



HG6: 1 Thessalonians (6/6) 'It's All In The Family'

1 Thessalonians 5:11 - 28

Home Group Sermon Notes

23rd November 2008 - Revd Paul A. Carr

Introduction: People's last words are often very revealing. Oscar Wilde was reported to have said on his deathbed as he looked around him: *This wallpaper is disgusting. One of us will have to go.* I remember the first time I went on holiday without my parents, my mother dropped me off and I remember her giving me a whole stream of instructions: "Make sure you keep your passport safe, make sure you wash, change your underwear, please send us a postcard home." Well sure enough, the moment I was out of earshot, I forgot everything, and duly delivered the postcard personally two weeks later! I must confess that my heart sinks when I read that the NIV editors have entitled our text this morning as 'Final Instructions'. I say that because these words are not just the quick fire instructions of an anxious parent; they are carefully crafted closing words. In fact, Paul's letters don't just dribble on to a feeble conclusion: every word is important. It's been said that one of the best ways to see the big picture in Paul's letters is to read the beginnings and the ends, for he often reveals his priorities in these sections.

Over the last three months, as we've have worked our way through Paul's to this young northern Greek church, we've discovered that, in many ways, they are the model church. And we've noticed how themes have cropped up time and again. They have a *faith* that works, a *love* that labours and a *hope* that endures. But the interesting thing to note is that this church was not made up of super saints. They were just ordinary Christians like you and me. They had problems like we do. Some had close friends and relatives who had died, others were under huge pressure at work, some were being persecuted for their faith, others were shaky in their faith, indeed, some were barely hanging on, some had a poor understanding of scripture whilst others were living lives which were displeasing to God. I guess if we were to take a cross section of Emmanuel, we would find all those people in our church family. And yet this young church was making progress: their love for one another was growing and they had a firm hope for the future. And it is these themes that Paul takes up again as he finishes his letter. Paul gives short, punchy instructions, which the Thessalonian church must take to heart if they are to stay on course pressing on to heaven. There's no doubt that apostle Paul saw the local church as a family and how each of us needs the church family if we are to: grow in faith and develop our spiritual gifts in service to God. I've grouped Paul's words together under four headings, which will help us to get the main thrust of what he is saying:

1) Family Leadership, vs 12 – 13: *Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.* Without leadership, a family falls apart. Children need the leadership and guidance that only parents can give. Just as the family needs a leader, so the flock needs a shepherd (1 Peter 5:1-5). But what responsibilities, according to Paul, do church members have toward their spiritual leaders?

a) Accept them: Whilst I may have earned the right in my training; ordination and induction, to be a vicar, I hadn't earned the right to appear out of nowhere and begin the task of leading and ministering as I did in June. I fully recognise that trust is earned, it doesn't happen overnight and I know how much time it takes for relationships to be established and developed. However, in the meantime, I hope some of you are beginning to understand something of my passions for Mission and Ministry and how, together, that will work itself out in renewal and growth within our church. And, just as I accept you as brothers and sisters in Jesus, I hope you will do the same to me.

b) Appreciate them: Don't take them for granted! That's what Paul means when he writes: *respect those who work hard among you.* There's nothing wrong with honouring faithful servants of God so long as He gets the glory. Spiritual leadership is a great responsibility and a difficult task. And that doesn't just apply to me, it applies to our Readers, wardens, DCC/PCC members and the many who lead others in any capacity. Paul is saying: *Get to know your leaders. Understand them.* It's not easy being in a position of church leadership in any area of church life. Appreciate them, says Paul - the battles and burdens are many and, sometimes, the encouragements are few.

c) Love them: Loving our leaders would prove to be very difficult if we didn't have the love of God as a bond between us. It would be a bit of a strain otherwise, wouldn't it? Too right - but it's true. We need God's love.

d) Obey them: In Hebrews 13:17 we read: *Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.* This doesn't mean that spiritual leaders are always right! I've been known to make mistakes - I'm not perfect! Some of the great men of God in the Bible made mistakes: Abraham; Moses; David; Peter. However, in spite of their limitations, spiritual leaders are to be respected - unless it is obvious they are acting outside of God's will. Whenever there is division and disagreement in a church, it's usually because of selfishness on the part of the leaders, or the members, or both (James 4:1-3)! It's only as we submit to one another in the Lord that we can enjoy His blessing and peace. The result of the church family following their spiritual leaders will be, vs13, *peace and harmony* in the church. Leaders can't do it all so Paul added a second point:

2) Family Partnership, vs 14 – 16: According to Ephesians 4:12, spiritual leaders are to equip the church family to do the work of ministry. In many churches, the members expect the leader to do it all, consequently, the 'mission and ministry' of the church begins to weaken and die and everybody blames the vicar! Many churches, in recent years, are rediscovering ministry as a team in collaborative partnership and this is something I know works well here in Emmanuel, but there are still many opportunities for many more of you to serve the Lord in an area for which you are passionate about. I never say no to people wanting to serve! In vs14-16, Paul highlighted those who need personal encouragement and, there's no doubt, that we can always can do better in caring for each other, and those who are yet to join us. We constantly need to be sensitive to, and recognise, the needs of others and to identify the part that each of us can play in that encouragement. vs14: *And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.*

a) The idle, vs14a: This word means 'careless' and 'out of line' and was applied to a soldier who wouldn't keep rank and who insisted on marching his own way. Some military minded people often talk about people not walking to the same drumbeat! This 'independent' attitude causes arguments and splits in any family. While the loving atmosphere of the church family encourages individual development, there are some things we must all do together. If there are no rules and guidelines in the family there is chaos, likewise in the church. Paul dealt with this problem again when he wrote his second letter to the Thessalonians (3:6; 11) so this first 'rebuke' must have fallen on deaf ears!

b) The timid, vs14b: Those who: are faint-hearted; always look on the black side; give up when going gets tough. Each family usually has one member like this and so does the church! We need to encourage and comfort them.

c) The weak, vs14c: 'Hold fast to the weak' is the literal translation, 'don't let them fall.' Those who had not grown strong in the Lord (Romans 14:1-15:3). Some children mature faster than others. We have the strong and the weak in our natural families just as much as our church families. And we are to handle them with patient, reassuring love. We are to encourage those weaker believers and help them stand strong in the Lord.

d) Be patient, vs14d: It takes patience to raise families. The weaker member who demands much help may one day be a leader - so never give up. I'm deeply grateful to those who persevered with me when I was a young Christian. Those who took risks and were patient with me in the midst of my youthful exuberance.

e) Watch your motives, vs15: *Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.* We'll always face rejection and opposition as we serve the Lord. We may receive little appreciation, but we should always serve in love, ready to forgive (Romans 12:17-21). If your motive in ministry is a desire for appreciation and praise, you may feel let down. However, if your motive is to be: *a servant for Jesus sake* (2 Corinthians 4:5) you'll never be disappointed.

f) Be joyful, vs16: *Be joyful always.* Joy takes the burden out of service. *The joy of the Lord is your strength* (Nehemiah 8:10). God loves a cheerful servant as well as a cheerful giver! Every church family has its doubting Thomas or its gloomy Gareth! But God desires that His family should be happy, and that means that each member contributing to that joy.

Paul has highlighted four spiritual characteristics that are part of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) Love; Joy; Peace and Patience. We can't manufacture these spiritual qualities: they only come as we submit to the Holy Spirit and allow Him to control us.

3) Family Worship, vs 17 – 28: Worship, it seems to me, is the most important activity the church family engage in and share together. Ministry must flow out of worship; otherwise it becomes just another activity in which we engage, without power and without heart. There may be 'results' but they will not glorify God or last the test of time. What is worship? It is engaging with God and involves honouring; serving; respect; faith; obedience; adoration etc. What does Paul say it is?

a) Prayer, vs17: *Pray continually.* Prayer was important in the early church (1 Corinthians 11:1-6; Acts 1:13-14 etc) and should play an essential part in our church life today. I'm sure you don't need me to expand on this! However, to: *pray continually* doesn't mean we must always be mumbling prayers to ourselves, it means to be living in an attitude of prayer. You could say it's about keeping the receiver 'off the hook' and being in regular contact with God so that our prayer is part of a long conversation. God knows the desires of the heart (Psalm 37:4), and He responds to those desires even when our voice is silent (See Psalm 10:17; 21:2). I raised this at DCC last week, but can I encourage more of you to make 'First Priority' a priority on Tuesday evenings? 2009, change of week: *'First Priority, First Tuesday.'*

b) Praise, vs18: *Give thanks in all circumstances.* Thanksgiving is a vital element of worship. We may not always feel like praising or praying. Our circumstances may not be conducive to doing those things yet we are to do so. Why? *For this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

c) The Word of God, vs19-21: *Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold onto the good.* Paul pictured the Spirit of God as fire (Isaiah 4:4; Acts 2:3; Revelation 4:5) and writes that we are not to: *put out the Spirit's fire*, vs19. Fire speaks of purity, power, light and warmth. When the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives/church we have God's love in our hearts; light for our minds and energy for our wills. He draws us together to bring harmony, and co-operation and shared purpose. Timothy had been neglecting his gift (1 Timothy 4:14) and Paul reminded him not to allow the fire of the Spirit to go out in his heart: *stir up the gift of God, which is in you* (2 Timothy 1:6). Likewise, we must maintain that devotion to Jesus that both motivates and energizes our lives. Paul writes: *do not treat prophecies with contempt.* The early church did not have a completed Bible as we do. When we preach today we preach the truth by means of God's Word. Those early prophets preached the truth as the Holy Spirit moved them. The Spirit gave their spiritual knowledge and they often spoke in a tongue. This is why the three gifts of prophecy, tongues and knowledge are grouped together in 1 Corinthians 13. If we restrain these gifts we may be guilty of quenching the Spirit. If we believe everything that is said we may obey false spirits. We are to *test everything*. Paul gave specific rules for this in 1 Corinthians 14:29-33. God's Word tells us the truth about God. It displays His person; His character; His beauty. It reveals His plans and purposes for His people; His church and His world. Worship that ignores the Bible is not spiritual. It may be emotional but unless there is spiritual truth, the Holy Spirit is not at work. It's important that we allow the Spirit of God to teach us the Word of God when we meet in worship. Jesus taught (John 4) that worship must engage our heart and minds. A marriage of intellect (Truth) and emotions (Spirit), which is both healthy and complimentary. His Word enables us see through deceptions and foolishness.

d) Godly living: vs22-24: *Avoid every kind of evil.* Paul is endorsing much of what he wrote earlier about holiness and living as children of light. The KJV of vs22 is actually a better translation: *Abstain from all appearance of evil.* Not only are we to avoid it, we are to abstain from the appearance of it. I struggle to understand why it is that some Christians, who profess to believe the Bible, seem to conform to the standards and practices of the world with hardly any thought that what they are doing is both unbiblical and ungodly. To Paul, the mark of a true Christian is that an experience of Jesus affects every area of their life and Paul emphasizes how a lack of balance as Christians leads to lives, and ministries, which are unstable. Paul highlights the negative and positive. Negative, vs22: *Avoid every kind of evil* and the positive, vs23: *May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus.* Sanctify simply means that we are: set apart for God's exclusive use. Vs24: *The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.* The purpose of worship, in a nutshell, is that we might become more like Jesus in our character and conduct.

One of the greatest definitions of worship I've stumbled upon is by William Temple, a late Archbishop of Canterbury, who said: *To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open up the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.*

4) Family Fellowship, vs 25 – 28: Fellowship is an important part of our commonality in Jesus. At the end of the family worship they were to, vs25, pray/minister to one another and, vs26, greet one another and encourage each other – kiss each other. Sometimes, church members don't spend as much time with each other as much as they could. We rush away at the end of services, we've not joined a home group, we don't invite folk round for a meal or share our social time together. If we don't enjoy being with each other in this world, how will we cope when we are together in the next world? The words in vs11 are a helpful reminder to us, to: *encourage one another and build each other up ...*

Conclusion: I entitled the first sermon in this series: 'What every church should be' and, after preaching through it these past three months, I think it's a pretty good model for being church and there is a lot we can learn from it and put into practise. It gives us an outstanding foundation both for our life and for our faith. However, if each of us desire to become the church God desires us to be, we can do nothing without, vs28: *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ being with us.* And more grace seems an appropriate point on which to finish.



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Home Group Study Sheet

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COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION **BEFORE** THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to House Group along with any previous/other notes that might be helpful.

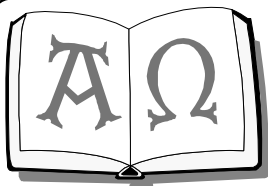
Welcome/Icebreaker (10 mins)

In this study, the apostle Paul speaks a lot about the importance of the family of the church. Sum up, in one word (or maybe two, if you are struggling!), what the family of the church means to you



Looking Upwards - Worship (10 mins)

Songs of Worship; Prayers; Bible Readings; Meditations etc.



Looking Upwards - Bible Study (40 mins)

Read through the above Bible reading (and any readings below and the references in the sermon notes) and answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss your answers in your Home Group.

1: What does it mean for someone to be '*over you in the Lord*' vs12? What could you do to show your regard for such a person at Emmanuel and within the wider Church?

2: Paul (the rector) raised four responses to church leadership: acceptance; appreciation; love and obedience. Discuss why some of these responses may be easier and/or more difficult. What would be the most important response of all?

3: What can you do to help and encourage the '*timid, weak and idle*' (vs14) within our own church family (without them taking revenge, vs15), and still live in peace with them?

4: What does it mean to be joyful '*always*' to pray '*continually*' and give thanks '*in all circumstances*' vs16-18?

5: In the section entitled '*Family Worship*' Paul (the rector) spoke about what worship entails and quoted a definition of worship by Archbishop William Temple. How/what would you define worship to be? How can each of us, if we are able to do so, develop an effective, and Biblical, approach to worship?

6: The church is a family and living/working together is vital to the health and growth of our church family. How can you better serve the family of the church? How can you help those who are struggling with their faith, family, work and personal issues? Are you sharing your God given ministry with others? Are you a spectator or a participator?

7: Our series on 1 Thessalonians has touched people in many different ways. What, for you, has been the most significant aspect of this study? What has helped and/or challenged you the most? What will you 'carry' with you into your future Christian life as a result of this series?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Inwards - *Caring for each other* (15 mins)

Is there anything you would like to share with the group:

For Thanksgiving?

For Prayer?

Or for help from the group?

*(Reflect with the Lord on your life at the moment and think if there is anything you would like to share and which you feel is appropriate. This is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however - 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!')*



Looking Outwards - *Concern for others* (15 mins)

Is there anything concerning someone in: church; family; friends; or neighbours which you would like to share:

For Thanksgiving?

For Prayer?

Or for possible action by the group?

(Please be careful not to pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared).

