

Philippians 2021 - Part 4

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Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0 : 00] Well, what we'll do now is we'll turn to our reading before we turn to God in prayer.

And if you'd like to turn to the end of Philippians chapter 1, verses 27 through to 30. Perhaps many of you have noticed as Paul has been writing this letter, and we're not going through it fast, we're not going through it slow.

Well, but perhaps as you've read the letter, and perhaps if you're reading the letter ahead, which is always a good thing to do. In fact, back in the day when we were training, one of the rules were before you're allowed to preach on any part of the letter, you had to read the whole letter several times.

So you weren't allowed to just open it the bit that you were reading, and then say, what does it say? You had to read the whole thing. And when you do that, one of the things that you begin to notice that Paul does brilliantly is that before he says the thing that he's about to say, that is address it in detail, he sows the seed of it in the preceding verses.

If I can put it a slightly different way. My wife is very good at making me think that I came up with the good ideas when they were normally her ideas sewn a few days earlier, only for them to ripen and flourish.

[2 : 04] And then all of a sudden, I thought I came up with a great idea, and she'd be like, oh, that's a great idea. Let's do it. Wise enough to know that she had already sewn it a few days earlier. I still can't figure out how she does it, even though I know she does it.

It's very similar to the fact that for many years of our marriage, I was convinced we had two fridges. Because I would go there and couldn't find what she said was there. She would then come into the kitchen, open the same door, and lo and behold, it was where it was.

So I'm not quite sure how she does that sorcery. Well, Paul is brilliant.

It's sowing the seed as a way of preparing the Christian for what he is about to address in slightly more detail.

He has done that all the way through, right from the very beginning, where he doesn't include his apostleship. And he doesn't include it, as you know, because he wants to draw attention to what it is to be a servant, rather than what it is to have an exercise authority.

[3 : 11] So with that in mind, what we read here in verse 27 to 30, Paul has already sown the seed of. And what we read here in verses 27 through to 30 is that he is sowing the seed of what he's about to say next, especially about being of one mind.

So verse 27, now hear God's word. I let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit with one mind, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents.

This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God, and that from God.

For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ, you should not only believe in him, but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

Well, let's pray. And let's pray with a level of honesty that the suffering and conflict that Paul is speaking about here is far removed from the suffering and conflict that we have.

[4 : 45] That doesn't mean that the conflict and suffering that we have as Christians is to be belittled as though it is nothing, but it is to recognize the degrees, I think, that Christians suffer.

Paul, as you know, is in prison. This church will soon be persecuted. Ten years on from this church, persecution comes to Philippi, and these Christians are persecuted. And as we've heard of our

brothers and sisters in Christ in Afghanistan, there's a modern-day example to us all. Let's pray. Father, we do thank you for Jesus Christ. And while we recognize our calling is to live a life like his, there are many things that we would rather not have happen to us that happen to him. We don't want to be opposed. We don't want to suffer. We don't want to be involved in conflict. And yet you have designed our life to include those things so that we would become more like Christ and so that we would be a witness of Christ here.

We thank you, Father God, for how you have done things. And we repent and are ashamed of thinking that we would much rather have a different life or perhaps achieve the same end in a different way.

[6 : 11] Father God, we ask you this morning that you would allow these words to penetrate our heart and mind, allow us to consider them greatly over the coming days and weeks and months, allow us not to think that this is merely food for today, but allow us to see that it is instruction for tomorrow.

So, Father God, we look to you this morning for grace, for favor, for mercy, that you would show us Jesus. And that, Father God, that we would understand that we are not just called to do a work in the world, but you are actually doing a work in us as we live in this world.

May we never forget that what we have come into our life and what we have taken and what we go through is your hand at work in our lives to make us more like Jesus.

And, Father God, allow us never to forget this, that, Father, you are at work in our lives, that you who began a good work will bring that to completion. May we understand that every moment of tomorrow and today is all about that.

And so, Father, help us in grace and in favor to appreciate these things. In Jesus' name, amen. So, the idea of Paul sowing a seed ahead of time before he addresses the main issue could simply be a way of preparing the church for what they're about to hear.

[7 : 45] Sometimes people are not always ready to hear the thing immediately. They have to be prepared. They have to be worked around so that their minds and heart would be open and engaged in a way where they can actually hear it.

But he's not just sown seeds. He's given himself as a personal example of what it is to live for Christ and to die his gain.

So, his life is an example and his teaching is consistent with the life that he lives. Or rather, his life is consistent with the teaching that God has ordained for him to give to the church.

So, when he said, as we saw last week, for him to live is Christ and to die is gain, this isn't simply a motivational aspect, something where he has convinced himself that this is how it ought to be done. But rather, this is reflective of the change that has happened within his own heart. To live for Christ simply means that my life is going to look like Christ's.

[8 : 52] And therefore, what Christ went through, I shouldn't expect to not go through if it comes my way. And so, the Christian life that we live may be quite a long way away from the way the Christian life is actually explained and applied in God's word.

Now, that doesn't mean that we then have to go in court suffering an opposition on purpose as though if we don't have it, then we're not really genuine Christians.

But what it does mean is it gets to the very heart of whether or not our Christianity has simply become a matter of our heart, internal convictions with no outward witness, or whether it is, like Paul says, we are opposed for what we believe and what we stand for and what we confess and the way that we live.

Now, if these Christians, and this is the point that Paul is getting to, do not walk in a way that is worthy of the gospel, then Paul's work has come to nothing.

I've got a quote in one of my notebooks and I could never remember the English poet that wrote it. And it stuck with me because of its deep truth and observable truth that he says that when he looks back on his life's work, it's like looking back on someone who has plowed water.

[10 : 27] Now, of course, when you plow a furrow in a field, you can see the work that you have completed. But when you plow water, the water just simply folds back in as though you have never been through it.

In other words, you've got nothing to show for your work. Absolutely nothing. Paul doesn't want to look back on the Philippian church as though he's looking back on a plow gone through water.

And yet, if these Christians do not live a life worthy of the gospel, then all of his work is really futile. It has really come to nothing. And I think, in many ways, a lot of pastors use that as a measuring guide for their ministry within the churches they serve.

when they look back over the 10 or 11, 15 or 20 years that they have been in ministry in one particular church, and then they measure it against the change that is expected and whether or not people are truly walking worthy of the gospel.

It's a very good indication of whether or not their work has been worth it or if it has been a waste of time. Other ministers would say, well, I don't remember what meal I had when I was five.

[11 : 55] I don't remember what I ate when I was 10. I don't even remember what I ate last month. And some days, I don't even remember what I ate last week. But I know that I needed it.

That's a much more positive way of looking at ministry. That whether or not the ministry can actually be validated by change is questionable, but it is expected.

But at the same time, that food of prayer and the teaching that people are to receive, particularly the teaching, is the necessary food.

And therefore, an observation can be made that if you remove the food, would it make an immediate difference? Well, there are plenty of ministers around the country who have left their churches over time for multiple reasons, and the testimony of the congregation has been this would never have happened if that minister was still here.

So sometimes, we don't actually get to see the change or the difference until you remove the feeding element. And when you see how quickly things revert back to the way they were, then you begin to see the importance of it only after the fact.

[13 : 20] A prime example might just be Afghanistan. For 20 years, you've had American and British troops in that country, and people have been questioning its worth.

And then they are withdrawn, and within two days, you got to see just how much they were worth to those people. So sometimes, we measure things incorrectly, and sometimes God removes the hand that feeds so as for you to realize the desperate situation you're in if that wasn't provided.

Well, Paul is bringing this with quite a bit of weight because he knows that unless these Christians walk in a way that is worthy of the gospel, then all of his work has effectively come to nothing.

Now, because Christians are also to have a good understanding of the gospel in order to proclaim the gospel, they're to have a good understanding of the gospel so that they can live for Christ rather than their own selfish ambition.

Paul has already laid the ground for a life of self-denial rather than selfish ambition. salvation, he has already laid the ground to say that for me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

[14 : 42] But then he includes at the end of chapter one that that gain also includes, or rather that life also includes suffering and conflict and opposition as something which Christians will go through.

and of course being prepared for that is seeds that you sow much earlier on. You know, Jesus is very clear, isn't he, to the two men who wanted to follow him and he says, don't be so quick, don't be so quick.

You do realize that the son of man has nowhere to lay his head. You realize that, don't you? And you do realize how much this is going to cost you. And therefore, it looks as almost as if Jesus is putting people off from following him.

But what he is doing is he is laying down the ground for which they're about to walk on. The seriousness of a call to follow Jesus.

So the gospel is not just something we proclaim, but it is something that we are called to live. And that's why Paul goes on that we are to walk in a manner that is worthy of the gospel.

[15 : 53] And now a man by the name of, I have to read it out, Brigadier General Samuel Lyman Atwood Marshall of the U.S. Army.

There's a name, isn't there? You can understand why he's a brigadier general with a name like that. The acronym is SLAM. Samuel Lyman Atwood Marshall.

Brigadier SLAM. You kind of get this image of him now that he's going to be a pretty tough dude to work under. Well, he concluded in a series of articles that he wrote on military and warfare and even in his book Men Against Fire.

He was asking the question, why didn't men engage on the front line? He takes Vietnam as an example where he says that seven out of every ten men only discharged their weapons, only fired

their weapon.

Seven out of every ten men only fired their weapon. And then he asked the very searching question, what do you think the other seven were doing? What do you think the other seven were doing?

[17 : 14] Now this is a pretty good illustration, though not completely perfect, because we're not at war, but we do have an opposition.

And to put it in the words of Jesus, he tells us to pray to the Lord of the harvest for workers for the harvest field, because the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. What do you think everyone is doing?

What do you think everyone is doing? What do you think everyone is doing in the church? Well, here's the summary then, as we get down to the importance of really walking worthy of the gospel. In verse 27, there's a lot to take in. Oh, let your, only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And then he adds this bit, so that whether I come and see you or I'm absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit.

In other words, your life should not depend on whether or not I'm present or absent. But as we've seen that Christian history dictates and tells that when you remove the absence of perhaps a leader, that it can have an effect on the congregation because they're not receiving what they ought to be receiving and if they're not listening in the first place, the effect may be marginal across some people's lives.

[18 : 42] In other words, there is no difference whether or not a minister is present or there is no minister. Their life, their Christian life just remains the same. Others could be affected deeply.

It all depends on whether or not they are in need of what they're receiving. But Paul is addressing slightly a different issue in verse 27 and that is that your obedience to Christ is your obedience to Christ.

Your walking worthy of the gospel is really down to you. I can come and encourage you and teach you but it shouldn't depend on my presence amongst you.

But sometimes people believe that it really ought to be. Then he introduces the obligation in verse 27 that we are to be of one mind and we are to strive side by side.

Now being of one mind is where Paul is sowing the seed for what he's about to say in chapter 2 and the reason he's sowing that seed is because the church is not of one mind. They should be but they are not and because they are not of one mind they're not striving together and therefore because this letter begins with the importance of being a partner in the gospel in order for that partnership to continue being of one mind and striving together is necessary.

[20 : 04] There are too many people I believe that come to church for what can I receive for me as though the Christian life is the fuel or rather the church is the fuel that I need to live the way I want to live this next coming week and it really isn't.

It really isn't that. It is the fuel that God wants you to have to live the way he has called you to live but we don't come to God so that we can be topped up with the necessary things that we need to then spend them in ways that we have chosen.

So here's a church that is not in one mind if they were they wouldn't need to be instructed and their need to strive together for the partnership of the gospel and then in verse 28 he adds that you ought not to be afraid of opponents of the gospel and therefore your opponents.

Now I know it's quite common to cause separations between what we are and what we do but that's really not possible for the Christian because we are a product of the gospel and therefore to separate our life from the proclamation of the gospel may be possible practically for you to do but it's certainly not true biblically because our life is the product of the gospel.

The gospel is what has is the power of God at work in us that has saved us and therefore we know about Christ not only originally but continually and then he says that your lack of fear is a witness to their destruction and to your salvation in Christ Jesus.

[21 : 59] The fact that you are not afraid of the opposition that you face concerning the gospel means that you are not afraid of what is coming your way because your eternity is secure in Christ.

Let me just make a very brief but important point here and that is it is possible to suffer in ways that has nothing to do with the gospel. It is possible to suffer not for righteousness sake.

It is possible to be opposed not for the gospel but the person who is opposing you is opposing you for other reasons and therefore we must be very clear about when we're being opposed what are

gospel issues and what are not gospel issues.

in other words what are the ones that you're willing to fight for and what are the ones that you just I'm not even going to contend with that. But the gospel cannot be simply a matter of proclamation it must be a matter of a worthy way of life that we are called to live.

And so this opposition that Paul is addressing here is not just opposition but it's opposition on account of the gospel on account of you being saved by the gospel on account of you proclaiming the gospel and you ought not to fear when people oppose you for being a gospel person or being a product of the gospel that your life is the produce of God's work within you and people will oppose that.

[23 : 38] They may not oppose a number of other things about you and they may not oppose you if your Christianity is internal with no outward witness.

You can get along in the world by simply obscuring the reality that makes you who you are. But Paul says we ought not to be afraid.

And then in verse 29 he says that it has been granted to us not only to believe but to suffer and be engaged in the same kind of conflict that Paul has been engaged in or rather that he is still suffering.

So Christians can be expected in certain situations to be imprisoned for no other reason than being who they are.

For no other reason than being who they are. Now if you're imprisoned for a crime then so you should be. And we'll pray for you. We'll pray that you repent of that crime.

[24 : 46] But if you're imprisoned for being a Christian where there has been no crime committed then that's a totally different situation that you're in. And that's really what Paul is addressing here.

So people can be imprisoned for multiple reasons. But what Paul is addressing here is suffering for the sake of righteousness like Jesus says in the sermon on the mount.

So what does it mean to have a life that is worthy of the gospel? Well I think it all comes down to one simple call.

Something that Paul's already addressed. Something which we see that Jesus tells his disciples in Mark 8. That unless you deny yourself and take up your cross you're just not going to be a disciple. Because that's what it takes to be a disciple. This is why it's very hard to appreciate the calling of discipleship at perhaps a younger age when you have dreams and ambitions and I like to do this when I'm older and that when I'm older.

[25 : 55] But how essential is it for very very young children to hear that if your life belongs to Christ he's going to use everything in his power to shape that life however he pleases and for whatever purposes he has for your life to serve him in this world.

This is why I think all our conversation when you especially talking to young people growing up in the faith should always be within the framework or context of God willing.

God willing. We've kind of lost that. Sometimes the DV put at the end of letters Dio valente which is Latin for God willing is simply just almost like a blessing isn't it like you put at the end but you think of the meaning behind God willing.

What are you affirming when you say God willing? Well you're affirming that it is God willing. That my life is determined by God willing.

Now of course there's many people who don't want that and that's why Paul has already addressed those who do what they do out of selfish ambition. I think you ought to be incredibly ambitious.

[27 : 20] I think you ought to be ambitious for God. I think you ought to be able to read God's word in a way where you don't need to look at the world for permission to do things. I think one of the key changing points in my life was when I realized growing up and I think it came at the same time when I started my own business is that actually all this time I was growing up thinking that I needed someone's permission to do what I wanted to do and then I realized I don't need your permission and neither do I need your affirmation to do what I want to do.

As long as I am convinced that what I am doing is for the glory of God I should be ambitious for everything. But too often so many Christians don't do anything because they almost think they need to ask permission and yet when you ask them whose approval are you looking for before you begin they don't actually know.

It's almost like said in them. So be ambitious for God but do it in a way where you deny yourself and look at the things of God from God's point of view.

And so the Christian life then is incredibly hard as you can imagine when people are not of one mind in the church. The church stagnates when the church does not have one mind. doesn't mean that you cannot be independent doesn't mean that you cannot exercise your own thoughts but the idea of being of one mind and of one spirit is a Christian reality.

[29 : 06] And so the reason the church stagnates and does not get anywhere is possibly because we're not of one mind. And not being of one mind is the reason why we're not doing anything.

we can say perhaps that one of the reasons why the church is not of one mind is because it's not learning.

It doesn't engage in God's word in a way where we strive for the truth that we have become quite content to agree to disagree.

Now of course that is a very famous atheistic virtue to agree to disagree. It's just a shame that has been adopted in the church where we can agree that we disagree but our aim should be a striving for the truth.

A striving for what decisions need to be made in light of what we are learning. What does it mean to be of one mind? But we don't.

[30 : 17] We get to the point where we adopt the atheistic virtue of I agree to disagree and we reduce everything down to opinions because we have no value in teaching or teachers and everything becomes to the same level where there is no affirmative conviction in anyone.

Now Paul has addressed this in other churches but you can see how important it is to Paul for the church to be of one mind. The problem here is that when people in the church begin to say well as long as I do my bit I'm right before God you're not.

You're not. Not only is that an independent thought that is to think independently because to be of one mind is to consider the minds of others.

to strive with one another is to consider your relationship with one another. So it's tempting for many churches to not do the difficult things because they're difficult and then they have the self-imposed limits brought on them by that's not my calling but the calling is actually for the whole church to be of one mind and striving together.

We can all do the same thing in the body granted but nonetheless it doesn't remove the call to be of one mind and strive together for the purpose of the gospel.

[31 : 51] And sometimes a lack of progress can come down to the fact that the church is genuinely opposed in their proclamation of the gospel. But sometimes a lack of progress can come down to the fact that the church is not actually opposed they just cannot strive together.

And when it looks as if the church strives together it's often independent fractions. There was a survey done many years ago with a very simple question asked of ministers who had started internet ministries.

Now I'm not going to speak about whether or not there's a blessing there or not when you consider some of them that actually turn over millions each year. I mean if you only take the there is no mandate as I said before there is no mandate in scripture for an itinerant ministry.

You just don't you just don't see it. You see Paul who's an apostle therefore he's unique establishing churches like a church planter. You see missionaries out on the field.

You see evangelists going out into the world but you don't see ever in scripture traveling ministers. And one of the reasons for that is because a minister is supposed to be confined to the church underneath an eldership with an eldership so that there can be checks and balances.

[33 : 23] And so you only have to look at perhaps the ministry of Ravi Zacharias who has now been disgraced with all the stuff that has come out about him whose ministry what turned over what's it 12 million pound a year with no checks and balances.

The reason those things happen is because people establish things that they are involved in and like and birds of a feather flock together.

So the question was asked in light of this. this is before the Ravi thing came out. But the question was asked was why do so many ministers start these things? And the overwhelming answer that came back was because of their dissatisfaction with how their church was going.

And so by putting their time and interest into other things that flourished it gave them a sense of achievement. I can appreciate that. Everything I start never seems to succeed anyway.

But I can appreciate that. One famous evangelist, I use the word famous, well known evangelist, I shouldn't really use the word famous, well known evangelist in England, very well known.

[34 : 38] I asked him, why do you write so many books? He says, because for me it's a sense of distraction from the hard work. book. And I get invited to places because of the books that I've written, not because of the work that I do.

And so now you begin to realize that actually the church is far more complicated with far more people doing what they want to do because there's no striving together. And there's no striving together because the church doesn't have one mind.

So the church doesn't get anywhere. It doesn't make the progress. And in the mix of all of this, and this is the sad part, countless and countless people who were coming who could have been disciples in the church have never been disciples.

If I were to start a discipleship program, would you come? Or would you think you're already near the end? If we were to actually disciple the way that the Bible teaches us to disciple, would we come?

It would be a sad day, wouldn't it, if the only thing that defined our church as being church is coming together on a Sunday morning. So what we notice here is a manner of life that doesn't concentrate necessarily on morality, though that's important, but actually concentrates on what the gospel looks like in terms of self-denial, what it has to say about selfish ambition, what it has to say about being of one mind and striving together for the purpose of the gospel, and why, when one Christian suffers in the faith, we all suffer in a kind of way, because we know that it could have happened to us if we were in their position, but it hasn't, and therefore we feel that grief because what they're going through is not something that they shouldn't expect to go through, but the fact that it has happened and no one wants it to happen.

[36 : 51] So Paul lays it on abundantly thick, abundantly thick, that effectively, if these people do not walk in a manner worthy of the gospel, then his ministry has really come to nothing.

But he won't go and do something else, and we thank Paul for that. He stays where he is, doing what he's doing, with perhaps in some cases very little progress, for the very reason that that is what he has been called to do.

And so a church which looks on the surface to be a very good and healthy church, is actually a church that has a number of issues just quietly there below the surface. that are not being addressed.

They want Paul to be there, and Paul's saying, I don't need to be there for you to obey Christ. You should be doing it all on your own. Well, here's the exhortation then, as we close.

God has granted to us a life that not only is to be lived in a particular way, that is, we do things and we live a certain way, we live a certain way but it is a life that is going to be exposed to opposition, suffering and conflict.

[38 : 09] We shouldn't court it on purpose as though if it's not happening to us, we're not being genuine. But at the same time, we shouldn't run away from it because to do so wouldn't have the witness effect that Paul says our lives would have otherwise.

otherwise. Our life is to proclaim a message simply by being opposed and standing firm of their destruction and their salvation in Christ Jesus.

So we may suffer a few little snide remarks about being who we are and the commitments we make and where we believe men and women came from and what we believe men and women are for in the 21st century.

But by standing firm on these issues, which are gospel issues, because they are the product of God's word, then we can be opposed for no other reason than simply believing what God says. Well, the Christian life then is not a life about selfish ambition. It's rather a life about self-denial. And so we shouldn't expect the gospel to create great change in the lives of other people and then not expect that great change not to happen to us at the same time.

[39 : 30] What we're not recognizing is that great change is often coming to us through suffering, through opposition, and through conflict.

That's how it's coming to us. If we stand firm for God. So is the final thought. Paul ultimately doesn't want the work that he has done amongst this church, no doubt amongst the other churches, to come to nothing.

And so he calls them with a sure amount of eagerness to let their manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ. And so he presses the point of what is to be expected.

Stand firm in opposition. Stand together, striving together, being of one mind. And expect along the way suffering, conflict, and opposition.

Even the same type of conflict and opposition that I have faced that's ended me in prison. But what he's effectively saying is exactly what Jesus told his disciples at the beginning of their discipleship really, or at least during their discipleship.

[40 : 40] And that is to be a follower of Christ is self-denial, taking up your cross, and then following him. And so it leaves the church with a lingering question, doesn't it?

And the lingering question is very similar to the three in ten men. The date of every ten men only three fired the weapon. If it's the calling of all to stand, then what do you think everyone's doing? If it's the calling of all to be of one mind and striving together, what do you think everyone is doing? If it's the calling of all to partner in the gospel, what do you think everyone is doing?

Amen. Amen. Well, we're going to come to, well, we have come to our final hymn, and then we'll come to God's final word after this.

Thank you. Thank you. JACK Thank you for the cross.

[42 : 15] Thank you for the cross you came. Caring all my sin and shame. In love and pain.

And give amazing grace. Thank you for the cross. Thank you for the trail of nearer's hands.

Watch me in your friends in gold. Now all I know. You're forgiven that's had their reign.

Worthy is the Lamb. Seated on the throne. Proudly now in many clouds.

You've made the torment. I am Israel. I am Israel. Jesus, Son of God.

[43 : 19] The darling of heaven. Crucified. Worthy is the Lamb. Worthy is the Lamb.

Worthy is the Lamb. Thank you for the cross. Lord. Thank you for the cross.

Thank you for the cross. ■■■■■■ me.