

How should we live?

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[0 : 00] We're going to turn to Philippians chapter 1 and do our work there this morning.! Is there a second person talking as well as me? Is there an echo? Echo, echo? Are you sure?

I'm just mumbling to myself then, probably. Let's ask God to help us to get the text into our beings. Thank you, Lord, that you spoke years ago.

Thank you that you still speak today through your Holy Spirit. Thank you that you use your word, your word, to speak into our hearts. Please transfer the text, as it were, from the book in front of us or the script in front of us into our hearts and into our wills, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.

How should we live? How can we walk well? How does a church gain a reputation with outsiders? We're told we're meant to have a good reputation with outsiders.

How do we do that? Isn't it when we are known as people who are loved in the community and when we walk the talk, to use an old phrase, when our actions do good and are in line with our message?

[1 : 22] We're not judged for our theological understanding, but for our behaviour. Would you agree that in this context, actions speak louder than words?

Let's move on from the song, shall we, and do the Bible talk. We're joy in Jesus today. But if you know Philippians up to now, which we've been working through, you will know that Paul has stressed that what matters most is preaching.

And while I'm standing here, I'll agree with him. What matters most is preaching. And he said that as long as Christ is preached, whatever the motives, he's really thrilled.

Whether he's in prison or wherever he is, as long as Christ is preached, he's thrilled. Yes, but he hasn't finished his letter. He's only at chapter 1 and verse 27, although he wouldn't have known those numbers in those days.

But that's where he is. He now turns to our conduct. How should we live? Well, let's put it in the negative. Inconsistent believers, liars, immoral, very selfish people, those who are rude to others or act with superiority, just do not make good witnesses, do they?

[2 : 42] Do you agree? Yeah. We are to walk worthy of Christ. That's what 27 says, doesn't it? Whatever happens, whatever happens, conduct yourselves, live, in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

The question then is how. How am I going to do that? And I think the next section of verses will tell us that. How are we going to do so? There are three ways, three answers he's going to give.

The first one, 27 to 30, is that we should work together. We should walk worthy of the gospel. How? We should work together.

See, one key of walking worthily of the gospel is to be one united body. The way we live is never to clash with the gospel we proclaim.

We can't cop out and say, don't follow me. I'm a sinful, stupid person. Follow Jesus. How will others see Jesus? Where will they see Jesus?

[3 : 44] They'll only see Jesus in us. So our walk and our talk must be in tandem. Look how it shows itself. Look at 27.

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, when I come and see you, or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel, without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you.

This is a sign that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved, and that by God. For it's been granted to you on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him.

Since you're going through the same struggle, you saw I had, and now hear that I still have. See the stress at 27? Standing firm, in the one spirit, striving together as one, and not for our sake, but for the faith of the gospel, the gospel's sake.

Now, unity is really, really important, because a divided church makes for difficult witness. But in unity, when people hear about Christ from one person, and then they hear about Christ from another person, they hear the same message, in different words and different thought forms, through two different people.

[5 : 11] Someone once told me about a married couple, that they said to me, whatever one of you says, when I go and ask the other one the same question, I get the same answer. So it should be.

We stand firm, we strive together. We're not frightened by opposition. That's what 28 goes on to talk about, doesn't it, the opposition? Sadly, we have to expect opposition.

29. You see, Jesus can be a terrible, terrible threat to people.

We all want to rule our own lives. We want to be our own saviors. And when Jesus comes along and says, well, I'm the boss, I rule, there's a terrible clash that takes place, isn't there?

Bound to be. And that was Paul's experience. Look at verse 30. Since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

[6 : 08] He was in prison. He's faced struggles. He knows their struggles. But don't be frightened. It's always been like this. Continue to follow Jesus, think how he was attacked, and expect nothing less.

It's a great joy to be on Jesus' team. Fantastic. But it does attract opposition. Learn to expect it. Suffer together.

Support one another. Striving for one, for the faith of the gospel. Now, no one likes to suffer. We all want an easy life. Do you know, one of the most persecuted groups of people on earth are the Farsi speakers in Iran.

And yet they are seeing the greatest growth to the gospel. They have a headquarters not far from here, near Godalming. And their newsletter is well worth taking.

There are people we support in the church who work amongst Farsi speakers. Farsi is spoken in Iran, and it's spoken in Afghanistan. Far from preventing the good news of Jesus spreading, the believers are encouraged and emboldened to make Christ known.

[7 : 25] In one of the worst regimes on earth, the gospel shines the brightest. Isn't that fantastic? So be encouraged. Work together. Secondly, as he starts chapter two, he calls on us to be like-minded.

Here's one to four. If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the spirit, of any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, rather in humility. Value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interests of the others.

If you want to disrupt a church and encourage different factions and get people arguing, then that's the way to do it. Church arguments sap energy and they lose focus.

Unity is crucial to all-round growth. You notice the therefore in 2.1? Conduct yourselves well. Therefore, be like-minded.

[8 : 38] Being united with Christ, have the same love, like-minded, one in spirit, one mind. You see, at Philippi, two women fell out.

They fell out with each other and they fell out with the leadership. You'll find about them in the beginning of chapter 4. One of the key phrases is that they didn't have the same mind.

They didn't have the same mind. They were thinking oppositely, as it were, differently from one another, enough to fight, argue, and cause trouble. It's this togetherness.

It's this like-mindedness that Paul is emphasising here. No selfish ambitions, but valuing one another. You see, it's the gospel that brings us together, isn't it?

We're not brought together naturally, other than we live in the same country and the same town. It's the gospel that brings us together. We're united to Christ. And therefore, when we're united to Christ, we're united to one another.

[9 : 39] That's what he's saying, isn't it, in 2.1? If you have any encouragement for being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in

spirit and of one mind.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. No selfish ambitions is the gospel that unites us. Therefore, be united to one another. See, that's the joy of being united to Christ. The joy of being united to Christ is you have fellow believers all over the world who you can pray with and understand, if you understand the language, easily.

You're at home. This is our family. Gospel oneness is extremely attractive. Gospel divisions are ugly. Paul is pleading for like-mindedness, for one in spirit, one in mind, a common sharing in the Holy Spirit, no one-upmanship.

He asks for tenderness and compassion. These are all relational words, aren't they? Knowing how to deal with one another. He would be so encouraged if the Philippians have the same love for each other as Christ has for his people.

[11 : 03] Like-mindedness is absolutely crucial, isn't it? Not that we're all identikets, but we hold the same values. We see things the same way. We have a common focus.

I do hope we know that, that division and arguments really hinder gospel work. A church which functions really well together, united in its core values, is much more likely to make headway. Indeed, you could say churches, five or six of us working together in Gostry Meadow last Sunday afternoon, has a huge witness into the town, a togetherness. And unity comes from an attitude of selflessness.

Be like-minded. As you well know, our default position ever since the fall is to be selfish. We secretly want what pleases me.

I don't want what pleases you, I want what pleases me. I think you probably feel the same. So Paul spells it out in verse three. Make my joy complete by being like-minded. Having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.

[12 : 14] We're not to push ourselves forward. We're to act in humility. We're not to be vain. We're not to think that we're this world's saviour.

Our focus is to be on the outward, the other, not the inward. And that change is made by applying the gospel to ourselves. I don't know if you were ever taught when you were much younger the word J-O-Y, joy.

Jesus comes first, others come second, and yourself comes last. Aren't you always impressed when you chat to somebody and they ask you about you? What's going on in your life?

How are you, they say. A friend of mine told me a wonderful story. He said he met a chap once for the first time. And after an hour, my friend said to me, I know a lot about him, but he knows nothing about me.

He didn't ask any questions. He was totally wrapped up in himself. And I believe he was a vicar as well. Paul is pleading with his Philippian friends and with us not to be like that, to take a greater interest in others than in ourselves.

[13 : 29] That's what verse 4 is saying, isn't it? Not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interest of the others. We're other-centred people. Whereas, in a natural, secular world, we're self-centred people.

The community is more important than the individual. Let me say that again because this is completely counter-cultural to our Western way of thinking. The community is more important than the individual.

But it's the way of the Gospel, isn't it? Now, for some of us, this is relatively, reasonably easy. We love to find out about others. But for others of us, it's much, much harder because our own needs, our own concerns just dominate our horizon.

So let me encourage you to force yourself to ask after someone else. Keep quiet about yourself. And if you do get asked about yourself, be brief.

Be known as lovers of others. Not someone always talking about themselves. Learn to ask. Learn to listen. By golly, have I had to learn to listen.

[14 : 38] Have a phone call with me on the phone and I'll do 90% of the talking. Be a servant to others. Copy the great Lord Jesus. Be like-minded.

Now, here's the big punch coming up in the third section. In your relationships with one another, verse 5, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.

We're to work together. We're to be like-minded. We're to copy Christ. We're to be servant-hearted. We're to think like Christ, to have his mindset.

We're to copy him. Now, these verses, which are in a poem form, this poem, are probably one of the most brilliant passages in all of the Bible.

You see, he who was and is and always will be God gave up some of his God-like qualities to become human like us.

[15 : 45] More than that, he actually became sin for us. Not sinful, but sin for us. He bore our sins on the cross. He faced death on our behalf as a full human.

He came down from the highest of heights without any bells or whistles. Down he came to the deepest of depths so that we could gain access to his Father.

Look at 5 to 11. in your relationships with one another have the same mindset as Christ Jesus. We start at the top. Who being in very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage.

He didn't grasp hold of it. Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant. We're going down. Made in human likeness.

Found in appearance of a man. He humbled himself. He became obedient to death. We're almost at the bottom. Even death on a cross. He did God's will.

[16 : 51] And therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the 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. That's everywhere.

And every tongue every tongue acknowledged that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. aren't they superb? Now I don't know if Paul himself wrote this or if this was a poem that was circulating but it is magnificent.

Absolutely magnificent. Only when Jesus had descended to the very depths does God exalt him to the highest place. The text says he became obedient to death.

Obedient to death. Willingly obeyed. This is the plan of the triune God. The plan that Father, Son and Holy Spirit put together that Jesus would take on human flesh take on our sin face its consequences so that we would not have to.

It's a brilliant plan. He's outstanding. He's the one who represents us before the Father. And he did it out of sheer and utter love.

[18 : 02] Love for his Father and love for us. That's real servanthood for you, isn't it? No wonder Graham Kendrick called him the servant king. The song we'll sing in a few moments.

Who else has acted like this? What other God has swapped sides from glory to earth so that we earthlings could be fitted for glory? Doesn't 6-11 humble you?

It's almost shocking that God in Jesus would act like this. but he did. And he did it so that you and I could have a relationship with God without our wretched sin blocking us and blocking the way.

If therefore God has acted like this in Christ how should we act towards one another? We should be like-minded. We should work together for the gospel.

Shouldn't we copy our Lord Jesus and be a servant to others? Of course we want to learn from Christ but doesn't our behaviour need to mirror that? Shouldn't we imitate the Lord Jesus?

[19 : 10] Now this brilliant, brilliant, brilliant passage about Jesus' death is rather rare. You see Jesus here is being used as our example.

Usually the emphasis is on Jesus' death on our behalf for us. But here he's our model. We're to be like him. That's how it starts, doesn't it, in five?

Having the same mindset as Christ Jesus. Well, one thing is clear by the time you get to the end of the poem. We must regularly bow down and worship Jesus.

After all, he's the Lord of Lords. Verse 10, isn't he? At the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

You see, a day is coming and we don't know when, when everyone who's ever lived will have to stand before King Jesus and bow down. Are we not some of the most privileged people in the world that we can do so willingly?

[20 : 21] but think of others, think of others who refuse to acknowledge him as their true Lord while on earth.

What a terrible, terrible, terrible final day it'll be for them. The world is darkened by sinful selfishness.

We've had our eyes opened. We've repented and turned to Christ. At least I hope you have. So we are compelled to share this good news, this gospel truth with all and sundry.

Jesus is just so brilliant, so humble. He must shape the way we think and live. And that means calling on our friends and family to trust him also, to let his life and especially his cross shape us and mould us.

So how are you doing at copying Christ? How are you doing at being his servant? How are you doing at loving fellow believers, working together to make his brilliant name known?

[21 : 29] Are you learning each day to be more and more like the Lord Jesus? You know, we often learn by osmosis even more than being formally taught, don't we?

Copy Christ. Be like him. Let's pray together. Our gracious Father, we do thank you for the Apostle Paul who learned what it was to follow Jesus Christ.

Thank you for transforming him to be a true servant of the Lord Jesus. Please make us here today his servants. He's such a wonderful person to follow.

No one had such compassion and humility as he did. No one pleased his heavenly Father more than he did. Please make us love him, thank him, learn from him, absorb him into our spiritual bloodstream and follow him wholeheartedly, we pray, alongside our brothers and sisters.

In his holy name we ask. Amen. Thank you.