuck at their faith in the face of intense persecution.

He writes,

^{1TH 2:13} And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. ¹⁴ For you, brothers, became imitators of God’s churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, ¹⁵ who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men ¹⁶ in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last.

Paul is a Jew, writing about Jews. This is not an anti-Semitic rant, but an intense and passionate critique of a Jewish society which largely rejected the good news about Jesus and persecuted his followers.

In fact, Paul is contrasting the Jewish churches with the Jewish society they lived among, and he says that the Thessalonians imitated the Jewish believers in the way they kept going in the face of such persecution.

People who hope, endure.

I had a friend who laboured for years in a very difficult church, and never achieved what he

wanted to achieve. He was a keen evangelist, and hardly anyone was converted.

Yet he kept going.

He didn't see what he achieved, but his friends saw it. He won few, but he taught many how to evangelise. He didn't see revival, but he brought two divided churches together into an effective community of faith.

His hope kept him afloat.

He didn't see results today, but he hoped to see results tomorrow, because he trusted in Christ who had called him.

That's hope. Full-sized hope takes us even further. It says that there is always hope. It reassures us that there is always a reason to go on. It tells us, "Never despair! One day Jesus will return and bring his reward with him!"

Jesus himself exercised hope, and clung to it as he hung on the cross. When he told his disciples that he wouldn't drink wine again with them until they drank it together in the Kingdom, that was hope speaking.

When the Thessalonians had nothing else to cling to, they still clung to their hope, and they didn't give in when their fellow citizens persecuted them most severely.

LESSONS

What are the lessons for us?

First of all, I want to urge us all to cultivate the qualities of integrity, care and constancy. We need these qualities because they are what faith, love and hope look like when they are being lived out.

The Apostle James writes,

JAS 2:18 But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds."

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. ¹⁹ You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that — and shudder.

We must reveal our faith through our actions, and not merely claim to have faith. Remember that the Thessalonians were being talked about everywhere, because of their faith. But that can only happen when faith is revealed through actions.

In the same way, love is seen by what love does. Love is not a feeling, it is a choice. And a choice not acted upon is not a choice, it is a mere preference.

When the Psalmist cries out,

Give thanks to Yahweh, for he is good:

His love lasts forever

he goes on to list what the Lord does for his people. God's own love is expressed in his deeds: can we do less?

And hope must be active or it is not hope: it is only an unproven theory. I laugh — and it is a scornful laugh — at people who squeak about Evolution being a mere theory, yet there is far more evidence of Evolution than there is for their faith, love and hope!

We have to live it out.

But the other principle is, look for people who display faith, love and hope, and model yourself on them. If they are believers, that is a great model, and very accurate; if they are not believers, take the good you can get from them, and go beyond it — go where Jesus himself went.

Here is what the writer to the Hebrews said:

HEB 12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. ² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

There it all is.

In love, Jesus died for us. He did the work of salvation on the cross, trusting in his Father. He laboured in love, putting himself into all he did for us. And he endured in hope of the coming joy of the Kingdom.

What better model can we follow?