

A Shared Peace

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[0 : 00] I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women who have laboured side by side with me in the Gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life.

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is anything excellent, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. Well, I want to begin this morning by asking a question.

How important, if you're a regular here at Grace Church, how important do you feel your contribution is? Or, if you're looking in on the Christian faith, how important, if you began to follow Jesus, do you feel your contribution might be?

[1 : 42] On a scale of one to ten. It's an important question because the Apostle Paul's letter to the Church of Philippi that we've been looking at over these last few weeks or so, it's all about partnership in the Gospel.

Just to remind us, it's where the letter starts, if you look back to chapter 1, verse 5. Paul is full of thanks for their partnership in the Gospel.

In chapter 1, verse 7, he describes them as partakers, literally partners with me in grace. The explanation comes in verse 6, they have begun to follow Jesus, and the Lord God has begun a good work in them.

In other words, at a point where we begin the Christian life, that is precisely the same point at which we become partners in the Gospel.

It follows, of course, that the person who regards themselves as a follower of Jesus, but isn't really kind of up for this whole Gospel partnership thing that we've been thinking about over these last few weeks in Philippians, hasn't understood what it means to follow Jesus.

[2 : 55] Now, partnership, of course, is a business word. It speaks of energetically striving together for the same shared concern. Think, perhaps, of a business partnership, a medical practice or a law firm or something like that.

The contribution of each partner is vital, isn't it? Either for good or for ill. If the partners are individually striving to achieve the aims of the partnership or business, then the business will flourish.

If they're not, the business will be hindered and won't function effectively. Hence that question I started with.

How important do you feel your contribution to Grace Church is? The answer, it is of enormous significance, whether for good or for ill.

Our ability to stand firm as a church, side by side, for the faith of the Gospel depends on the individual quality of the discipleship of each one of us who follows Jesus.

[4 : 10] I wonder if you've ever thought about that. I think in our culture, where we're so kind of individualistic, where we so rarely think about corporate things and the implications of our lives for others, I think that's a very striking thought.

Alec Mateer, in his excellent commentary on Philippians, imagines a triangle similar to, certainly on the paper outline, perhaps it's about to appear on the screen.

Wonderful. There it is. Alec Mateer imagines a triangle like this, where the top part of the triangle represents the church as it faces the world, so to speak, as it proclaims the message of Jesus, often, of course, in the face of hostility, and yet stands firm.

The church as it faces the world. The point at the bottom of the triangle, the point, in other words, on which the church rests, is the quality of each individual's walk with the Lord Jesus.

And that is why Philippians is such an extraordinary combination of both kind of corporate, big-picture vision, but also individual discipleship as well.

[5 : 34] And our verses today, while at first sight they look rather kind of disjointed, actually focus on the kind of mature Christian discipleship which will strengthen and undergird our corporate gospel partnership.

So that's where we're heading together this morning, and we're going to think about three things in our own personal lives which will undergird our corporate gospel partnership. Firstly, partnership undergirded by unity.

Have a look at verses 2 and 3 of Philippians 4. I entreat Iodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.

Yet I ask you also, true companion, help these women who have laboured side by side with me in the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Well, it must have been a rather awkward moment, wasn't it, that Sunday morning in Philippi, as this part of the letter was read. Perhaps people had gathered a few minutes earlier, excited about the fact that the church had received a letter from the Apostle Paul and it was going to be read out.

[6 : 48] Iodia had arrived and sat in her usual seat on the left. Syntyche had arrived and sat in her usual seat on the right, both of them studiously avoiding each other's gaze. They had both rejoiced at this letter, full of encouragement to live as citizens of heaven, and then the bombshell, verse 2.

I entreat Iodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Well, they must have wanted to die, mustn't they be on the spot and sort of hide under their chairs.

But I wonder if we can feel the surprise of this. I think it would be something like being at a sort of company annual general meeting or something like that.

And we've had all the kind of big picture stuff about the company results, the future of the business, the nature of the industry, big plans, big picture stuff.

And then suddenly in the midst of all that, the tone completely changes. As two employees who work in the back office in Slough are called out and they're told to stop squabbling and start working together as a team.

[8 : 06] I think that's the kind of, the sense that we get here. And we're bound to ask, well, hang on a minute, what's the big deal? Well, the big deal is that personal disputes and fallings out matter in church because they weaken our ability to stand firm together, side by side with each other, contending for the gospel.

Now, we're told little about Iodia and Syntyche, except verse 3, clearly at some stage, perhaps when the Apostle Paul was in Philippi, they were co-workers with him. Paul, notice, is in no doubt they're Christian.

Their names are in the book of life. And yet, they've fallen out. We're told nothing about the reason for their squabble. It's certainly not over a primary matter of Christian doctrine or teaching or discipleship.

Otherwise, Paul would call it out, as he does elsewhere in other letters in the New Testament. But perhaps we can imagine in the past there might have been an unkind word or a misunderstanding over something that was said or done or a personality clash.

Or perhaps they're both on the church council and they disagreed over a decision that had been made. Christians can fall out over all sorts of things, sadly. Things like how money is spent or the music we sing or the employment of staff or the use of buildings.

[9 : 40] So, what's the remedy? Well, notice firstly, verse 3, it's not simply a matter for these two women.

It's a matter for the church. As Paul says, I ask you, true companion, to help these women. Now, we don't know who this person is, but notice that Paul won't let the issue remain a private matter.

Because although the point of their disagreement may not be a serious issue, the fact of their disagreement is a serious issue. It consumes their energies, it hinders them from serving Jesus

effectively, and as others inevitably get drawn in, then of course, it hinders others as well from serving Jesus effectively.

In other words, the Christian life is not an individual sport. It's not like running or squash, where, you know, if you're distracted and your mind is on other things, then you are the only one it affects.

No, being a follower of Jesus involves partnership in the gospel with others. It is a team game. And just as when a talented member of a team is sent off the pitch with disastrous results, so too all are affected when one or two members of a local church are distracted from serving the Lord Jesus.

[11:11] In other words, there is no such thing as a private quarrel in church. And therefore, it's the responsibility of the church to help these women to sort out their differences.

But secondly, notice that both women then need to agree in the Lord, verse 2. Now, the word that Paul uses for agree there literally means to have one mind.

It's that loaded mindset word that we've seen time and time again throughout Philippians. just look back to chapter 2, verses 5 to 7.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant.

Jesus Christ humbled himself by taking the form of a slave, a servant, for the eternal welfare and benefit of others.

[12:20] And therefore, you see, these two women, they're to have the same mindset and put the eternal welfare of others before their quarrel and squabbling.

Sacrificing their own pride, I guess, and subordinating their own agenda for the greater good of the gospel. So let me ask, is there someone at Grace Church you've fallen out with?

Don't worry, I'm not going to do a poll, I'm not going to name names, yes, you over there and you over there. But I guess, for most of us, there, even if there isn't now, I guess there has been in the past and I guess there will be in the future.

Perhaps a situation where a small disagreement or misunderstanding is in danger of becoming a large one. Will we humble ourselves? Make contact?

Agree to meet up? Start talking? Because humility drives out pride. humility doesn't exist, doesn't insist that the other person makes the first move.

[13:39] It doesn't hold grudges. Will you humble yourself so that you and others are not distracted from contending together for the gospel?

Partnership undergirded by unity. Secondly, partnership undergirded by peace. verse 6. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God.

Anxiety drains us of energy, doesn't it? I guess some of us will know that from our own experience. And it can drain us of the energy to live as citizens of heaven.

Now, there are loads of things the Christians in Philippi may have got anxious about as they stood together side by side for the sake of the gospel. I guess we saw some of those things, didn't we, those of us in our growth groups this week on Tuesday and Wednesday evening.

When Paul was in Philippi, they faced accusations that proclaiming Jesus was unlawful, that it's un-Roman to follow Jesus, that it's against the emperor, that it's proclaiming another king, King Jesus.

[14:57] In other words, it's very much outside the cultural mainstream and therefore it's a source of suspicion. That was first century Philippi.

But of course, it's no different really, is it, in 21st century Britain. And I guess we all kind of know, don't we, how that plays out. You know, at work or school as a citizen of heaven, what am I allowed to say?

What am I not allowed to say? What will happen at work if I speak up? Well, perhaps I should just keep a low profile instead. Or just thinking about Christmas, I mean, should I invite friends and neighbours to carol services?

What might they think about it? How will they react to hearing that actually we all need a saviour from the judgement to come? Or what will people think of me if as a church we make a stand on particular issues that go against the grain of our culture?

And of course, we could go on. So what's the answer to that kind of anxiety, which, and I take it we all of us experience that kind of anxiety to some extent?

[16:18] Well, notice firstly, it's to redirect our joy. It's to redirect our joy. Verse 4, rejoice in the Lord always. I say again, rejoice.

Because of course, the things we get anxious about, it's so often, doesn't it, it reveals what we rejoice in, where our joy is. You know, if my real joy is in my career and the status that my career affords me, then of course, I'm going to be reluctant to speak up as a Christian at work.

If what I really rejoice in are my friendships, then of course, I'm going to be anxious about inviting my friends to a carol service, because I'm going to be anxious about how people respond.

If what I rejoice in is how popular I am, perhaps at school or just with friends or whatever, then again, I'm going to be reluctant to stand out from the crowds.

If what I rejoice in is my security, then I'm going to be reluctant to take risks for the gospel. And just think about the Apostle Paul.

[17:34] He probably had more to be anxious about than anyone. Remember, he's in prison. He doesn't know whether he's going to be released or executed.

Yet, what does he say, chapter 1, verse 12? I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has really happened to me has served to advance the gospel.

And, verse 18, what then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

rejoice. You see, Paul's rejoicing is in the Lord. He views his circumstances not through the kind of lens of personal comfort and uncertainty about the future, but instead whether or not the gospel is advancing.

And as a result, he's remarkably free from anxiety about his present experiences. So, back to chapter 4, verse 4. You see, I think my temptation is to read chapter 4, verse 4, and kind of think rejoice in the Lord simply means cheer up.

[18:50] It's far more than that. It's a call to redirect what we rejoice in. It's to so value Jesus and so long for his smile of approval, his smile of approval, that nothing else matters.

That's the first part of the answer to anxiety. The second part is to pray, verse 6, which in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God, and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

The Lord is at hand, he isn't distant, prayer demonstrates a trust in him. Prayer, of course, therefore, is the very opposite of anxiety. And out of that trust flows a peace and confidence in God's goodness, his sovereign overruling, his kindness, in every situation, even when things don't work out as we might like them to.

When we find ourselves anxious, we're to turn to the Lord in prayer. The result, verse 7, God's supernatural peace guards our hearts.

That word guards literally means garrisons our hearts. So think of some enormous castle somewhere, Windsor Castle or Pembroke Castle or somewhere like that, guarding those who live inside.

[20:24] Well, here is the peace of God guarding our hearts and our minds. again, it's that Philippians word. It's just what we need, isn't it? Our hearts and minds to be guarded.

So rather than being governed and shaped by our anxieties at the prospect of standing firm with others, side by side, for the sake of the gospel, rather than being governed by anxieties about that, actually we're governed and shaped by the fact that we are citizens of heaven, because our hearts and minds are guarded in Christ Jesus.

So let me ask, what are you anxious about when it comes to this whole issue of partnership in the gospel with others, standing side by side for the gospel that we've been thinking about over these last few weeks in Philippians?

What are you anxious about as we think about that? There are loads of things that make me anxious. things that do they reveal about what you rejoice in and about what you value.

Instead, will you seek Jesus' approval and rejoice in him, redirecting your joy and cast your anxieties on him?

[21:48] Partnership undergirded by unity, partnership undergirded by peace. Thirdly, partnership undergirded by our minds. Verse 8.

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Now, this isn't just a kind of random list of Christian virtues that Paul writes down as if he's kind of run out of things to say. Rather, it is about having the right mindset as citizens of heaven that will enable us to stand firm for the gospel together.

In summary, it's the affairs, concerns, and value of heaven that should fill and shape our minds. things. I mean, just think about the Philippians previously, before they came to put their trust in the Lord Jesus, what would they have filled their minds with?

Well, I guess the affairs of this world, the affairs of Roman citizenship, the front page headlines, the 24-hour news feeds on their phones, the latest gossip, the sports results, and all that kind of stuff.

[23 : 08] But now, as citizens of heaven, they are to think about other things. they, like we, are to have a different focus. So, let's remember the big vision of this letter.

It's there, just click back to chapter 2, verse 15. Chapter 2, verse 15. That you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, or as stars in the world.

We were down in Cornwall over half term. One of the joys of being down there is you can see the stars. I mean, not just kind of the one or two of the brightest stars that you get to see in London on a clear night, but actually looking up a whole kind of carpet, stars.

I mean, just completely amazing being able to look up and see them. Well, that is our calling if we belong to the Lord Jesus.

London is a dark place. It is a spiritually dark place. It's crooked, it's twisted. And yet, imagine the impact of Grace Church Dulwich if this week, wherever we are, whatever we're doing, whoever we're with, we are shining like stars in the darkness as we live for the Lord Jesus and as we hold out the gospel to others.

[24 : 52] Isn't that a beautiful picture? As each one of us, our lives are transformed and shaped, not by the world around us, but by our heavenly citizenship.

relationship. It's why I call it so focused here on what we think about. Because radical action is required, you see, to redirect our thinking.

You know, we're not to fill our minds with all the concerns and ambitions and anxieties that those around us, whether it's neighbours or friends or colleagues or friends at school, fill their minds with. It's all about, isn't it, what consumes our kind of mental energy, so to speak. I wonder what consumes your mental energy. Perhaps it's thought of a job move and you're forever kind of restless, going down endless kind of rabbit holes when a recruitment consultant phones up and it's so time consuming.

Or perhaps what consumes your mental energy is making your home beautiful. Or it's some project that you are focused on. Or it's your children and your entire life is completely consumed by them.

[26 : 13] It may even be your social media profile. I heard someone quip recently that the reason God has given us social media is to show us actually how much spare time we have, or at least how much spare time we would have if we deleted all our social media accounts.

things. You see, it's only when our minds are filled with the affairs of our heavenly citizenship, things in verse 8, true, honourable, just, lovely, commendable, and so on, that actually we'll then be focused on how to shine like stars.

Because it's in our minds that we decide what is important. I think, for some of us, the temptation is to equate Paul's use of the mind in Philippians to kind of, well that's just the kind of clever people, the mind, the cerebral stuff.

But no, the mind shapes us, doesn't it? It's through our minds that we make decisions, that we decide what is important, what isn't important, what we are going to live for, what we're not going to live for.

And when our minds are shaped by our heavenly citizens, that's when we're going to have time to think, who are we going to invite to a Christmas carol service, either here or at work?

[27 : 30] We'll have time to think and process, okay, how am I going to shine like stars in the week ahead, in the situations I know I'm going to face?

But notice it's not just in our minds, it's also putting it into practice. Verse 9, what you've learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things and the God of peace will be with you.

In other words, will we learn from the Apostle Paul? Will we shape our lives around the Gospel? Will we shape our lives around the salvation of others, whatever situation and stage of life we're at?

Christ? Now I began by asking this morning, how important, how significant do you feel your contribution to Grace Church is?

Well, I hope that we can now see the answer. The contribution of each one of us is vital if we are to stand together as a church proclaiming the message of Jesus and making him known.

[28 : 36] In other words, what you see is the Holy Spirit asking us this morning as we look at his word together. He's asking us questions like, what's the quality and depth of your discipleship as a Christian?

How are your relationships at church? What is it you rejoice in? What is it you think about? Do you live for Jesus in practice or only in theory?

And the way we answer those questions will determine the ability of Grace Church as a whole to partner together in the gospel. And yet wonderfully, how does verse 9 end?

Just have a look at it one more time. The God of peace will be with you. Isn't that precisely the motivation and encouragement that we need? If we belong to Jesus, our relationship with God is strong.

It's what we've been thinking about all through our service this morning. God is our heavenly Father. Our sin is forgiven. We're united with him. He is with us.

[29 : 44] The God of peace will be with you. Let me lead us in prayer. what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me practice these things and the God of peace will be with you.

Heavenly Father, we rejoice in the fact that if we know Jesus, we are at peace with you. The Lord Jesus, the one who bore our sins on the cross.

We praise you that we can address you as our heavenly Father. And we long, heavenly Father, in our better moments, that we would indeed be a church where each one of us shines like stars in a crooked and depraved generation.

And we pray therefore this morning, please would you help us to take your word to heart in terms of our own relationships, in terms of our anxieties and what we rejoice in, the way in which we think, what we consider to be worthwhile.

And we ask all these things for Jesus' sake. Amen.