

Philippians 2:27-30

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 October 2012

Preacher: Brian Maiden

[0 : 00] Well, let's turn to Philippians chapter 1, and we're looking particularly at verse 27.

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Now, you'll remember that the Apostle Paul is in prison when he writes this letter. He's awaiting trial, and he doesn't know what the outcome of the trial is going to be.

It could be that he will be released and be able to continue his ministry to the Philippians and others, which he says will be great. It could be that he will be executed, in which case he will go to be with Christ, which he says is far better.

Part of me would like to go and be with Christ, for me to live is Christ and therefore to die is gain.

Part of me would like to go and be with Christ. Part of me thinks that my ministry to you is not yet over, and therefore maybe you should pray that I'll be released, so that I can continue my ministry to you.

[1 : 17] I'm torn between the two, he says. Torn between the two. Continuing my ministry with you, or going to be with Christ, which is better by far.

We looked at that last Sunday night. But far more important to Paul than what happens to him, is what is going to happen to the gospel.

That's his great concern. Even in prison, as we saw last week. As long as the gospel is being preached, he's happy. He's got Roman soldiers to preach the gospel to.

They're chained to him. They're a captive audience. They can't get away. So they've got to listen to Paul. They've got to listen to his conversations with his Christian friends. They've got to hear his prayers.

They might even peer over his shoulder as he's writing his letters. Try and find out what he's writing. So, the gospel is being advanced, he says.

[2 : 18] That's the important thing. The gospel's the important thing. Don't worry about me. And because I'm in prison, all kinds of other people are preaching the gospel as well. Which is great.

Whether they're people who like me or people who don't. It doesn't matter. If they're preaching Christ, I'm not bothered. If they're preaching Christ. We looked at that last Sunday night.

It's the gospel that's important. So he said, verse 27. Whatever happens, that is, whatever happens to me, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

If we want people to listen to the gospel, if we want people to take it seriously, we've got to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel we preach.

We've got to embody the gospel we proclaim. We've got to look like what we're talking about. That's the phrase I'd like you to try and remember tonight.

[3 : 22] We've got to look like what we're talking about. Paul writes to Titus. And in Titus chapter 2 verse 10, he says, Teach them to live like this and this and this and this, so that they might adorn the gospel.

So that they might make the gospel attractive. The word for adorn there, the word, the Greek word that we translate adorn, is the Greek word from which we get cosmetics.

People put cosmetics on because they want to look more attractive. In some cases it works. And they want to look more attractive, so they put cosmetics on.

And Paul is saying, make the gospel more attractive. How can you make the gospel more attractive? The gospel is just incredible. But your conduct, says Paul, will either attract people to the gospel or it will repel people from the gospel.

Now that's true of us as individuals, but it's even more true of us as churches, as community, Christian community.

[4 : 37] And Paul's writing here to a Christian community. He's writing to a church. And he's telling the church to conduct itself in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Paul even says in this passage that a local church is a sign to the world. Verse 28. The local church is a sign to the world.

A sign is something that's meant to grab your attention and warn you of something or point to something beyond itself. And Paul says that the church, the local church, excuse me, this church here is a sign from God to the people of Whitby.

That is what you are. A sign from God to the people of Whitby. Something that grabs their attention and makes them think. Jesus' miracles, especially in John, are called signs.

They grab people's attention. People stopped in their tracks and said, what's going on here? God is at work. And the local church is meant to be a sign from God to the people round about.

[5 : 58] So this evening, I just want to look at this passage and ask the question, how do we conduct ourselves as local churches in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ?

And I've got three points and most of my time will be taken up with point number one. So don't worry if it's getting on in time and I'm still on point number one.

I know. And point number one is the longest point. I may not even have much time for the other two. But Paul mentions three things here.

Unity, truth, and fearlessness. Unity, truth, and fearlessness. Let's look at unity first.

Verse 27, Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit contending as one man for the faith of the gospel.

[7 : 07] One spirit. One man. And he develops that in the first four verses of chapter 2. Verse 2, like-minded, the same love, one in spirit and purpose.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Because that would destroy the unity. But in humility, consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

At the top of our mind in the local church, constantly, there should be oneness. How can we speak with one voice? How can we be united?

How can the world see that we are a loving, united people? And actually, in chapter 4 of Philippians, he names and shames two ladies in the church.

Chapter 4, verse 2. I plead with you, O dear, and I plead with Syntyche. He mentions them both by name, and he pleads with them both.

[8 : 17] I plead with you, O dear, and I plead with Syntyche. This isn't just a request or a suggestion. He pleads with them both personally.

I plead with you, O dear, and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. These were two ladies. And everybody knew that they'd fallen out.

Everybody knew in the church that they'd fallen out, these two ladies. And people even outside the church, like Paul, who wasn't in the church at Philippi at the time, he knew that they'd fallen out.

And so Paul names and shames them in the letter, and he says, look, I want you to conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, and that means you only are in Syntyche that you get things sorted out.

Now, I don't know this church very well at all. Are there, is there, are there, a, a, a, a, a, you, a, you oldeer, and a Syntyche here this evening?

[9 : 32] It may not be two ladies, actually, it could be two men. Men are just as bad, just happens to have been two ladies at Philippi. part. Are there individuals in this church who've fallen out? And actually quite a few people know you've fallen out. Are you going to do anything about it? Are you going to patch it up? Are you going to patch it up today? Are you going to behave in a manner, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ? Unity doesn't just mean a very general fluffy sort of unity. It means euodia getting sorted out with syntiki. And it means syntiki getting it sorted out with euodia. That's what unity in the local church means. And they do it for Christ's sake. They do it in order to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. We live in a world torn apart by strife and quarreling and suspicion and envy and malice and anger. It's all over the place all the time. Why on earth should anyone take the gospel seriously if the church that preaches it is just the same as everybody is just as disunited? Perhaps sometimes even more disunited? You actually sometimes get more unity and more fellowship in the local pub than

you do sometimes in the local church. Why should anybody take a local church seriously that isn't united? So Paul says conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. One in spirit as one man. Can I remind you at this point of the message of the letter to the Ephesians? Ephesians said that the gospel is all about God uniting people. Did you know that? The gospel is all about God uniting people.

The gospel of course is all about God reconciling sinners to himself through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. But Paul actually says in Ephesians chapter 1 verse 9 right at the beginning of Ephesians that God's great plan from eternity, his great plan, Ephesians 1 verse 9, is to unite everything under one head, even Christ. His great plan is to unite everything in heaven and on earth under one head, Jesus Christ. So he unites, the Lord Jesus unites us to the Father, he unites us to God, one God, reconciles us to God by his blood shed on the cross, but by reconciling us to one God, one Father, he reconciles sinners to each other. One Father, one Lord, one Spirit, one hope. We're all going to the same place where we'll have to get on with each other for all eternity. You can't preach the gospel, it says in Ephesians, without emphasizing the unity of people, the reconciliation of people to each other, as well as the reconciliation of sinners to God. Sinners are united to each other through the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. And Paul says, look, if you don't believe that, what about Jews and Gentiles? The gospel unites Jews and Gentiles. Now the great division in the human race was the division between Jews and Gentiles, and that was a God-given division. It was God who separated the Jews from the Gentiles. It was God who said, you've got to be different.

Don't get too friendly with the Gentiles. You can't eat what the Gentiles eat. You can't do what the Gentiles do. You can't work on the Sabbath. Because that means that you won't be able to get into much serious business with Gentiles who do work on the Sabbath. So you've got to be different. It was God who made the division between Jews and Gentiles. But Paul says in Ephesians, now that Christ has come, that division is over, and Jesus is united, Jews and Gentiles, under one head, in the body of Christ, under the Lord Jesus Christ, in his body, the church.

So if the gospel can unite Jews and Gentiles, it can unite anybody. That's the message of Ephesians. Let me just ask you this question. What causes divisions amongst human beings? Well, I'll tell you what causes divisions amongst human beings. Divisions amongst human beings are caused by some people thinking that they are better than other people. And so Jews thought that they were better than Gentiles. People. Gentiles thought that they were better than Jews. [14:59] Some black people think they're better than white people. Some white people think that they're better than black people. Rich people tend to think that they're better than poor people. Poor people think that they're better than rich people.

People educated at Eton think that they're better than people who are educated at Bass Street Comprehensive. If you read the Bino, you'll know what I'm talking about. People who are educated at Bass Street Comprehensive think that they're much better than those snobs at Eton.

Liverpool supporters think that they're better than Everton supporters. Manchester City supporters think they're better than Manchester United supporters. Carlyle United supporters think they're better than anybody. Young people think they're better than old people. Old people think they're better than young people.

Men think they're better than women. Women think they're better than men. And so there's strife. There's rivalry. There's competition in human society because some people think that they're better than other people.

Can I remind you about the Gospel? What does the Gospel tell us? Listen to this very, very carefully. The Gospel tells us that nobody is better than anybody.

[16:17] Nobody is better than anybody else. The Gospel, Romans chapter 3, says no one is good. Not even one.

All have sinned. All have sinned. There is no different. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

The Gospel tells us that any righteousness that we have that is acceptable to God is not even our own righteousness. It is the righteousness of God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

That is the righteousness that gets us right with God, puts us right with God, and which saves us. We're not saved by our own efforts. We're not saved by our own righteousness. We're not saved by being better than anybody else.

We're saved when we confess that we're no better than anybody else. That the vilest sinner in the world is me.

[17 : 14] The Apostle Paul describes himself as the chief of sin. We're saved when we come to the end of our own righteousness and understand that we are not better than anybody.

Now, how can you confess all that? In other words, how can you believe the Gospel? How can you confess all that in one breath and in the next breath think that you're better than somebody else? Perhaps even better than somebody else in the church? It's a denial of the Gospel we preach. Paul says conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ.

If you believe in the Gospel you have got to take being reconciled to every other person who believes that Gospel seriously. You've got to do it.

Jesus reconciled all sinners to one Father. He gives them one Spirit. He calls them to one hope. And it's no use the Church preaching that and then denying it by its quarreling and its disunity.

[18 : 28] Jesus in John 17 prays to his Father for the unity of those who will believe in him so that the world might believe that the Father has sent it.

And when I talk about unity I'm not just talking about not falling out. I'm talking about positive sacrificial love for one another.

I'm talking about serving one another in love. I'm talking about bearing one another's burdens. I'm talking about local churches where people can't do too much for one another. I'm talking about local churches where people love one another as Christ has loved them.

John chapter 13 verse 35 Love one another as I have loved you. By this shall all men know that you are my disciples.

How do people know that you're a Christian? How do people know that this is a Christian church? Jesus says the only way they'll know is not by you putting a sign outside although certainly you should do that.

[19 : 33] It's not by you putting a sign on the back window of your car saying honk if you love Jesus although if you want to do that you can. The way in which people outside the church will know that you are Christians is if you love one another as Christ has loved you.

That's what Jesus said. That's conducting ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Can you just turn over to 1 John chapter 4 1 John chapter 4 verse 7.

This is everybody's favorite passage. It's the passage that says God is love. 1 John chapter 4 verse 7 Dear friends let us love one another for love comes from God.

Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us. He sent his one and only son into the world that we might live through him.

This is love. Not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his son as a stoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends since God so loved us we also ought to love one another.

[20 : 52] No one has ever seen God but if we love one another God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. Can you see what John is saying there? He's saying God is love. Okay.

How do you know that God is love? How do you know that God is love? It's not obvious is it? I mean just look at the world and the rotten things that happen in this world.

It's not obvious that God is love. Look at some of the things that have happened in your own life.

Has none of you ever questioned whether God is love in view of some of the things that have happened in your own life?

How do we know that God is love? John says the only reason well there are two reasons he says that we know that God is love. How do we know that God is love? We don't look around and think of all the nice things that are happening to us.

There might be all kinds of horrible things happening to us. How do we know that God is love? If you want to know that God is love says John you look back 2,000 years to the cross of Calvary and that's where you see the love of God.

[21 : 56] This is love. Not that we love God but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation to turn his wrath away from our sin.

That's how we know that God is love. Look at Calvary if you want to know that God is love. But there's another way. That is the main way. But there's another way that must back that up.

And John says no one has ever seen God. But if we love one another God's love is made complete in earth.

So how are non-Christians to know that God is love? Through the gospel, through preaching about the death of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross but also through looking at the lives, the community, the churches that preach that gospel.

And they will see there the love of God. So says Paul, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

[23 : 02] The gospel of Christ is all about forgiveness forgiveness. And therefore a Christian community is a forgiving community. It forgives and forgives and forgives.

Every member forgives and forgives and forgives. The gospel of Jesus Christ is all about the grace of God. What's the grace of God? It's God's generosity to the undeserving.

So what does a church that preaches the grace of God look like? It's a church that goes out to the undeserving generosity. We've got to look like the gospel we preach.

At our church in Kendall three years ago, three or four years ago, we began to work amongst people with debt. We now have 48 clients who were helping with debt.

And at the same time sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with them. Two or three of them have become Christians. one of them is a lady who was suffering from depression. She never went out of the house.

[24 : 05] She was in debt. She was scared to answer the phone. She's become a Christian. She's paid off her debt. She's now a church member. She came on our church weekend to Blathwaite House with us a few months ago.

And she was absolutely gutted when she learned that we have them every other year at our church.

And she thought there was going to be one next year and there isn't. It's the year after next.

She can't wait. She's been completely transformed by the gospel but also by people who look like the gospel they preach. People who went to her in her depression and helped her.

We didn't give her any money but we sat down with her and helped her to sort out her finances.

Began to negotiate with the banks and the building societies and the gas and the electricity on her behalf.

And gradually she's been able to pay off her debt. We've got to look like the gospel we preach. If we're serious about the gospel we've got to look like the gospel we preach.

[25 : 11] And if we don't look like the gospel we preach people won't take the gospel we preach seriously. And why should they? Why should they? Okay.

Okay. Number two. Number two. Truth. Truth. Paul says chapter 1 verse 27 I want to know that you stand firm in one spirit contending as one man for the faith of the gospel.

Contending. That word means fighting. Fighting for the faith of the gospel. Now he's just said that churches should be characterized by unity by love by one mindedness by standing together as one man.

But for what? For what? For the faith of the gospel. So he's talking about loving and contending in the same breath.

He's talking about unity and fighting in the same breath. A local church is a united community and it's a fighting community.

[26 : 31] We stand firm in one spirit. We contend as one man. For what? For the faith of the gospel.

There are truths truths that we stand for, that we believe, that we won't be budged on, that we will fight for if necessary, not with our fists of course.

The church never should go down that route. But we will fight intellectually, we will fight for certain truths and they are the truths of the gospel.

And this church I'm sure will have a basis of faith. and that basis of faith are the truths that this church stands for. They are the truths that this church will fight for.

They are non-negotiable truths as far as this church is concerned. So when Paul talks about unity in this passage, he's not talking about unity at any price.

[27 : 33] He's talking about unity created by the gospel. And this unity is inseparable from the gospel as we've seen from Ephesians. Christian unity is inseparable from the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There can be no unity, therefore, with those who deny the gospel or detract from the gospel or subtract from the gospel or add to the gospel, another little thing of their own which they think is absolutely essential.

Our unity is gospel unity. unity. And where people deny the gospel, then we love them as neighbors, we love them as neighbors, but we cannot love them as brothers and sisters, because it is the gospel that unites Christians together.

So we must be willing to contend for the gospel and read Galatians, where Paul describes those who preach a different gospel as being accursed.

And where he even publicly took Simon Peter to task, the apostle Peter to task, in the city of Antioch, when by his conduct, Peter denied the gospel by his conduct, not so much by what he taught, but by behavior, which we won't go into now.

[29 : 02] And Paul publicly rebuked him, because the gospel was at risk through Peter's behavior, which was public behavior, and therefore Paul publicly rebuked him.

So we're not talking here about unity at any price. It's unity amongst those who agree about the gospel.

gospel. And there are secondary truths, which those who agree about the gospel must be willing to disagree about. Yes, even in a local church, there is room for differences of opinion amongst those who believe the gospel, because it's the gospel that's important.

Those who believe the gospel don't fight each other. They fight the real enemy. Which is those who deny the gospel.

There's a story about Lord Nelson, I don't know whether it's true or not. Probably isn't, but it's a good story, it should be true. And apparently during the Battle of Trafalgar, two of his sailors on his ship, the victory, were scrapping, they were fighting each other, they were arguing, even coming to blows.

[30 : 26] And Lord Nelson is supposed to have gone and separated them and pointed to the French fleet and said, gentlemen, there is your foe. It should be true, shouldn't it, even if it isn't?

Gentlemen, there is your foe, he said. And that's what we should be saying to people who are constantly falling out in our evangelical churches about nothing, about secondary matters.

We should be separating them and we should be saying, there is your foe. Don't waste your energy fighting each other, what a terrible, terrible thing. Fight the foe.

So it's unity and truth. I like to think of the church, the local church, as an orchestra. And the thing about an orchestra is that it is made up of very different instruments, played by different musicians, with entirely different gifts, making totally different sounds.

And if you were to give, let's say, a euphonium to a drummer, the drummer wouldn't know what to do with the euphonium.

[31 : 47] And vice versa, the euphonium player wouldn't know what to do with the drums. Or if you were to give a piccolo to a violinist, the violinist wouldn't know how to play the piccolo, and the piccoloist wouldn't know how to play the violin.

The whole point about an orchestra is that it is made up of entirely different people, with different gifts, playing different instruments, making different sounds.

And actually, if everybody played the same instrument, it wouldn't be very nice, would it? I mean, I don't know, I do have a carnival in Whitby.

We have a sort of carnival at night time in Kendall. It's called the torchlight parade. It's the highlight of Kendall's year. The torchlight parade. And they get these steel bands on the backs of Laurier.

And everybody in a steel band plays a steel drum. It's drums and nothing else. And as far as I'm concerned, the sooner they're passed, the better. I can't stand them when everybody is playing the same instrument.

[32 : 50] I mean, imagine an orchestra made up entirely of people playing the piccolo and nothing else. Or people playing the triangle and nothing else. Well, you know what a church is where everybody's identical, don't you?

It's called a cult. It's called a cult. That's a church where everybody's identical. And there are evangelical cults, actually. where I will say that there are cultish evangelical churches inclining to be cultive where you've got to look the same, you've got to talk the same, you've got to believe exactly the same about everything.

And if you don't, there'll be trouble. That's a cult. It's not a church, it's a cult. it is an orchestra made up of identical instruments and it's not very nice.

So, an orchestra is made up of different musicians playing different musical instruments with different sounds. But, the other thing to remember about an orchestra is that when an orchestra

plays, they're all playing from the same score.

they're all playing the same piece of music. If it's Beethoven's Fifth, they all play Beethoven's Fifth. Half the orchestra isn't playing Schubert's Unfinished, they're all playing Beethoven's Fifth.

[34 : 30] And if they're not, it's complete disco, it's complete chaos. Now, the church is made up of different instrumentalists, if you like, but we're all agreed on this tune, and the tune is the gospel.

The tune is the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. And if you're not playing that tune, you're in the wrong church. I'm sure the elders here won't mind me saying that. If you're not playing that tune, if you've got another tune that you want to play other than the gospel, or if you've got another tune that you think is as important as the tune that everybody else is playing in addition to the gospel, then you're in the wrong church.

Everybody in the local church plays the same tune. It's the gospel. And what's the gospel? The gospel is that the Messiah, Christ, the Christ, died for our sins.

He was buried, and on the third day, he rose again. That's the gospel. That's the tune this church plays. And we play together, different people, with different gifts, from different backgrounds, with different things to offer.

And it's great when we live together in unity. And finally, fearlessness, fearlessness. And we haven't really time to say anything much about this at all.

[35 : 52] Verse 28, without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved, and that by God.

For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him. Since you were going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have. Paul says, and he's writing this from prison, don't forget, he says, look, not everybody will like this, not everybody will like this gospel. You will be persecuted, there will be those who oppose you, but don't be frightened, don't let it stop you.

Don't be frightened by those who oppose you. I'm not. I'm facing possible execution, but it doesn't matter. I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.

I'm not frightened, nor should you be, by persecution, by opposition, no matter how hard it gets, no matter what the opposition is. we must preach this gospel, and we must stand for this gospel, and we must be united through this gospel, and we must be fearless, we must preach it fearlessly, whatever people think, whatever people say, we must preach it fearlessly.

[37 : 16] 4 verse 29, and this is lovely, isn't it? It has been granted to you. This is God's gift to you. This is God's gift to you. It has been granted to you on behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him.

It's part of the package. Believing on him, yes. Suffering for him, yes. Both given by God. Both is gift to Christians, to believe on the Lord Jesus, and to suffer for the Lord Jesus.

to go through the same struggle that Paul had, and was still having as he wrote this letter. So, as Paul faces an unknown future, he is concerned about the gospel, and he says to his friends at Philippi, whatever happens to me, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, if you want people to take it seriously.