

Week 5: Gospel Light

Chapter 2:12-18

So far... we've seen Paul's affection and gratitude for the Philippian church, and his desire for them to grow in Gospel-centred love. Paul testifies to his desire to boldly glorify Jesus whether by life or by death, and then urges the church to humble Gospel-centred unity, based on nothing less than the example of Jesus Himself.

Reverence for the Indwelling Christ

"...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." (2:12-13)

As Paul continues his encouragement to the Philippian church he has a sobering but important reminder for them in the life they've been called to. He recognises that there could be a case of the church flourishing in their obedience when he was with them, but somehow letting their standards slip when he was away from them. We all know that reality - when someone we respect is watching us it can bring a real restraint to how we act that isn't there when they're not around.

However, Paul reminds the church of a greater reality that should urge them to holiness, purity, humility and obedience whatever situation they are in. God is at work in them wherever they are, He indwells them by His Spirit, and that should bring a real reverence into the way they behaved as His people. This is not a game we're playing, or a social club we've joined - this is a new life given to us by God, and where He is involved in absolutely every part. We can't hold back anything from Him because we belong to Him entirely and He wants every part of our lives to bring Him honour and glory.

As with any time the Bible talks about fear, what it's not meaning here is the kind of paralysing fear that can tie us up in knots, and stop us from doing anything, let alone live a life that glorifies God. What this is urging us to have is a proper view of who God is. He isn't like us, He's not at our level in any way, but is so far above us in every way. He's more powerful, more glorious, more wise, and more awesome than we will ever truly understand, and the knowledge that He is always there with us should keep us from allowing ourselves to slip into sin when we feel no-one is watching.

Though Paul has been clear on the security that this church has in knowing that God will finish the work He has begun within them (1:6), this doesn't give them licence to just do whatever they want with the life He's given them. We no longer need to be terrified of judgment but should be willing to live our lives with a proper reverence for just who it is who is living within us as His people.

For Discussion:

How can we develop a consciousness of the reality of God's presence wherever we go?

Other Verses for study:

• Colossians 1:15-29 • 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

The Light of Contentment

"Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world" (2:14-15)

Paul's continued exhortation to the church in Philippi comes in the shape of 2 very simple, yet searching commands, which come with a radical promise attached. Firstly the commands, while they are easy to understand, touch an area of life that is a challenge to us all - contentment. Paul tells the church to do everything without complaining and without arguing. Both of these things are signs that we are not willing to accept life as it comes at us but feel like we somehow deserve better. Either we think things should change and just decide to let everyone else know it, or we decide those around us are wrong and start telling them just what we think.

Either way, we're not happy about the world and we somehow feel we have the right to something better so we shout our mouth off to, or even at those around us. God, through Paul is calling us to a better way. He's calling us to an acknowledgement that in this life He is in control of everything, and He's

Paul's Life Poured Out

"Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all." (2:17)

As he is writing to the church in Philippi, Paul is calling them to radical levels of sacrifice and to lives that stand out from the world around in amazing ways. As he continues to do this, he wants them to know that this isn't just talk as far as he's concerned - this is the way he himself lives. Paul isn't a man who is out for what he can get out of life, he's done exactly what he's calling this church to, and given his life away for those around him.

Listen to the language Paul uses to describe the life that he has - he is being poured out. There's no idea of self-preservation or holding back here - Paul is willing for his whole life to be given away as an encouragement and help to the Philippian churches faith. That's what a drink offering was - it was an addition to the main sacrifice, poured out on top of a grain offering or a burnt offering (see Numbers 15). The drink offering wasn't the main event, it was a supplement to the main sacrifice, and that's exactly what Paul is willing for his life to be. In a world where everyone is climbing on top of each other to

working it out for our good. He's calling us to realise that life will never be the perfection we desire it to be until we see Him face to face in glory. In the light of these truths we ought to be those who are content with the life that is given to us. Not that there's nothing we try to change, but we don't change it because we're seeking some kind of gratification for ourselves - we try and change things because we know they're wrong and God would have us change them.

These are small but powerful commands for us to obey - not easy, but Paul gives an amazing promise if we'll live this way. This kind of contentment is so rare in the world that when we display it we'll be like a light that shines into the darkness around us. As we show a contentment that others just don't have, they won't be able to help but notice and ask that question - why are you different?

For Discussion:

What things make us complain or argue - how can the truth set us free from this kind of response?

Other Verses for study:

• Matt 6:25-34 • Phil 4:10-13 • 1 Tim 6:6-10

become the main event themselves, Paul steps out of the limelight and says - I want you guys to be a fitting sacrifice, an aroma pleasing to God, and if I can do anything to help that happen then I'll do it. His eyes are not even looking at what he is bringing to God, but is consumed with a love for this church.

What a difference there is here from the general self-centredness of life, but this is exactly what the Gospel frees us to do. In the Gospel we know that our eternities have been secured, our sins have been forgiven, and we have a God who has promised to provide for our needs. If God has already dealt with our past and guaranteed our future, then what thought do we really need to give to our own lives? We're now free to give ourselves away, to be filled with a deep desire to see others shine for the sake of the kingdom, and as a result to see more people come to know the same reality that we know.

For Discussion:

What are some of the barriers to this kind of self-sacrifice? How can we overcome them?

Other Verses for study:

• Ephesians 5:1-2 • John 15:12-13 • Luke 9:21-26