

Thessalonians Chapter 3 a Pattern Worker and Minister

by A.B. Simpson

Paul's ministry was a pattern for workers and ministers, characterized by single and supreme consecration to God, personal purity, and the direct power of the Holy Ghost.

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 2:1

Topics: "Ministry", "Character of a Believer"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the character and ministry of Paul as a model for all believers, illustrating how Paul worked diligently in various circumstances while remaining true to his calling. He highlights that Paul's ministry was marked by a single aim to please God rather than men, a pure personal life, and a commitment to serve without financial burden to others. Simpson encourages believers to recognize their everyday work as a platform for ministry, advocating for a life of prayer and love as essential components of effective witness. The sermon calls for a spirit of gentleness and the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit in all ministry efforts, urging Christians to embody the fullness of the Gospel in their lives.

Transcript

"For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain; . . . 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 tries our hearts." (1 Thes. 2: 1, 4).

A man's character is revealed by his correspondence. Much more was this the case in the days that are past, before the modern typewriter and stenographer had come in between the full heart and the written page. Then you could read between the lines many a shade of feeling and many a touch of character, which now becomes lost in transmission through our artificial mediums of correspondence. The best biographies are compiled from the heart to heart letters of confidential friendship. Paul's first letters to the Thessalonians are full of such touches, and we can trace without much difficulty a personal portrait of the man behind the message.

First of all, let us remember that it is a man speaking to us from our own level. This is not the traditional priest in his conventional robes high upon the steeple, but this is the man among his fellow men "down among the people," and speaking to them from their own class and their own level. It is Paul working for daily wages at his loom and web of haircloth, and then preaching in his moments of leisure without

canonical robes or ecclesiastical titles, but just because a joy and love made him preach the message that had filled his own heart. This is a message for the reader, whoever you may be or whatever may be your calling, reminding you that as you toil at the workbench, the plow, the washtub, or the laundry table, you may be as truly a minister and a messenger of the glorious Gospel as the man in the pulpit and the woman in the rescue mission. The charm of Paul's ministry was its unconventional freedom. Put him on board a storm-tossed vessel as a prisoner, and you soon find him working for the salvation of all on board, and by sheer force of character taking command both of captain and of crew. Put him in a Roman barracks chained between two soldiers, and you soon find the whole pretorium a great revival meeting. Bring him up before Agrippa, Felix, and Caesar on trial for his life, and lo, he turns the tables on his judges and preaches the Gospel to them until they tremble before him. Set him loose in Philippi among strangers, and he will first get a job at the factory to make a living for himself and his companions, and then find his way on Sabbath morning to the little open air meeting by the riverside, and have the leader of the meeting converted before the day is over. No, put him down in the deepest, darkest dungeon in the Philippian prison, and before morning you will find the prison broken up, the jailer converted, and the magistrates begging him to leave and help them out of the dilemma into which his arrest has brought them. In fact there was no possible situation where Paul did not manage to find service and turn the situation into an opportunity to witness for Jesus Christ.

Let us look a little more closely at the spirit of his ministry.

I. HIS AIM AND MOTIVE WERE SINGLE AND SUPREME CONSECRATION TO GOD

"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 tries our hearts. Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others." (1 Thes. 2: 4, 6.) He had but one Master to please and one purpose to fulfill, like the railroad employe who had refused to accommodate a lot of passengers by suspending one of the rules of the company for their accommodation, and when told by the crowd that there was no danger of his being spoiled by popularity, answered, "The only man with whom I wish to be popular is the man who employs me." This was the secret of Paul's courage and faithfulness. He tried to please God only. We are living in an age when it is very difficult for the ministers of Christ to be true to God and popular even with the religious world. No man can stand in a pulpit today and bear faithful testimony against the social, political, and commercial wrongs represented in the average congregation, without becoming a bore and an offense, and sacrificing his worldly advantages. But Paul had died to all these things, and so he could afford to speak of God whether men would hear or forbear. May the Holy Spirit make us true to our testimony and to our Master.

II. HIS PERSONAL LIFE

His personal life was pure and blameless and he could appeal to them and say, "You are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe." (1 Thes. 2: 10.)

Our life is more powerful than our eloquence and wisdom. We can only give to others that which we have personally lived. Men soon detect the professional talker and the unreal life. They make burning glasses out of pieces of ice, but you cannot set fire to human hearts until you yourself are first on fire:

You must yourself be true

If you the truth would teach;

It needs the overflowing heart

To give the lips full speech.

The most eloquent address will be neutralized by one flash of angry temper or one fall into sin. Living epistles, "known and read of all men," are the messages which each of us can hold forth before a world that often reads no other message and hears no other Gospel. God help us to so live that we shall "adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things."

III. MANLY INDEPENDENCE OF ALL MERCENARY METHODS

Paul gloried in but one thing in his ministry, and that was that he could preach the Gospel without charge and say to his fellow disciples, "Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labor and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an example unto you to follow us."

Many people are tempted to think that they should give up business and go into what they call mission work, where somebody else would support them while they give all their time to direct religious service. It would be well for these friends to take a good look at the example of Paul, and remember how many of His servants God has used without taking them from the vocations of secular life. Think of Daniel, the statesman of Babylon; Nehemiah, the courtier of Persia; Barnabas, the consecrated merchant; and Paul, the weaver, who just found a pulpit in their ordinary business life, and preached the Gospel to their fellow men from their own level. It is a blessed advantage to look in the face of the world and say no man has hired me to preach. "These hands have ministered to my necessity." Such a testimony has a dignity and a force that even the world can fully appreciate. There is nothing wrong in receiving a salary in the ministry of the Gospel if God has called you to that place. But if God has placed you in a business station, think well before you fly from it to a more conventional ministry, and remember the words of the Apostle in another place, "Let every man abide in the calling wherein he was called. . . . Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God." In the midst of the trials, temptations, and conflicts of business life you get in touch with men as the professional preacher never can. You understand their needs, and they can feel that you understand them. You can speak with an authority born of experience, and help them heart to heart and hand in hand as mere preaching never could.

The methods of financial support in some lines of Christian work are a great reproach to the cause of Christ. It is always painful to see the Christian worker going around with his hat soliciting help for the Mighty One who owns the cattle upon a thousand hills, and says that the silver and gold are His. There are so many ways of doing this

and so many temptations to do it, that we cannot be too careful in maintaining our dignity and independence. Often have I been humiliated to see some modest girl obliged to go to coarse and godless men of the world in the business offices of India, and beg for a few coins to help them preach the Gospel. The coins were often given, but with a leer and a jest which must have gone with a pang to the Master's heart. It is all right for God's people to give to the support of the Gospel, but they should do it voluntarily as a debt which no gift ever can repay, and never put the ministry of Christ in the humiliating position of asking for charity.

In these last days when God wants messengers on irregular lines, let us not be surprised if He often takes people just as He finds them, and makes use of the rod of Moses, the ox goad of Shamgar, the needle

and thread of Dorcas, and the loom of Paul, as instruments for His boldest and most effective messages to a world that is itself absorbed in business cares and seldom goes off the secular plane to hear the conventional message. Thank God for the laymen of our age whom the Holy Ghost has ordained to a higher ministry than even the touch of human hands could have bestowed.

IV. PRAYER

The secret of Paul's power as a Christian worker and minister is found in the closet. He was always praying for his converts and getting them to pray for him. "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father." (1 Thes. 1: 2, 3.) "Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith." (1 Thes. 3: 10.) And so on the other hand he begs them to pray for him, "that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified even as it is with you: And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men." (2 Thes. 3: 1, 2.) If we turn to the eighteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles we shall see how this prayer was marvelously fulfilled in the deliverance of Paul from the persecutions of the Jews even after he had been dragged before the judgment seat of Gallio by Sosthenes and the Jewish mob of his persecutors. Gallio dismissed the charge with contempt and drove the accusers from his judgment seat, while the mob, ever ready to turn upon the beaten party, attacks Sosthenes instead of Paul; and to complete the revenge of the Apostle we find him writing to these very Corinthians a few years later and including Sosthenes with himself in the dedication of the epistle as "Sosthenes our brother." That looks as though he were no ordinary brother, but there was a history behind him. What a splendid revenge of love it would be if after his failure and his beating Paul became his protector and friend, and led him to the Savior that once he opposed, and accepted him as the fellow-worker in the church at Corinth! Surely this would be an answer to the prayers of the Thessalonians worthy of the things God loves to do for those that trust Him. This must ever be the deep secret of spiritual power. Our work must be born in prayer, watered by prayer, guarded and protected by prayer, and the worker himself ever steeped in prayer, and hidden behind the supernatural working of an almighty hand.

V. THE PREEMINENT CHARM OF PAUL'S MINISTRY, AS ILLUSTRATED IN THESE LETTERS, IS THE SPIRIT OF GENTLENESS AND LOVE

"We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children." (1 Thes. 2: 7.) This is not a hired nurse, but a mother nurse, for the original emphasizes the fact that it is her own children. This is the right sort of nursing, and God forgive the mothers and help the children where they are left exclusively to the care of some hireling nurse. These were Paul's own children, and how tenderly he nursed them! Then a little later we have the figure of the father as well as the mother. "You know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father does his children." (1 Thes. 2: 11.) And yet even more tender was the sacrifice of a love that gave himself to his spiritual children. "So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because you were dear unto us." (1 Thes. 2: 8.) The true worker must give himself to his work and put his life into it if it is to tell.

"How did you succeed in bringing up such a lovely family?" was asked of a mother whose children had become her crown and reward. "I gave myself to them," was her answer. "I shared in all their troubles and their joys, held my leisure at their command, counted no sacrifice too great, and poured out my life for them as well as in them, and I have, indeed, my great reward today." We cannot win souls without love. A

harsh theology will not bring them to Christ. Alfred Tennyson says that he had an old Calvinistic aunt that used to say every time she met him, "Alfred, whenever I see you I am led to think of that verse, 'Depart you cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'" It is a wonder that under such circumstances the poet ever had as much religion and love as he attained. The wise Spurgeon used to say to his students, "You are the salt of the earth, and, boys, the sugar, too." It is the sweetness that draws. What a blessed quality a genial, kindly spirit is in Christian work! How often a smile, a playful word, or a grain of love will prevent a painful crisis and heal an incipient strife! In one of the meetings of a New Jersey Presbytery at a little village called Cranberry, the brethren were almost coming to the boiling point of some local trouble which they were trying in vain to settle from the opposite sides of the question, when a good brother from Princeton, noted for his blandness as well as his wholesome humor, arose and said, "Mr. Moderator, I propose that we put a little sugar into this Cranberry tart." The effect was electric, and even the good doctors of divinity were unable to get up again, after their humiliating fall, to the plane of conflict.

But it is especially in the work of soul-winning that love tells. It is said that the first incident in the Christian work of the late Mrs. Catherine Booth occurred while she was but a child. A poor fellow was being dragged to prison by two policemen, and the jeering, hooting crowd were following him along the street, while his face was blazing with shame and anger. The little child was deeply touched, and pressing through the crowd to his side she gently put her hand upon his arm and told him that she was going to walk with him as far as they would let her. And so all the way to the jail the little one tramped beside the criminal, cheering him by her loving sympathy and standing by him in his trying hour. Little wonder that in later years she was able to draw the hearts of lost men and women to her with a power that has left its impress on one of the noblest religious movements of the Christian age.

VI. GLIMPSES OF THE GOSPEL PAUL PREACHED

We have some glimpses of the Gospel that Paul preached to the Thessalonians, for besides the spirit of the man we must ever emphasize the power of the Word. It is the man of God and the Word of God together that the Holy Ghost uses. Paul's Gospel was large and complete. It was a Gospel to attract men and save them to the uttermost. He was not a social reformer wasting his strength and time on a thousand little negative efforts to fence men round and keep them from evil by moral persuasion or material restraints, but he just trusted to the truth in all its largeness and fullness to lift them to a higher plane, and carry them with a controlling impulse.

The difference between man's moral system and God's great salvation is that man is always trying to dig up the rocks and remove the snags from the river, while God is aiming to pour a floodtide into the channel that will lift the little boat above the snags and rocks. They tell of an old weatherbeaten pilot who once pulled himself up to the desk of a ship owner in New Orleans and asked for a job to run one of the river steamers up the Mississippi. Of course, the ship owner immediately asked him if he knew the river. He said he did know something about it, but added, "That's not saying that I know much about the snags in the river." "Well," said the owner, "I don't see much sense in my employing you as a pilot if you don't understand where the snags are." "Wall," said he, with an impressive look, "I reckon I know where the snags ain't, and that's where I expect to do my sailing." The ship owner did not need much shrewdness to see the qualities behind this weatherbeaten but keen old man, and he soon closed the contract. Far better to know where the snags ain't than where they are.

God's great salvation is intensely positive. It has one thing for us, and that one thing is all we need to know. For the rest the Holy Ghost will care from day to day. Paul's great Gospel gave to his disciples salvation, sanctification, deliverance for the body as well as for the soul and spirit, the blessed hope of the Lord's coming, and the Holy Spirit Himself to lead and teach. God has given us such a Gospel. Let it be our joy and pride to give it in all its fullness to a perishing world.

VII. FINALLY THE SPIRIT OF PAUL'S MINISTRY WAS THE HOLY GHOST

"Our gospel came unto you not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." (1 Thes. 1: 5). All personal qualities, all ministerial training, and even the most full and glorious message will fail to reach men's hearts and lives without the direct power of the Holy Ghost. As the Master did not begin His ministry until after the baptism at Jordan, and the disciples also waited for Pentecost, so we must tarry before we go, and learn that it is not our eloquence or unction, but the direct working of a mightier Person through which all fruit must come. It is not only that we are conscious of the power, but if we are truly working in dependence on the Spirit we shall find that He is working along with us in the hearts of the hearers, and witnessing to our message with an authority and power altogether apart from our personal influence or conscious blessing. He will convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgment. This is not our convicting but His. This is a power that we can only claim by faith, and as we believe in Him we will find it co-working with us, and our work will cease to be ours and become His, for "He that believes on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father."

May God make us such ministers and workers for Christ and our fellow men as God has taught us in the beautiful example which we have gathered from the letters of Paul to the disciples at Thessalonica.

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