

Phillippians 2021 - Part 5 - We reflect what we worship

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[0 : 00] I should have said it's a trouble not having my notes in the same place.

There's a few, you know, families and what have you that self-isolate at the moment because of COVID issues and what have you. And this is just a reminder to us all that it's still very much a present concern amongst the church, churches, I should just say. Gerald will be writing just a brief sort of introduction to how we're going to conduct the members meeting that is going to be coming up. And we're going to following this more or less exactly the same procedures that we're following for a church gathering and act of worship. Now, the reason this needs to be stated is because there are some gatherings that you can have in church buildings that don't need to follow any of the requirements because they don't fall under a corporate act of worship. But because we want to have a good reading of Romans and considering one another's faith, especially those who have perhaps weaker faith or just common sense, we're going to be following the guidelines. And so we're going to be sat, you know, where you can sit and what have you. And then, of course, if you want to speak, you'll have to come up at the front and face everyone and speak from the microphone. Now, Gerald will be putting out an email just to confirm everything that I've just said, just so that people are absolutely aware that if you want to attend the meeting, these are the sort of obligations that you'll need to fulfill to attend the meeting. Now, that could be a perfectly good reason for not coming.

You know, I've never had God speak to me other than through his word and convicted by his spirit. But I longed for him to just tap me on the shoulder and say one day, no need for church meetings ever again. Wouldn't that be wonderful? Would you believe me if I told you he said it to me? No, because no.

I'm really pleased. I'm really pleased about that, that you wouldn't believe that. But I have heard some ministers say the word of the Lord has told me and suddenly, you know, sheep follow.

And what have you. But no, he hasn't said that. We're going to turn to Philippians. We're just going to continue going through the book of Philippians.

[2 : 53] So if you could turn there. We've made our way into chapter two. But as you would have noticed, if you're reading the book of Philippians, that it's an awkward break between the end of chapter one and chapter two, simply because Paul is continuing with many of the same themes that he has been already introducing. And as we have noticed going through the book of Philippians, that he has purposely, that he has purposely sown the seed for what he is about to say before he then says it.

And this is a bit like you. So you want to say something very important to someone. You're not quite sure how they're going to take it. And so you drop those seeds in so that eventually when you get to the subject, the subject is already been risen in part. So we're going to pick up our reading in Philippians chapter two and verses one through to four. Now hear God's word. So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility, count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

There's a short reading, but full of stuff that we have been prepared for in chapter one. Let me pray and then we'll come back to that. Father God, we know that our life is a life that is to be conformed to the cross of Christ, that to be a follower, we are to deny ourselves, take up our cross and then follow you.

But the old man gets in the way and encourages us to go a different way or that tells us that we can get to the same place a different way. But the walk that you have called us to live is both specific and necessary for us to become like Christ. And so we ask of you this morning that we would recognize that we are gathering together to worship you and as we do, that your work in our lives is to make us more like your son.

So we ask of you this morning that you would bless us with understanding and that we would be able to humble ourselves in light of the truth so that we may be changed from one degree of glory to the next as we behold Jesus. Amen. Amen. Well, one of the most important lessons found in the Old Testament and then repeated in the New is that people can only reflect what they worship. I want to just say that again, that people can only reflect what they worship. And therefore, the object of our worship determines our likeness. And our likeness is what people see. Now, it's very clear in the very beginning that God created man and woman to reflect him. And the moment they disobeyed him and their desire was for something else, they then began to reflect the objects of their desires. And of course, this led to one-upmanship and the breakdown in the marriage or possible breakdowns within marriages.

[6 : 53] The first murder, where one brother kills another. And these things are reflective of the very nature and destructive power of sin. Therefore, right from the very beginning, since God created us to be worshipers or created us as worshipers, this is very closely linked to the fact that we will reflect what we worship. And therefore, if we are worshiping God in spirit and in truth, we are then reflecting God to each other and to the world. If we are, however, loving something else other than God that we have put in first place, then we will reflect that to others and to the world.

And so we can't move away from this created ordinance that we will reflect to the world and to each other our object of worship. We are created to worship God, but in the full, we worship other things and we reflect that which we worship. And this raises a very serious question for the church, and that is, whose image does the church reflect? Whose image does the church reflect?

Now, of course, I've taught ecclesiology in three Bible colleges, and ecclesiology is not a big subject which people find all that interesting, but the church is incredibly an important subject.

More importantly, however, that if faithfulness to Christ looks the same, then why do every church look so different? And therefore, the church is after whose likeness?

Now, my contention, or the biblical contention is, is that the church should reflect Christ rather than the individual images of those who go to church. And the only way that can happen is if the individual people deny themselves, take up their cross and worship God alone. And as we worship God alone, we will reflect to the world and to each other the image of Christ.

[9 : 15] So our church is after whose likeness? Is it after the likeness of Christ? Or is it after the likeness of you individually brought together?

Now, as you will know, Paul begins chapter two with a conditional sentence? And this is not unusual for Paul to introduce a conditional statement. And his desire is that this church would be of one mind, and this is stated again for a second time. And the contrast between selfish ambition and selfish ambition and serving others is raised again, that not only are we to look out for our own interests, we have our own interests, but we are to look out for the interests of others.

And that is the very definition of what a church should look like. But all of this is addressed under one conditional sentence. Now, Paul is not questioning if there is any encouragement in Christ.

It is very obvious that there is encouragement in Christ. What he says is, so if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in spirit, any affection and any sympathy, then do the following. His point is not whether or not there is encouragement in Christ or all of those things that he mentions, but whether or not you can find any of those things in Christ for yourself. In other words, the Christian ought to be motivated by Christ, not motivated by Paul's words.

The Christian is to be motivated by what God has done for them, not by what the pastor is exhorting them to be. So if you this morning can find any encouragement in Christ to be like Christ, then be like Christ.

[11 : 09] And the reason this sentence is conditional is because Paul is not making up his mind for those who need to answer that question. This is very much your consideration. This is very much something that you will have to decide upon. And if you want to know what's at stake, this is at stake. Whatever you answer to that conditional sentence, either the church will reflect your individual image or it will reflect the image of Christ. So it's a very simple statement, but with huge implications for how the church is going to look to each other and to God and to the world. So let's come to the summary.

Paul uses verse 1, as I said, this conditional if. If there is any encouragement, any love, any reasons to participate, any affection, any sympathy in Christ. If there is any of this, then complete Paul's joy by being of the same mind. In other words, think in the same way or rather arrive at the same conclusions about encouragement, about encouragement, about love, about participation, affection, and sympathy.

Participate in these ways. Now he goes on to address again the importance of being on one mind because the big issue in this church is that the church is not of one mind. They are unable to arrive at the same conclusions. And what seems to be apparent is that the same conclusions or conclusion is they ought to be like Christ and this is what Christ is like. Now I know it's very important for us to all stress that God has made us equally different and God creates unity out of making us all different.

God doesn't create uniformity, you're right, but unity is created in the church by being of one mind, striving together, finding that encouragement in Christ. And so he goes on in verse 3 to reintroduce this idea that selfish ambition does not belong in the church, rather humility does. And the way that you will be humble is by not only looking out for your own interests, but the interests of others.

Now this poses a very significant challenge for every single church, and here's why. Who determines what the church should be interested in? Who determines whether or not we should be interested in having a Sunday school?

[14 : 09] Or a discipleship class? Who actually decides these things? And someone will say, well, it's in the best interest of everyone. But what Paul is saying here is something a little bit different.

This isn't just about having collective interests. This is about not only looking out for your own interests, but the interests of others, which may differ very differently from your own.

But those interests, of course, has to be modified and understood as what is best for the church and for the witness and for individual lives.

Now at one point, we had a Sunday school where we had more children with autism probably than most other Sunday schools had. And God just seemed to kept blessing and blessing this church by bringing children with autism to us because there was such a great, there is such a great Sunday school team that we're able to look after those children and do our very best by them.

And we thank God for that. This is a prime example of not only looking out for your own interests, but actually looking out for the interests of others. That's a good example.

[15 : 26] And as a church, we're to be thankful to God that we are able to share in that type of reality. That here we are doing what Paul is actually encouraging churches to do.

But of course, that's just one example. And there are many other examples which need to be brought into focus. But Paul's ultimate aim here is, look, if you can find any encouragement in Christ yourself to be like this, then be like this.

Now you'll notice that he's not commanding you to be this way. He's not telling you to be this way. He is appealing and exhorting your heart to see whether or not you are responding to the gospel of God in the way that you should be.

How often have you as parents had to remind your children when they have received something from someone else to say thank you? In other words, that response has to be encouraged.

And in some cases, it has to be taught. Saying thank you is not an immediate, obvious response to receiving something.

[16 : 43] Now it ought to be. It ought to be an immediate, obvious response. But it isn't. And so we raise children that when they receive something, to say thank you.

To show gratitude. To show an act of thankfulness to the other person. By perhaps, you know, a card or a letter or a picture or whatever it may be.

B. And so that act there is something that needs to be taught. And this is what Paul is doing. He's searching these Christians to the point to see whether or not they themselves can find any encouragement.

To put this in a slightly different way, if I tell you a joke and you don't get it, which when you consider some of my jokes, that's probably highly likely.

But let's just say that I've got one joke and it's really funny. But my family are tired of me saying it. But if I have to tell you the punchline, not only does it ruin the joke, but it proves that you don't get it.

[17 : 54] In the same way, when Jesus has to explain to his disciples what the parable means, that is a bit of a rebuke to the disciples. Because Jesus is saying, look, if I have to explain this to you, then you're not getting it for yourself.

In other words, you're not as far ahead in your Christian faith, follow me, as you think you are. So Paul here is addressing what it is for us to respond to God.

And so as he begins this conditional statement, the ultimate aim is whether or not we are going to be a people who reflect Christ or reflect ourselves to each other.

Are we going to imitate Christ or are we simply going to imitate someone else that we want to be like? Are we finding encouragement in Jesus to be like Jesus?

Or are we finding encouragement in some other way to achieve something else that may be of selfish ambition and nothing more than selfish ambition?

[19 : 05] are we a person who don't really want to be of one mind and can't really understand or appreciate the balance between our interests and the interests of others?

And that there is a real challenge. What is the balance between me looking out for my own interests and looking out for your interests? And of course, that balance is often the thing that causes the point of tension.

But none of this happens automatically. None of this happens as God works in you and you don't need to do anything in response. Rather, what is happening here is God is showing us through Paul that this is how you ought to respond to the work that God is doing in your life.

You need to work out, as Paul will later say, what God has worked in. And you're to do it with fear and trembling. And so if there is any encouragement in Christ, this is where it all hangs.

If there is any encouragement in Christ for you to tell the gospel, go and tell the gospel. If there is any encouragement in Christ for you to serve in this church, then serve in this church.

[20 : 22] But the conditional statement is if there is any encouragement in Christ, whether or not you can find it in yourself, that encouragement that comes with Christ.

So that the exhortation does not come from me because we need help, or it does not come from me because you need to tell others about Jesus, but it comes from Christ and your response to what Christ is doing in your life.

Without that, you simply have someone at the front constantly trying to get you to do things. And then, if you're not careful, the pastor ends up with forms of incentives to motivate people.

And I've said this over and over again, that Christ is the biggest incentive. That having been saved by grace through faith is the biggest incentive.

You don't need my praise. You don't need my thankfulness to motivate you. And I don't need yours. I should be motivated by God.

[21 : 27] I should be willing to serve Christ and not be seen by anyone and do it to the very best.

But what tends to happen, as we have said so often with the world that we live in, with the social media now, where everything gets presented to the world, where self-denial is not so much something that is sought after, but rather self-fulfillment.

And I need to take a picture of me standing in the airport before I go on my flight. I need to take a picture of me and my dinner that I'm just about to eat. People do this, I'm told.

I need to take a picture of me. Right. And this is motivated by almost like everyone wants to be the hero in the film that they're watching.

for one reason. Because it's being watched. Because it's being watched. So that emphasis that people have to do great things is always almost attached to being watched.

[22 : 40] PJ O'Rourke once said this, that everyone wants to save the world, but no one wants to help mum with the dishes. Everyone wants to save the world, but no one wants to help mum with the dishes.

Right? Because it doesn't have the kind of audience, does it, that saving the world would have. So there's much to consider.

As we walk in a manner worthy of the gospel, as we consider all of these things, we can understand why Paul is stressing this with a conditional sentence.

He is effectively saying we should all arrive at the same conclusions, but it's clearly the case that we will not all arrive at the same conclusions. Because it will come down to what you consider to be faithful and true.

Now, faithfulness in the gospel should look exactly the same for every single one of us. Walking in a manner worthy of the gospel should look exactly the same for every single one of us.

[23 : 50] And this is how the church begins to reflect Christ rather than our own image. And so we come back to this very simple question. The church is after whose likeness? After whose likeness is the church?

When the world looks at the church, who does it see? If we are people made in the image of God, being redeemed and reformed and transformed into the image of Christ, when the world looks at the church, who does it see?

Well, the answer should be they should see Jesus. But they don't. Who do they see? They see the individual images of those within the church.

And those individual images do not always look like Christ. And this is the underlying if, conditional if, that Paul's using here.

And so linked to this is that continual denial to worship Christ, worship God in order to reflect Christ to the world. This then affects the shape of our fellowship.

[24 : 59] The shape of our fellowship will be determined by our worship of God. And our worship of God is not determined by our gathering here today.

It will be determined by what we do at home, what we do at work, wherever we are. Because we will always reflect that which has our deepest commitment. We will always reflect that which we love the most and desire the most.

Because we are made to reflect an image. We are created to reflect an image. God created us to reflect him. We are made in the image of God.

God created us to reflect the fact that we are doing in the world. God created us to reflect the fact that we are doing in the world. And so we need this humility as the necessary condition to deny ourselves, to take up our cross, and to follow him.

That humility to not go after selfish ambition. This is what I can be and this is what I can do. It's a big challenge.

[26 : 05] It's a big challenge. but how difficult it is for some. And may I also say, as you get older, it may be increasingly more difficult. Never ever underestimate the power and conviction of moral guilt when you get older.

Have you ever noticed that when the woman who's caught in adultery, who's about to be stoned, that when Jesus challenges the men, it says very specifically, and the oldest ones left first.

I think moral guilt sharpens with age. If you're conscious of it, and you've been around the block enough, and you've seen it, moral guilt sharpens with age.

You know, and therefore it's just sometimes even more difficult to change. And some people just cannot accept the no's when they're young.

They cannot accept the no's when they're middle-aged. They cannot accept the no's when they're slightly older. And then it gets to the point where I'm too old to change.

[27 : 11] I'll never forget the lady. In fact, I knew the son because the son was involved in my theological training and education. And he went to visit his mother.

He was a church of England vicar, and he went to visit his mother. And she was dying, and he tried to convince her to turn to Jesus.

And her answer to him was, for me to admit Jesus now is for me also to admit that the whole of my life was a lie, and I'm just not willing to do that.

Don't think it gets easier to change because you're wise when you're older. No, sometimes it can get very, very difficult, especially if bitterness has never been dealt with.

Bitterness is like an incredible padlock that the older you get, the harder it is to unlock and to break open.

[28 : 16] And some people are just quietly bitter. And so you have to be free from bitterness as quickly as you can. Well, here's the exhortation as we close.

There ought to be a divine encouragement here to be like Christ for the sake of God's glory and to the praise of his glory. Something has to be addressed in the church, and the way to address it is not by exhorting these people without any appeal to their heart, and rather pause appealing to their heart to see whether or not they can find it in themselves any encouragement to be like Jesus.

And if you can find encouragement to be like Christ, then be like him. Now, since we are created to worship God and worship God alone and therefore reflect God, we will become like what we worship.

We will reflect to each other and to the world the object of our worship. But if individual worship is towards something else other than God, then the church is the collective image collective image of individual identities.

It doesn't look like Christ. And so there's much here to consider. Paul says that we ought to be in one mind. We ought to be uniformed.

[29 : 41] But it's not a uniformity in the sense that we're all the same. It is rather unity without that making us the same. I'll give you an example to close.

When God created Adam and Eve, is it or is it not the case that they are both made in the image of God? They were made in the image of God.

But it should be clear to every single one of us that they were different. They were both made in the image of God, but they were different. So it is possible for us all to reflect the image of God in who we are and what we do and what we say and still be different from the person next to us.

This does not rob you of being an individual. Rather, it enhances your individual status because you are now who you are meant to be in the presence and image of God.

So I'll finish with this. This began with that conditional if. And therefore, your heart is being searched this morning with that perception and that question of whether or not you can consider, whether or not you, as a person who has been saved by the gospel, can find any encouragement in Christ to be like Christ.

[31 : 06] Therefore, the church should not want to ignore the encouragement on the grounds that we have been saved by grace.

And you'd be surprised how often I come across this, that whenever there is a situation where there is a form of conflict or there is sin present or there is a sinful act that has been committed and you go to address it for those who want to be addressed and really want to know what God is going to think about what I am planning to do or I want to do or I have done and I've made a big mess.

Those who actually come and sit around the dining room table with me and talk it through will find that I'm way more gentler than I appear to be as I stand here.

And this is because this is much more of an exhortation. We are all sinners and I'm able to deal with people incredibly gently because I know how destructive sin is.

But those who are honest to actually deal with it. But one of the things that presents itself over and over again is that people seem to be convinced that because they are saved by grace, they almost get a free pass on everything.

[32 : 29] I'm saved by grace. How big of a deal can it really be? I'm saved by grace. It'll all be over and forgotten by tomorrow. Well, I'm saved by grace.

God can't hold a grudge against me if I do what he doesn't want to do because I'm saved by grace. And what they're doing is they use the very grace of God to be an instrument, not to be conformed to the image of Christ, but is a free pass for doing what they want to do.

I'm saved by grace. And what Paul is not saying here is, look, if you can find any encouragement in Christ to be like Christ, don't then use the fact that you are saved by the gospel by grace through faith as a reason to say, well, I can take my time.

Okay, what's the hurry? So we're finished with this. If there is any encouragement in Christ, be like Christ. Amen.