

Christ-like Conduct

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[0 : 0 0] Lord God, we pray that you'd help us to understand your word today and not only to understand it but to avail ourselves of the work of your spirit in our lives that our lives might be changed as a result.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well friends, in 1994 I became the lead pastor of an Anglican church in Perth. Three or four years earlier the Christians at this particular church were divided and the divisions among them were deep and severely affected their life together.

Eventually one group in the church decided that they could no longer continue to meet with the other group and as a result even families were split with one part of the family going to a new church and the other staying at the existing church.

It was very deep, very distressing. When I arrived as the pastor, as the new pastor of this church, the hurts ran very deep. Disunity, you see, had been an element in the congregation of the life of this church even before the actual split took place and the hurts ran for many years after.

You see, even when it does not cause divisions, disunity among God's people is one of the most distressing events of the life of any congregation. And I know that some of you will have been in churches that have split over one issue or another.

[1 : 3 0] And these things split friends, don't they? They split families. They split brothers and sisters in Christ. And it breaks apart the unity that God created us to share in Jesus Christ.

One of the other great causes for distress in individuals' lives and in congregations, of course, is not just disunity but opposition.

Opposition can come from a number of sources, hostility, open persecution. Many brothers and sisters of ours around the world experience this sort of opposition. Or it can come in more subtle forms, such as the rampant materialism of our culture that just eats away at the cutting edge of our faith, which we thought a bit about last week.

Or it can be personal, where individuals set themselves against us because we are Christians. Some of you will have experienced this either in the workplace or in ordinary life. Or it can be corporate, where people set themselves against us as the people of God because of the things we believe or the way we practice our faith.

My own suspicion is that we in the developed world are more prone to suffer from issues of disunity, where our brothers and sisters in the developing world are more prone to suffer from opposition and persecution.

[2 : 4 9] But the Philippian congregation seem to be suffering from both, external opposition and internal division. And today we're going to find out how Paul counsels them as to how they might handle these particular issues in their lives.

And as we look at Paul's advice in our passage, we'll find that God has some great principles to teach us. Even if all of those things are not true of us, even if we're not experiencing opposition or division, we'll find out how to be Christian in our lives together.

It'll help us handle disunity. It'll help us deal with opposition. But it'll help us just be good in our lives as Christians. So by way of introducing the passage, I want you to turn in your Bibles with me to Philippians 1, 27.

And I want you to notice some telltale signs within the initial verses. Look at particularly at verse 28. Paul talks about people who oppose the Philippians.

In verse 27, he talks about them standing firm in one spirit and contending as one person. In other words, we need to approach this passage in scripture, understanding that the Philippians are a group of Christians under pressure.

[4 : 03] They are experiencing opposition from outside. And it also appears that they are inwardly divided. So the question is, how do you deal with this? And that's what this passage is about.

You can see it in verse 27. Look at it, where Paul says, whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. The whole section, beginning at verse 27, going all the way through to chapter 2, verse 18, is about how the Philippians are to do this, how to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ in the face of these two issues, opposition and disunity.

And the passage is, I think, a tightly knit passage, all well integrated. So we're going to go through it. And as I do so, please remember, we're only scratching the surface.

This is, there's some grand things in this passage. We're only going to look really at this, at the surface. I'd encourage you to go back later on, read it in more depth and look at it in more detail.

But I want you to notice that there's something very different about this passage when compared to last week. You see, Paul's doing something very different here. Most of the time, he's urging the Philippians to do something, whereas prior to this, he had been urging them to hear something.

[5 : 18] Now he's urging them to do something. And I've tried to capture this by putting exclamation marks in my little outline, if you've got the outline there that came in your newsletter. So Paul's not just giving information here.

He's urging the Philippians into action. So that in mind, let's have a look at these verses, 27 to 30. First thing to notice is the word gospel in verse 27.

Last week, we saw that the progress of the gospel was at the forefront of Paul's thinking in relation to his own ministry. These verses show that it's at the forefront of his thinking in relation also to the Philippians.

Like him, you see, he says, you Philippians are to conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel. And the first thing that they can do is to live in harmony with each other.

That's what's meant by stand firm in one spirit and contend as one person. Verse 28 indicates that Paul knows this will be difficult when they've got.

[6 : 18] There's opposition surrounding them. After all, you see people under pressure are people who are more likely to act unpredictably and characteristically, aren't they? Now, I am sure that we all know this from both our ordinary work and family life, don't we?

When we are under stress, we are more likely to take it out on people close to us, aren't we? If you're not like this, please come and talk to me later on. I'd love to hear from you. You know, we might be grumpy or short with people or lacking in patience or just plain obnoxious at times.

Being under stress makes us more likely to treat other people wrongly, doesn't it? And so Paul advises his friends about persecution. And first he says, don't be frightened about it.

After all, your people who belong to a future salvation, that's certain. It has been set and determined by God himself. Second, Paul reminds the Philippians of the normal path for God's people.

God has given them grace, he says, so that not only might you believe in Christ, but you might follow Christ. And in following Christ, you might actually participate in his sufferings as well.

[7 : 32] And so God also gives grace to the Philippians that they might suffer for Christ. In other words, he's almost saying this is part of the Christian life. Paul is clear. Partnership with God in the gospel means partnership in proclaiming it.

It also means partnership in suffering for it. Do you remember last week? Do you remember that I said that we Western or developed Christians, developed world Christians, are often flabby, I think, and lacking in our dedication.

I think these words come with the same sort of message. Paul wants us to be people who live and who live as though to live is Christ.

And that may mean for us deprivation and suffering. It does for our brothers and sisters around the world and it may for us in the developed world. But it will mean life that is eternal in its quality and its quantity as well.

Let's move to chapter two. First four verses, Paul piles up phrase after phrase that addresses the question of unity raised in the previous section. His clear message is that their life together should be marked by unity.

[8 : 40] They should be united in mind, united in love. And then he names the enemy of such unity in verses three and four. Can you see it there? You see, the enemy of unity is us and our self-centeredness.

The enemy of unity of mind and unity of love is our selfish ambition, vain conceit, and putting the interests of self above the interests of others. However, Paul also names how unity, that unity can be preserved.

He names the friend of unity. Can you see it there? It is humility. It is self. If self-centeredness will result in disunity, humility will lead to love.

And friends, I need to explain this to you because in the ancient world, that word humility that is used here was a negative virtue, not a positive one. What Paul does is he takes what was a negative virtue in the ancient world and says, no, this is the grand Christian virtue, humility.

It will lead us to put the interests of others before our own. And it's that note of humility that leads Paul into the next section. Verses 5 to 11 in Philippians is one of the most beautiful and theologically rich and packed passages in all the New Testament.

[9 : 58] Countless books have been written about it. And my guess is that its theological depths go deeper than Paul even ever suspected himself. We're not going to have time to delve at steps.

But what I want to do is focus on how it helps Paul with the advice he gives to the Philippians. Let's remind ourselves of what he said so far. He's acknowledged that opposition and disunity threatens corporate life and the witness of these early Christians.

He's urged them strive together for unity in the faith. He's urged them turn away from the enemy of unity, self-centeredness. And he said embrace the friend of unity, humility.

Well, what he does in this hymn is he focuses on the center of the gospel, the person and work of Jesus Christ. And it's clear that he wants them to be conformed to the likeness of Jesus.

He wants them looking like him. He wants them thinking like him. He wants them acting like him. And so he tells them what Christ did. And the message is clear. Look at it in verses 6 and 7.

[11 : 04] We're told how Christ humbled himself. I call this the divine parabola. He there was in the form of God. He humbled himself. He who was from God poured out himself by taking the form of a slave and becoming a human being.

As a human being, he did what all humans were designed to do by God. He humbled himself and lived in humble dependence on God. In fact, his obedience stretched to extremes.

It stretched all the way to dying a death on the cross. Jesus put aside selfish ambition and vain conceit. He considered his own interests as secondary to the interests of those he was serving.

And of the God whom he served. And he considered his own interests as secondary to our interests. He died for us. And then in verses 9 to 10, we're told, or 9 to 11, how God responded.

Here's the other part of the parabola. God responded by exalting Jesus. He exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every created being, being, and the name above every other created being.

[12 : 17] And a name before which all creation will eventually bow. And the end result is that God is glorified. That's what Paul, you see, wants for the Philippians.

Can you see this? Where humility reigns amongst them, God ends up being glorified. And so Paul says, be like Jesus. He was humble. Where self-seeking and self-glory reign, then God ends up being humiliated and ashamed.

And the Philippians are to be like Jesus. They are to think like him. They are to have his mindset. And only then will God be glorified in their midst.

And with that, Paul turns to verses 12 and 13. Remember, 1 to 4, humility leads to the example of Christ in verse 8.

Verse 8 talks about Christ's humility showing itself in obedience. Verse 8 and the example of Christ therefore leads to verse 12, where Paul talks about Philippians obeying. Look at those verses with me.

[13 : 15] They read like this. Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed, not just in my presence, but now much more in my absence, continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. Now, friends, the first danger I think that we have in reading verse 12 is that we read it as those applied to us as individuals.

That is, we read it as though we should work out our own personal salvation with fear and trembling. And it could mean that. But let me suggest that it might not mean that. Let me suggest that Paul may be saying that the Philippians should live out the salvation into which Christ has brought them as God's people and do it in their relationships with each other.

That would fit with the context. So they should work on being obedient to God in their relationships with each other. But then he goes on to say they're not alone in this.

After all, that's what God's doing as well. He's working in the Philippians and he's doing it according to and for the sake of his good purpose. And his good purpose is the gospel.

[14 : 34] And this good purpose is currently under threat by disunity and disharmony in this congregation. And so like Christ, the Philippians should be humble and obedient.

God's good purpose in the gospel comes back to the forefront again in verses 13 and 14 or 14 to 16. Sorry. Paul says, look at it with me, please.

I do everything without grumbling and arguing. So that you may be blameless and pure. Children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.

Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain.

You see, what Paul does is he hones in on two sins that spring from self-centeredness. Complaining and arguing.

[15 : 35] If those things exist in your household, my guess is they spring from exactly the same. From self-centeredness. From self-centeredness. Don't they? Our own self-centeredness in our own households often will issue in complaining and arguing.

Anyway, they're to put aside disputing and have a common mindset of service, humility and obedience just like Jesus. You see, after all, God's purpose for them is that they might be his blameless children who will shine like stars in the universe and in amongst this crooked and depraved world of Philippi.

Paul's point's clear. Grumbling and complaining and arguing look like such small things. In fact, they're part and parcel, though, of the life of most Christian congregations.

And Paul's point is this, that our corporate life, including our arguing and complaining, can so easily undermine how effectively we hold forth the word of life to the world.

Friends, have you ever seen Christian congregations that are so much, there's so much bickering amongst themselves, they wouldn't know there's a world outside. So focused on their internal life.

[16 : 53] So focused on finding out what's at fault with each other. That they're not shining out to the world at all. In fact, they're a terrible example to the world. You see, these things in our corporate life can so easily undermine our effectiveness in shining like stars.

Internal bickering amongst the people of God has a disastrous effect on the gospel and the glory of Christ. And yet we Christians are often quite good at it, aren't we? But we ought not, these things ought not to be so.

With verses 17 and 18, Paul wraps up his argument for this section of the letter. You see, before he started this section, he had spoken about his own sufferings and the joy he had experienced.

His prayers for them is that he has not laboured in vain for them. And his desire for them is that they might mutually rejoice in any sufferings that might be theirs in suffering for the cause of Christ and the gospel.

So there's a very quick survey of this section of Paul's letter. Now, let's see if we can tie together some common themes and notice some common centres. Remember back to Philippians 1, 12 to 26, that we studied last week.

[18 : 11] In those verses, Paul concentrated on his own situation. As I said before, his focus was on his circumstances, his affairs. Well, the passage we've looked at today focuses on the Philippians and their situation and their affairs.

When we put both sections together, we find that Paul, as he reflects on his own situation and as he reflects on the Philippians, there is a common centre and theme.

And do you know what it is? It's the gospel. You see, the word gospel occurs more in Philippians than any other Pauline letter. In verses 12 to 26, that's last week, we saw how Paul was in prison and there was some thought that the gospel was under threat.

Paul counted it by saying, no, no, my imprisonment has resulted in the proclamation of the gospel. And that makes me rejoice. In the passage we look at today, he's also focused on the gospel.

And this time, Paul says, that the proclamation of the gospel by the Philippians is under threat. And that threat comes from two directions. First is from the outside to the inside, persecution and opposition.

[19 : 24] Second distraction is from the inside and its disunity and disharmony. The common focus or the common theme of both passages is the gospel and its proclamation.

After all, you see, God's purpose for us is that we as God's people are shining lights in the world.

We are to shine, particularly in our conduct, but also in our words. And we are to shine by speaking God's word into a dark world and by looking as God's people in a dark world.

So that's the common theme of these two passages. But it's clear that there's a common center as well, even to the thought of the gospel. The center is what is at the heart or center of the gospel.

And what is it? Or should I say, who is it? Well, it's Jesus, isn't it? In 12 to 26 of chapter 1, Paul talks about Christ being the center of his existence.

[20 : 26] For me to live is Christ, to die is gain. Jesus is there at the center. And that's what he's saying here, isn't it? What's at the center of the passage we've looked at today?

It's that passage from verse 5 through to 11. He's saying that as the Philippians think about how they should conduct themselves in the light of opposition and disunity, who should they center on? Jesus.

Jesus. And as they live, the center of their life is to be Jesus Christ. They should conform to Christ's example. They should have his example at the center.

And that's the basis for all their thoughts and attitudes and actions. And if they do this, then they'll be working out their salvation with fear and trembling together. And they'll become blameless and pure.

And they'll shine like stars in a corrupt world of Philippi. And they'll hold out the word of life. Friends, I want to tell you today that in this last week or so, sorry, not in this last week or so, but a number of years ago, when I was ministering to a particular congregation, I had some disturbing news.

[21 : 39] In fact, it was roundabout when I was preaching this passage the last time. And I had some feedback from someone outside the congregation about our congregation. And it concerned the way that we dealt with disunity amongst ourselves.

Now, the feedback was somewhat ill-informed as often feedback and gossip is. But, and I was able to correct the incorrect parts of it. But there was some of it that was quite accurate.

And the things that I'd heard were not about our purity and blamelessness. They were not about us shining us lights in the midst of a crooked and corrupt city that we were living within.

They were not things that I cared to boast about in relation to this congregation that I was part of. They were not things that I, as a pastor, could rejoice in. Because they affected our reputation and therefore our witness.

So I wonder if you can see what I'm saying. I'm saying that our life with each other here at Holy Trinity must conform to the image of Christ. It must have to do with being like-minded in our passion for gospel proclamation.

[22 : 52] It must be based on our love, on the love and humility that we see in Christ Jesus. And that love and humility must be demonstrated in our attitudes to each other.

With the humility of Christ, we must consider others better than ourselves. We must have nothing to do with selfishness, with selfish ambition and with empty conceit.

Our interest must be in God's great purposes in Christ and in the interests of others in our congregation. So friends, think of this as we approach our life together.

Now what I want to do in closing today is to talk about beautiful people. I wonder if you see what I see when I go shopping and even when I browse the internet.

Our news agencies and those, you know, as you go through the checkout in our supermarkets, are full of glossy magazines that picture beautiful people and describe their lives.

[23 : 59] And you can see we're fascinated by them because I know you wouldn't do this, but the people in front of you might. Flip through those magazines. Okay, and look at these beautiful people.

They place those magazines on the checkout so that we can be tantalised by such people. And underneath it all, there appears to be a sense in which these people are to be models that we might have for life.

We might be like them. There'll be guides for us. Models to which we should conform. So we get the magazines, don't we? You know, we might just be so tantalised that...

Sorry, I know you wouldn't be, but... That you actually buy that magazine so that you can browse it, not at someone else's expense, but at your own. And we think, yeah, maybe I might...

I might be like that. We gaze at these beautiful people and we read about the lives that they live and we long to be them. They're our modern models, aren't they? But underneath their beauty, you know and I know, often lie broken lives, broken marriages, faces that they're unhappy with so that they have plastic surgery on them and wacky attitudes to life.

[25 : 14] These beautiful people may indeed have the outward appearance of beauty, but the reality is that their beauty is temporary and empty. The model that we've been given in Philippians is very different, isn't it?

There are no cameras there. No celebrities. No outwardly beautiful people to gaze upon. Now in this passage, Paul takes us to an incredibly different place that our world would not go to.

There would be no magazine with this on its front in our checkouts. He tells them about a place in history where the God of all the earth put on human form and became a slave.

Where he became obedient. Where he was hung out on a cross in a backwater of Palestine, in a backwater Palestinian town by his own creation.

Where he was humiliated with a humiliation that is beyond description, where the God of all the earth was hung naked on a cross before the world. And Paul's view is that in this act, God is displaying what he considers to be true beauty.

[26 : 38] True beauty, you see, friends, is not external. True beauty is when a human becomes fully human as God designed them to be. True beauty is when a human being lives as God intended them to live.

When a human being humbles themselves before God and does God's will for God's world. And that is the beauty that we are to aspire to.

I want to urge you to aspire to that true beauty. To turn away from the magazines and the movies in your search for beauty and to turn instead to the cross. For there we see what God wants of you.

And of me. He wants us to put aside temporary and deluded foci for our lives. And he wants us to be conformed to the image of God. Conformed to the mindset that Jesus had.

To be beautiful in God's eyes. And this is true and eternal beauty. And friends, it is possible for all. So today, let's decide together, on our own, and amongst each other.

[27 : 55] And with each other. That our attitude will be the same as that of Christ Jesus. Who, being in nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage.

Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the nature of a servant and being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

And therefore God highly exalted him to the highest place and gave him a name that is above every name. That at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the beauty of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So counter-cultural, not only in the ancient world, but in our world. A man humble and obedient.

[29 : 07] Father, please help us. Please shape us with this beauty that we might be like the Lord Jesus Christ. That our, both together and in our own private lives, our attitude will be the same as that of Christ Jesus.

Who didn't consider equality with you something to be used to his own advantage, but made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant and being made in human likeness.

And then when he found himself as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Father, please, please help us to live lives of obedience and humility as well.

And thank you that in your time, as you exalted your son, you will exalt us to be with him for we will be in his likeness as well. And we thank you that all of this will be for your glory and yours alone.

And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Cheers. Amen.