

Unity: Be Likeminded

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[0 : 00] Starting from verse 12. Yeah. Do everything without grumbling.

This is a title. Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed, not only 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. Do everything without grumbling or arguing so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.

Then you will shine among them like stars in disguise 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.

But even if I'm being pulled out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and services coming from your faith, I'm glad and rejoice with all of you.

[1 : 30] So you too should be glad and rejoice with me. Amen.

Beatrice said to me this morning, I knew you'd be well prepared, Richard. And I said, well, prepared. The Bible is full of good truth.

And we should be wary of our experience making us doubt what the Bible says is true.

It says, greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. My own experience leads me to believe that possibly, greater love hath no man than this, he accompanied his wife to the mall in the rain with hundreds of thousands of other people to be pressed amongst the crowds.

But no, it's true, greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life. I can't remember when it was, but I'm sure at one stage, Liz said to me, oh, that could be something you could use as a sermon illustration.

[2 : 47] I can't remember what it was. But there was something that I thought I could start with. As those of you who saw on the television may have seen or read in the newspapers, there were protests with people with big yellow banners, not my king.

Well, unless they renounce their British citizenship, that is not true. He is their king. But, Jesus is our king.

And at the end of time, he will be everybody's king. But there are people who say, not my king. And when the time comes, Jesus will say to them, if you don't want me to be your king, feel free to leave my kingdom.

Let's not be those people. But that's not the passage for today. That's not the sermon for today. We're looking at Philippians.

The next, in our series on, sometimes I'll say Philippians, and sometimes I'll say Philippians. So please forgive me for whichever one is the wrong one. And we're looking at chapter 2, verses 12 to 8.

[4 : 02] And the title is Joy Through Unity. However, I felt that this was more implicit than explicit from the passage, although it does encourage us at the end to rejoice, to be glad and to rejoice.

And as I say, it's probably more implicit than explicit. But what I'm going to do then is do more just of a simple Bible study or look at the verses, the first few verses from 12 to 18 and draw some thoughts and hopefully some lessons from that, which I'm hoping will be helpful to us.

So I want to consider the following as we go through this passage this morning. Why does Paul talk about their obedience and consider whether it's important, whether he's there or not?

What does it mean to work out my salvation? Surely I'm saved already if I have confessed with my mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in my heart that God raised him from the dead.

So what more is there to do? Why does he make a point about not complaining or arguing? How do I hold out the word of God?

[5 : 19] Now it said hold fast to the word of God, but the translation I ended up using talked about holding out the word of God. And I'm going to look at that as the angle on that bit this morning.

What might be considered wicked and depraved for our generation, about this generation, and that in itself could take up a whole month of teachings.

But starting then with the obedience of the Philippians, Paul is clearly pleased by their obedience, but considers it even better that they have remained obedient even with him under house arrest in Rome, some considerable several hundred miles away and certainly not within easy communication distance, not simply on the doorstep when they think, oh, let's just go and ask Paul what he thinks because we're not sure.

We've come to this decision. Let's just go and double check with Paul again. It might be worth recalling that Paul admonished the church in Corinth by saying, some of you say, I follow Paul.

Some of you say, I follow Apollos. But actually, you are all of Christ and should all be following him. And it seems to me that here Paul is highlighting or referring to the danger, possibly, of the cult of personality and the danger of putting leaders on pedestals or considering them infallible or above contradiction or beyond reproach.

[6 : 55] And this has a number of dangers, particular dangers. The leaders themselves maybe begin to believe that they can do no wrong and end up deluding themselves with their own sinlessness or self-justification of the things they do.

And there is the danger that those who have put their faith in their leader as having all the answers and being the only one with the answers then fall away or disappear or their faith collapses and their lives fall apart when the leader themselves is shown to have feet of clay.

Put not your trust in princes nor in the sons of men for in them is no salvation, the Bible tells us. This is not to suggest that we should avoid the risk by avoiding having a leader at all, but to remind her that any leader is only as human as the rest of us with weaknesses, temptations and stresses, but maybe with different God-given gifts to us to help us understand his word, to help us function as a body, but not to replace Jesus as the head.

So if that false head gets removed, the body will fail, but Jesus will never leave us or forsake us. Hence Paul's delight that the Philippians were still able to live together as God's people, even though he had moved on elsewhere and was no longer living with them.

Secondly, what does it mean to work out our salvation if we have actually already been saved? And why do we have to work out our salvation if God is at work in us?

[8 : 48] Why don't we let him do it all? Well, it would be nice to think that when we first acknowledge Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, that he fills us with his Holy Spirit, it would be nice to think that at that moment we become perfect.

Alas, did I only have to look at myself or talk to Liz to realise that that is not true. The story of the fall in Genesis, amongst other things, teaches us that the problem of man using his free will to choose to go against God's wishes, despite all the good things that we are already present in Adam and Eve's lives, leads only to disaster.

When we allow God to save us, he opens our eyes so we can see how badly we misuse our free will. He does not take away our brains or override them or our ability to think, but he helps us through his Spirit to see what needs to change in us, and as we submit to him, he will show us where we need to change, which will be different for each one of us, but he does not force us to change.

It still requires us to do that work. And what does Paul mean by not complaining or arguing? I don't think he means that there should be no disagreements at all, but it seems to me it's more about the attitude towards disagreements and differences of opinion that we may have.

I think a good illustration of this is the advice I've seen written for married couples. Try not to think of an argument as being about you against your wife or husband, but try to see it as the two of you against the problem.

[10 : 49] Or to put it another way, disagreements should not be about who is right and who is wrong, but rather about prayerfully coming together to find out what is right or what is wrong, and then being gracious and accepting the outcome if it is not your preferred choice that comes to pass.

It means not continuing to try and explain why you were right and why they're still wrong, and we shouldn't be doing it that way, and who do they think they are anyway. Holding out the word of life is the phrase and interpretation that I was working with.

Holding out the word of life. You can also think about holding fast the word of life, because how that works out is very similar. But by thinking about holding out the word of life and being shining stars, is the implication that we're to do it so that we can be seen to be doing it.

It's not a secret thing. So if we're holding on and holding fast to the word of life, it's not just for our own sakes anyway. It's for the sakes of those that we live and work and spend time with.

But I note that Paul does not say forcing the word of God onto people, nor does he say we should force the unbeliever to live by God's word. We hold it out for them to see.

[12 : 20] As John's gospel reminds us, in the beginning was the word, and the word became flesh and dwelt amongst us as Jesus. And in 1 Peter 1 verses 23 to 25 it says, for you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

For all men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field, all the glory of yesterday, just like the flowers of the field that will wither and fade.

But the word of the Lord stands forever, the written word, but more importantly, the word that became flesh. so the word of life that we hold fast to and hold out to others is both Christ himself and the scriptures, the Bible that we read.

Quoting Bible verses at people, I would suggest, is not what is meant by holding out the word of life. The word of life, sorry, speaking out the word of God is an important part of it.

People need to hear the message, but it will only have an impact if we ourselves are seen to be obeying it ourselves, living it ourselves, and able to explain it.

[13 : 54] And Jesus himself gives us the example of this. He was obedient to the word, even the word that said, you're going to die on the cross.

He explained it in small groups to his close friends. He preached it to large crowds, some of them who already believed and some who didn't yet. He lived it by healing, forgiving, eating with his friends, eating with the outcasts, he demonstrated it by washing people's feet.

We hold out a word of life, but people will only be interested if they can see us living that word of life and see the life within it.

And what might some of the things that our crooked and depraved generation be about? I have a few thoughts in no particular order and some may be considered controversial, even within the church.

And some of you may feel that, oh, that refers to me a bit. And this is not to condemn you if any of this makes you feel uncomfortable. Because there is no condemnation, there is forgiveness.

[15 : 16] forgiveness. And after forgiveness, there is reconciliation. And after reconciliation, there is relationship. One of the things that he's said often, and I heard recently at Spring Harvest a number of times, is that relationship or love is more important than truth sometimes.

But actually, both are always important. And if some of what I say feels unloving, because it is the truth I believe, that's not to say that I don't want to forgive or be in relationship with you.

It is an awful long introduction to the next bit, I'm afraid. Just a few thoughts from my head rather than the thing philosophical particularly.

the thought that if you disagree with my politics, you are by implication wrong, and if you are wrong, you are therefore a bad person.

Men and women are the same. A child, teenager or young adult who has yet to develop a fully formed brain or understanding and who has yet to complete the process of hormonal change through puberty, is wise enough and experienced enough to make life-changing, body-changing decisions.

[16 : 43] I have a right to be paid ever more to keep up an increasing standard of living. I have an absolute right to exercise any of my rights.

My feelings and experiences are more important than external verifiable truth. we just need to get the right politicians with the right policies to make society work properly.

I have a right to a child whatever my marital or relationship status, married, single, heterosexual couple, same-sex couple. If I decide I need a child to be fulfilled, it's my right.

I have a right to fulfilment and this will come about by doing what pleases me. And I could go on.

But what about joy through unity, you may be thinking, and you may still well be by the end, I don't know. I would contend that from this passage, our joy through unity comes about through humility unity and through working together with a purpose.

[17 : 58] In this case, working with each other to become more Christ-like and through reaching out and sharing the gospel with others. Our joy is not through self-realisation.

I am blessed and experience joy in my home group through the fellowship, the study, the learning and prayer support and sometimes even sharing meals together.

But without wishing to hurt their feelings, I have probably experienced a bit more or greater joy through shared activity with people in the church where the talking and the discussing and the praying finishes and the doing of something together, whether in Sunday school or messy church or in other things, comes together with other people.

joy. But just because we have a shared purpose does not mean joy will automatically follow. We will have to work through how a particular task is done.

We'll have to discuss what elements are important, what things may be omitted, who should do each element and in particular who should take the highest profile or take the lead.

[19 : 15] Doing this can take time, include disagreement, include having to accept that maybe my idea will not be used or my role is actually the water carrier, not the master of ceremonies. promises. But in the end, by belonging to a group, by belonging to God and his family, by laying aside what is not needed or helpful and actually helping with what is needed and useful, we will each experience a joy which is shared with the others and not just a personal one.

So ask yourself this morning, who is my king and do I truly let him rule in every area of my life?

What is my response or reaction when a group decision differs to mine or the church does something I disagree with? Am I seeking self-fulfillment or fulfilment of God's purposes for me?

And what am I doing to hold out the word of life so that others may take hold of it too?