

Let Each Esteem Others Better Than Themselves

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Date: 14 January 2021

Preacher: Malcolm Macdonald

- [0 : 00] We're going to begin our service with the singing of the words of Psalm 138 in Gaelic.
- I'll read from the beginning. Thee will I praise with all my heart. I will sing praise to thee before the gods, and worship will toward thy sanctuary.
- I'll praise thy name even for thy truth, and kindness of thy love. For thy word hast magnified all thy great name above.
- Thou didst me answer in the day when I to thee did cry, and thou, my fainting soul, with strength didst strengthen inwardly. All kings upon the earth that are shall give thee praise, O Lord, whenas they from thy mouth shall hear thy truth and faithful word.
- Thee will be free, and thou, my fainting soul, with strength of thy love. Good kind of. Good kind of. Good kind of.
- [2 : 07] Good kind of.
- Good kind of. Good kind of. Good kind of. Good kind of. Good kind of.
- Good kind of. Good kind of. Good kind of.
- Good kind of. Good kind of. Good kind of. Thank you.
- Thank you.
- [4 : 07] Thank you.
- Thank you.
- Thank you.
- Thank you.
- Thank you.
- [6 : 37] Thank you.
- Thank you.
- O Lord our God, we give thanks for the words that have just been sung, the words of the psalmist who came with praise and worship towards your sanctuary.
- And we bless you and praise you that this is what you seek from us, that you would bless your world to us and that we would know that as we handle it, that it encourages us to come and that you bless us through it and that you bless us through us and that it reveals to us who you are and what you have come to do in this world.
- A world that belongs to us, that we have a world that belongs to us, that we have a world that we have in this world who think that they possess its riches.
- [8 : 40] That Pikachu is more true and that we are here in this world that they ■■ it God who is God over all, the one who inhabits eternity and before whom all things appear and all things were in your eyes even before they came into existence.

And that is a mystery to the creatures of the dust, those who try and comprehend the greatness of God and who cannot fathom what is before their eyes, that it was before your eyes even before it had an existence.

But we give thanks that regardless of the mystery, regardless of the awesome wonder that belongs to these things, that all things that you have created are subject to you in a way that gives strength to us even at this time.

Because we are surrounded by all kinds of uncertainty and all kinds of mystery in the outworking of your providence, especially with regard to the current pandemic.

There are many things that are a new experience to this world. There may have been episodes like this in the history of the world before now, but nothing like this and certainly nothing like this in our experience.

[11 : 09] And that invokes within us a sense of terror and fear and makes us perhaps in a sense believe that there is no way these things can ever change and that this is how things will be.

And yet you are the only thing that changes not. You are the one who remains the same and you are a constant in this ocean of uncertainty.

And for that reason we can come to you, pour out our cares and concerns to you, thankful that no matter what we are going through at the present, that we can go to you, the God who is the refuge and the strength of his people.

We pray for your people at this time as we pray for the world at large. We pray for those who are suffering, those who have difficulties and trials to contend with.

May you mercifully undertake for them. Bless those who are caring for them within the medical profession, doctors, nurses and all such.

[12 : 22] We pray that you would sanctify them to your own glory and that good may come out of evil. And you alone are able to do that.

So we pray that you would remember us and all we leave in your care at this time, particularly under your word and that it would be blessed to all who would hear it.

Give to us a hearing ear and a spirit that is willing and a heart that is consecrated to the service of God. We pray that you would continue to watch over us as congregations, that you would keep our feet in the way, that we would not be distracted or sidetracked because you have set before us a path to walk.

And this is the way walk you in it. And you have destined for your people a destination that is glorious to them and to you.

And your name will be magnified in them achieving the glorious end that you have purposed for them. So remember our homes, our families.

[13 : 33] Remember all who are under your hand at this time. Pray for the sick that they may recover their strength. Pray for those who are grieving that they may know where to go with their sorrow.

That you may remember those who are broken in body or mind. Heal their hearts and lift up their souls. That they may look unto God. Bless us together we pray around your word.

Bless us in the reading of your word. Forgive many sins in Jesus name. We pray all with forgiveness of sin in him.

Amen. We are going to hear the word of God as we have it in the New Testament scriptures. In Paul's epistle to the Philippians chapter 2.

We are going to read from the beginning of the chapter down to verse 18. If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfill ye my joy that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

- [14 : 46] Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory. But in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.

And then, being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence solely, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do his good pleasure. Do all things without murmurings and disputings, that ye may be blameless and harmless, sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life, that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.

- [16 : 40] Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all, for the same cause also do ye joy and rejoice with me.

And so on. God, at his blessing to this reading of his word, unto his name be the praise. God, at his blessing to this, I will read again at the beginning of chapter 2.

If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfill ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord of one mind.

Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory, but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not on every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

Particularly the words of verse 3 and 4, let nothing be done through strife or vain glory, and so on.

- [17 : 56] This week, sometime, in one of the news channels, the subject that was being considered was the vaccination programme that has been followed throughout the UK at this time.

One elderly gentleman was being interviewed in connection with receiving the vaccine. He was over 90, he said, and hoped it would work for him.

The main reason that he gave was that he was longing to be allowed to visit his wife of 70 years. If spared, they would celebrate that anniversary this year.

She was being cared for in a home, but he phoned her, he said twice a day, and wrote her a letter every week. I think you could safely say, even without hearing the conversation, that he loved his wife very much.

Now, while we cannot hear Paul speak, we can read what he has to say. And I think it's safe to say of the apostle that he dearly loves the people of the congregation in Philippi.

- [19 : 08] He thanks God for them, and joyfully prays for them, mindful of the gospel fellowship he enjoyed with them. Have you ever enjoyed fellowship in the gospel with anyone?

I think that many Christians, if not all, have enjoyed gospel fellowship at some point. But there are special occasions when you share a time of deep gospel fellowship with a fellow Christian, or perhaps more than one.

Your soul is knit with them for all time. You will never forget that experience, and you will never forget them. Surely it is true of Paul and these Philippian believers.

Listen again what he says. My brethren, dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, my dearly beloved.

And because Paul holds them in such high affection, it is inevitable that he would want the best for them. To be fair to Paul, he wants nothing but the best for the Lord's people.

[20 : 18] In this case, as we saw last Thursday, Paul desires for them the Christian graces that they undoubtedly possess to be increased and added to, if possible.

And that their witness to Christ would be faithful and winsome. And that any inconsistencies in that witness be dealt with, in order to preserve their testimony as a body of believers.

The two verses that we are looking at this evening tells us what not to do. If the first two are descriptions of the kind of things that should be seen, these two have more to do with what should not be seen.

So what does Paul look for? First, he does not want anything to be done that is stimulated by strife or vainglory. The word strife is also translated rivalry or selfish ambition.

Words that may be slightly nuanced so as to give a different slant. For example, if you have a rival, then you want what they want, but you want it for yourself ahead of them.

[21 : 32] Sometimes it can degenerate into wanting it for yourself so that they cannot have it. It is selfish in that respect. Sometimes the word rival can be used with the word healthy attached.

There is a mutual respect, but there is the element of competition. Perhaps like athletes who are similarly gifted. Remember the attempts of Steve Overt and Sebastian Go to get the better of one another.

Or Roger Federer and Nadal on the tennis court. But that is not what is being referred to here. What is being challenged is motive.

Doing something for the wrong reason, instead of doing it for the glory of God or for the good of the Church of Christ. There is rivalry that is bitter and it is sinful at its heart.

Greek scholars suggest the word used by Paul indicates a divisive spirit, something that has no place in the cause of Christ.

[22 : 47] Earlier in chapter 1, Paul refers to those who preach Christ for the wrong reasons. He states, some preach Christ even of envy and strife and some of good will.

The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely supposing to add affliction. You read that and you scratch your head.

Why would anyone want to do that? Some say it is just a sect or worse still, someone who holds to a particular doctrine and all that matters is that.

This doctrine must be presented at any cost. Perhaps here all that mattered was that Paul would not receive a place among them.

This was something they desired for themselves. That is an ugly picture, as indeed is the accompanying prohibition. Do not do anything out of conceit, he says.

[23 : 50] It is ugly. Donald Trump is not far from the news at any time. Whatever is wrong or right about him, I think that books will be written about him for decades to come.

One image springs to mind is of an international summit and all the state heads were gathered on the stage for a photo. We see President Trump very deliberately and with little decorum push himself to the front and centre.

It was almost childish. But yet you think this was what it was. Many of his political contemporaries were not shrinking violets when it comes to vying for possession for such a prestigious picture.

But what Paul is saying is clearly such a spirit is alien to the Christian. It should be alien to the Christian. Instead, humility should reign.

This will be seen in the way you treat others. Do you consider all others better than yourselves? Just think of how wrong it seems to us when we see Christians in Muslim countries treated as second-class citizens.

[25 : 11] Positive discrimination against them. The Barnabas Fund monitors the way different countries behave towards Christians as a state.

Over the years the West has sent aid to a great many countries in time of need, for example, when disaster strikes. But within these countries Christians are often at the end of the pecking order if indeed to receive any benefit of that aid.

Now we see the wrong of that. But what about within the church and within our own congregations? What happens when we at times are guilty of discrimination of sorts?

Whether we consider others worse than ourselves or ourselves better than them or not, for whatever reason.

Extremes may make us see the injustice of it. But it can be more subtle and equally damaging to the fellowship that we belong to.

[26 : 23] When we think of any form of belittlement, whatever lies behind it, it is never good. Whatever we think, whether it is education or wealth or anything that motivates us to look upon others and to, in actual fact, despise them.

Although we would never use these words for what they are or what we are. Then we come to verse 4. And the apostle there, Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

What he is saying there is, he is not referring to busybodies, but that we should not only be concerned about self-interest, but the interest of others.

Modern Presbyterianism is often accused of following business models from the world of commerce. There may be more than a grain of truth in that.

But one thing that is done at the outset of every Presbytery meeting is the agenda is presented and the question asked, does anyone indicate a conflict of interest?

[27 : 46] The reason for that is simple, that when an item comes up for discussion that they may withdraw or indicate that they want no part in the decision making, because then they will be free from accusation that they involved themselves in affecting inadvertently or otherwise the decision that was to be arrived at.

What we are seeing here is that Paul is concerned that every Christian should put self-interest last and the interest of others first.

This is the right thing to do. Dr. Sinclair Ferguson states that the alternative to doing this is to end up spiritually disfigured ourselves.

It is clearly something we need to cultivate because the world we live in is a place where me first is celebrated. J. Alan Blair states plainly, God hates pride and we need to recognise its danger because it usually evolves into factions or a factious spirit that undermines the testimony of the whole congregation.

This is why Christ demands that his followers take up the cross. But they cannot do that, he says, without denying themselves. Every Christian must recognise that whatever or wherever they turn, the curse itself is sure to follow.

[29 : 23] And one thing it desires more than any is to get its own way, no matter the cost. Where does Paul take the reader? No where better than to the example of Christ.

And that is what follows in the passage before us in verse 5. I want to finish quoting the words of A.W. Toser.

And he, as usual, takes a very personal stance with regard to this. He says the essence of legalism is self-atonement.

The seeker tries to make himself acceptable to God by some act of restitution or by self-punishment or the feeling of regret.

The desire to be pleasing to God is commendable, certainly. But the effort to please God by self-effort is not, for it assumes that sin, once done, may be undone, an assumption that is wholly false.

[30 : 31] Self, in that regard, thinks of what can be done by ourselves in order to secure the affection of God.

It is the same spirit that lies behind it as is an offence to the apostle here, where what we believe about ourselves takes priority over everything else.

What we believe or what we want concerning ourselves. We need to be spared from that and look, as Paul does, to the example of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As he says here in this epistle, let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, and so on.

May he bless to us these thoughts. Let us join together in prayer. Most merciful God, save us from ourselves and allow us to function within your cause to your glory and for the good of those who have part of it along with us.

[31 : 45] Hear our prayers, forgive our sins, in Jesus' name we ask it. And now may grace, mercy and peace from God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with you all now and always. Amen.