

## The Bride, Chapter 4 – A Contagious Style

The saying “You can’t tell a book by its cover” reminds us what it looks from the outside has nothing to do with its contents within. We should not determine the style, convictions or beliefs of a church based on the church’s size, name, location, or the kind of cars driven by the members. A good place to start in looking at what a church should be would be from **Matt 16:15-18** :

*“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.*

The term “church” comes from the Greek word “called out ones”. Jesus “called out” for Himself a people who, by adhering to His teaching, would glorify His name. And His building of that body of believers (His church) would be unshakable. Not even Satan and his wicked host could frustrate the plan.

### Various “Types” of Churches

If you had asked “Where is the church?” in the first century, you would have been directed to a group of worshipping people gathered in a house or wherever. There was no special building associated to ‘church’ – only people. It is not until sometime in the second century, that Christians began to erect church buildings. From page 68 to 71, the author interestingly described to us how the churches are divided or classified by some authorities. Such as the body church, the cathedral church, the tabernacle church, phantom church, based on how the body of believers organized their gatherings/activities. Other authorities classified the churches according to their size, and call them a “cat church”, a “collie church”, a “garden”, a “house”, a “mansion”, a “ranch” and a “nation”, etc. We also read about the *donkey church*, the *racehorse church* and the *mule church*.

The more important question we should ask ourselves is what type of church would glorify God? What style of a church will be considered as part of the body, called and built by Christ for His glory? The author here calls this as “A Contagious Style”.

### What is Meant by a Contagious Style?

The example given is from the first century, the assembly of believers at Thessalonica. The description of this style is found in 1 Thess. 2:1-13. Some observations made on this group of believers with a contagious style:

- Paul described his six to eight weeks of stay with them as not in vain (v.1). In another word, the time spent with them was beneficial, productive and purposeful, etc..
- The church in Thessalonica was a young congregation nurtured amidst opposition (v.2). Nevertheless, it grew . . . it survived . . . in fact, it flourished!
- Paul recalled the substance of his message to the flock as the gospel and the word of God (vv.2,4,8,9 and 13).

This brings us to the first of the **Four Characteristics of A Contagious Style**.

#### 1. It is biblical in content. Read. *Read 1 Thess. 2:3-4.*

- i) Clear and consistent declaration of the Word of God. Careful teaching and faithful applying of the truth of God (“*Our exhortation did not come from impurity*” v.3).
- ii) *Speak, not as pleasing men but God, who examine our hearts* (v.4).
- iii) It is not enough for the preacher to know the Word of God, he must know the people to whom he proclaims it. He is to be the bridge that spans across the gulf between the Word of God and the mind of man (**read** page 75 the extract from John R.W. Scott).

- iv) The authority of the preacher does not lie in himself, it lies in the Book he proclaims. In the ideal sermon it is the Word itself which speaks, or rather God in and through His Word. The lesser the preacher comes between the Word and its hearers, the better.
- 2. It is also authentic in nature. Read 1 Thess. 2:5-6.**
- i) Paul is affectively saying his presentation was authentic. He did not come to flatter, with hidden agenda of greed, to seek glory from the congregation, nor even to exploit his privileged position as an apostle of Christ, which are the authentic words of a true servant's heart.
  - ii) Refer to 1 Cor. 2:1-5 also. Authenticity occurs when real people say real things about real issues with real feelings. When you are authentic you live what you are. You say the truth. You admit failure and weakness when it is appropriate.
  - iii) As a church declared its intent to remain biblical in content. People will begin to look for authenticity. Is this a church that really believes what it says it believes? Do we really carry out what we agreed in our Vision and Mission Statements and live up to our committed Core Values?
- 3. It is a place that is gracious in attitude. Read 1 Thess. 2:7-11.**
- i) The verses tell us that the church is a family, make up of people who agree on the same basics and find great joy in learning, growing, and sharing in these things.
  - ii) The question arises on how do we deal with people, who struggle? How are they treated? What kind of spirit pervades? In the same passage, we read all over the display of grace, fond affection, gentleness, encouragement and understanding in Paul's leadership style.
  - iii) We need to be a Steel and Velvet in our attitude. There will be times a church must be steel, and other times it will be velvet. A church that is all steel is harsh, calculating and tough. A church that is all velvet becomes too soft, too tolerant, lacking in conviction. We need to stay balanced, to be both steel and velvet for there to be authenticity, along with grace, truth and love.
- 4. It is relevant in approach. Read 1 Thess. 2:12-13.**
- i) This passage is a description of relevance in action. Many churches provide good news for the first-century, yet what we need is good news for modern man. We need a message with today's issues in mind. People needs the assurance that Bible strikes at the heart of today's needs, addressing issues we live with right now.
  - ii) We don't make the Scriptures relevant they are relevant. Our job as Christians is to point out how relevant God's Word really is.
  - iii) Christ and His standard of righteousness penetrate all of life. Each day is equally relevant. God is not out of date.

When we strived to be a church that is *biblical in content, authentic in nature, gracious in attitude, and relevant in approach*, we can expect the following:

1. From God – He will honor our effort regardless of our weaknesses.
2. From ourselves - To model the relevant Christ-likeness in our today's context.
3. From others - To be part of our fellowship in spites the difficulties.

One of the major secrets to a contagious style is keeping the right perspective. Refer to the good list of contrasts, stated in pages 80 & 81.