

Responding Well

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[0 : 00] So let's then just return to that portion of God's Word that we read together. If you've got your Bibles there, we can just look at these verses in Philippians chapter 1 from 27 through to verse 30.

So Paul's writing here to the church at Philippi. Philippi was a leading city in the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony.

Probably wrote this around about AD 61, and we suppose that he was in prison there in Rome, and that's where he wrote this letter from.

Paul had a great love for this particular church, and we read of his first involvement with them in the Acts of the Apostles' Air in chapter 16.

And they too loved the apostle Paul, and they were very supportive of his ministry, both prayerfully and financially.

[1 : 09] And he particularly thanks them for their gifts, further on there in chapter 4 from verses 10 and onwards, because they were really the only church who sacrificially partnered with Paul in his ministry.

You see, Paul never wanted to be a burden to any of his churches. He always wanted to be independent, and of course he earned his living independently from tent making.

However there were times when inevitably situations were that finances were tight, and these dear ones, they in the Philippian church lovingly provided for the apostle.

Friends, there's a reminder here for us too, isn't there, of the scriptural requirements to love and to respect and to care for our pastors and those who watch over us.

Paul reminds us in 1 Thessalonians 5 in verses 12 and 13 when he says, respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and esteem them very highly in love because of their work.

[2 : 38] A reminder for us to love our care for our pastors and our leaders. So here then in verses 27 to 30, he's exhorting them how to respond and to conduct themselves in an obedient, God-honoring way whatever circumstances face them.

And Paul lays out here good sound advice for them and indeed for us as a church here as we move forward into this new year in God's providence.

So let's look then at some of the teaching that are in these verses for us. So he begins here in the NIV by saying, whatever happens, friends, as we look to the future, nobody knows what will happen.

Who could have predicted a global pandemic and all that it has brought to radically change the daily lives of all mankind's lockdown, virtual meetings and all the other various restrictions that it brought. And following on from that, now we have subsequently moved into times of global economic collapse creating poverty and strife.

[4 : 15] And all of this has been compounded, of course, by situations like that dreadful war in Ukraine.

Yet apart from these exceptional conditions, we do live in an ever-changing world, a world that's changing.

It's changing for good and it's changing for bad. And as Christians, we seem to be continually persecuted by the pressures of a secular society.

And these pressures eventually find their ways through the corridors of power, and they can ultimately present as government legislation.

For example, hate crime bill Scotland, abortion and assisted suicide, gender recognition reform bill Scotland.

[5 : 23] Indeed, we're living in days when the words of the late theologian Francis Schaefer have never been more true.

Schaefer said, I believe that pluralistic secularism in the long run is a more deadly poison than straightforward persecution.

This worldly secularism has for many years also been pervading sections of the Christian church, not least the church of Scotland.

I mean, over the years within the church, we've come to no terms such as postmodernism, which means there are no absolutes.

And that's widely accepted in certain areas of the church. In fact, in the year 2016, the new word of the year added to the Oxford dictionary was the word post-truth.

[6 : 37] The meaning of that word is the disappearance of shared objective standards of truth. It gets bizarre.

However, it brings into sharp focus, doesn't it, John 18:38, the words of Pilate. Well when Christ was before, and Pilate says, what is truth?

Of course, truth didn't matter to Pilate, who was motivated by expediency. Likewise today, truth doesn't matter to the skeptics who have despaired of knowing it.

But friends, how thankful we are to have the Bible, which is the word of truth, the inspired and errant infallible Word of God penned by men.

And within these pages, we read John 14:6, that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life, and no one cometh unto the Father but by Him.

[7 : 51] So whatever happens, he says, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. In other words, in all respects, live as citizens of the kingdom of God, whatever the circumstances.

No matter the persecution, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Now that applies to each of us individually, and it applies to us collectively as Christians.

And indeed, it presents immense challenges to us in the realities of our daily lives, because we must be image bearers of Christ in how we live within a shadowy and distorted society where identity politics overcome everything, and there is no respect for other opinions.

We now live in a society where democracy is drifting to autocracy.

Liberty and principles are drifting to anarchy. And this creates a astonishing division where everyone wants their own way and their own agenda, and people even build their own distorted image of God.

[9 : 36] And of course, all these things come from the evil one, from Satan himself. So how then are we to be image bearers of Christ in our daily lives?

Well, let me give you just some very simple, practical ways. We should, as Christians, conduct our affairs in a God-honoring way, decently, honestly, fairly, and we should be generous to others.

For example, we should always pay our bills on time. We should exercise consumer responsibility. By that I mean we should exercise discernment in what we buy.

Was it produced using child labor? Was it produced in a sweatshop? And by the way, willful ignorance is no defense here.

We should take these steps. We should stand up for social justice. We should champion the oppressed and do not adhere to political world opinion, but do adhere to God's way.

[11 : 02] Now these are only a few ways that we can express our transformed image in Christ. We should also be critically discerning.

Rampant is an important gift and it's a reality. And for that we rely on the Holy Spirit. There are great dangers of rampant individualism leading to confusion and isolation.

You see, we can so easily, by our own self discernment, veer off on the wrong path, and that can lead to disaster.

But we must keep in tune with the Holy Spirit and with the Word of God. And in all of that we should continually appraise ourselves.

And in that context it can be good as trusted Christian friends to regularly hold each other accountable for our actions.

[12 : 16] We should live as individuals together under Christ. Paul writes in Ephesians 2, 19 and 20 how we are built on the foundation on the cornerstone of Christ.

In Galatians 3 and 28 he reminds us that we are all one in Christ. And of course, Jesus has already prayed for us in his high priestly prayer of John 17, John 17:21, where he says to the Father, as you and I are one Father, so may they be one in us.

So he has prayed for our unity. And brothers and sisters, this is our scriptural responsibility to be image bearers.

And do you know, people out there are watching us. Your neighbors watch how every Sunday morning you get into your car and you go to church in the evening and maybe midweek you go to meetings.

You maybe said a group is at your house and all the cars are parked there. What are they doing there? They watch the way that we walk. They watch the way that we talk.

[13 : 39] So we are to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of Christ as His ambassadors for such a time as this.

Paul then goes on and says, 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.

So Paul here is, he's firstly reinforcing the accountability of the church community and each individual within that church community to stand firm.

You see, it's not about the minister, the leadership's presence, but it's about everybody's responsibility.

And he's strongly emphasizing the togetherness of the church members that we're to stand firm in one spirit contending as one man for the faith of the gospel.

[14 : 55] Of course, we see a wonderful example of this in the early church, don't we, there in the Acts 2, verses 42 to 47, where we see that they were devoted to the apostles' teaching to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

And all the believers were together and they had everything in common. But more than that, they were out there in the city square.

They were out there in the high street. They were ministering to the people. They were loving the people. They were doing good to the people.

And in all of that, you see, as they endeavored to be image bearers, the Lord blessed it because we've got that wonderful verse 47 where we read, and the Lord added to their number, daily those who were being saved.

Isn't that what we yearn for? Is that not the church we want to be so that people are being saved and coming in and building up the church here?

[16 : 08] And how He says, stand firm together, and the writer of the Hebrews in chapter 10, 24 to 25, he reinforces that by saying, do not give up, meeting together.

Continue to meet together, to spur each other on in love and good deeds.

You see, we're to stand firm, but we're to stand in the Holy Spirit, and we're to stand in the living Word of God.

For our battle is not against flesh and blood, but it's against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. And Paul reminds us of that in Ephesians 6, verses 10 to 18. So he says, therefore, put on the full armor of God, daily peace by peace, and always remember that final peace.

[17 : 20] Keep on praying for all the saints. And we must especially remember our dear brothers and sisters and lands throughout the world who are severely persecuted.

You know, in reality, life is a picnic for us compared to some of these dear ones and some of the lands throughout this world.

So we need to continually remember them. Paul goes on then in verse 28, he says, 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.

Paul saying, be bold before your adversaries because the battle belongs to the Lord. Christ has already won the victory through the crucifixion and His resurrection power that has defeated Satan, sin and death for all time.

Brothers and sisters, when we're in Christ, we're on the victory side. So do not in any way be frightened by those who oppose you.

[18 : 45] Paul wants the Philippians and us to have that same holy boldness in the face of opposition that he had. You see, these spiritual enemies use the weapons of fear and intimidation against us, and we can all testify in our human weakness to the reality of that.

However, the more we mature in our faith, the stronger we become, fully exercising the power and the authority of Christ that is within us until we can reach that stage when we can say with the apostle himself, as he says in Philippians 4 and 13, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

And Paul points out here in verse 28, he says that those who oppose the gospel of Christ, though they are already marked out for ruin, and that we as Christians, by being persecuted, well that's a sign of our salvation.

And furthermore, when these spiritual enemies fail to make us afraid, well then they failed completely because they really have no other weapon than fear and intimidation.

And he goes on then in verse 29 to say, for it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for Him.

[20 : 38] Well, as Christians, we've been granted by grace alone the greatest privilege that any human being could have, salvation.

salvation from eternal damnation, and that comes through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

That there is no other name in heaven given amongst men by whom we must be saved. That is our credentials.

That is our credentials. Some of you might remember the late Bill Galvear. Bill was born in the Gallagate in Glasgow as a teenager growing up in the early 1950s.

He was involved in gangland warfare. He was in the Stickle Gang in Glasgow gangland warfare. He got involved in much crime.

[21 : 51] He spent some time in prison. Growing up, Bill was, he was a wild boy. But you know, one evening, Bill went along to a gospel meeting in the tent hall mission in Glasgow.

The preacher was a man called Seth Sykes. And Bill Galvear heard the gospel. Seth Sykes gave him these words.

He said, what will you do with Jesus? Will you nay Takim, hem with you? And Bill Galvear surrendered his life to the Lord Jesus Christ.

He was convicted. He was converted. He became a new creation in Christ. And then he went on to serve in nursing, missionary work in the Congo and in other places.

And then in later years, he became the Scottish representative for scripture gift mission, which meant the Bill went to different churches.

[23 : 00] And he spoke at churches. He spoke to young folks. He spoke in different places. And on one occasion, he was speaking at St Andrews University in the Younger Hall.

St Andrews University is very formal, so he was to be introduced by the sacrist. Just before the sacrist went to introduce him, he went and asked him, he says, Mr. Galvear, can I ask you, what are the letters after your name as I formally introduce you?

So that kind of flummoxed Urwale for the Gallo Gates. But nevertheless, he swiftly replied, yes, I'm William Galvear, SSBG.

So the sacrist, Julie, introduced him as William Galvear, SSBG. But you see, what Bill was doing there was he was giving his true credentials because he was a sinner saved by grace.

And for all of us who are truly born again by the Holy Spirit, that is our credentials, sinner saved by grace.

[24 : 16] So like these Philippian Christians, we have then the privilege to suffer for our Savior. And it is a privilege to suffer for our Savior.

The Apostle James reminds us in James 1, 2 to 4 there, he says, consider it pure joy, my brothers. Whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance, perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

And then Paul goes on finally to say, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

So as a great encouragement to the believers here in Philippi and indeed to us, Paul now points out that the struggles that they and we are going through are the same struggles that they saw Paul had when he was with them.

And by the way, our struggles I guess are not up to the extent of Paul's where he was beaten with rods, he was thrown into the inner prison, into the stocks where he continually had to flee for his life.

[25 : 39] And that struggle, as Paul reminds us, continues for him now. It's interesting that for the word struggle, the King James Version uses the word conflict which in Greek is agon, from which we get the words agonai and agonize.

So with the Philippians and we have Paul's kind of conflict or agonai, then we also can look forward to having Paul's kind of joy and fruit that he had in the midst of all of that.

And of course, he brings that out so well in Romans 8 and 28, doesn't he? He tells us that even though whatever we go through, that we are always being blessed.

Well, friends, in all of this, as we sort of pull it together, let's try to get some points of application to take away with us in some sort of practical way.

Well, firstly, let us be aware that there are dangers here.

[27 : 09] Firstly, we can so easily create our own God.

Yes, I believe in Christ as my personal Savior, but I do not actively acknowledge commonality with all other believers.

That can be a failing. But you see, when we are saved, then we are part of that body, and we are all one in Christ.

There's not just a thing as a solitary Christian. Or on the other hand, yes, we belong to a church and live outwardly as a Christian, but then maybe have no radical personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well then, we cannot be a true image bearer as we are called to be of the one who we do not know personally. We need to have that personal relationship.

[28 : 27] So how then can we be image bearers individually and together as we move forward into the uncharted waters of this new year?

Image bearers in the context that Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 15, 49, where he says, So shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.

In other words, the people would see Jesus in us and through us. Well, we need to be open and we need to display our transformation and our new image of God.

We share not only our individual testimony, but also our community testimony as being one in Christ. So how can we do it better together?

How can we reflect the image of God together in our society? That is the ongoing challenge for us in 2023.

[29 : 39] Well, God has presented us with an opportunity to reach our city, to reach our communities individually and together to Corinthians 3 and 18.

And we who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory are being transformed into His likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Friends, I do not have the answers as to how we as individuals and as a church will do this.

But you know what? God does. So we must prayerfully seek His spiritual strategy for us.

However we are accountable to our heavenly Father. There are immense challenges for us as a church as we serve again in our city, in our communities and in society in general.

[30 : 53] However we are to be encouraged as Paul encourages us with that wonderful doxology in Ephesians 3, 2021. Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to His power that is at work within us.

To Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever. We serve an amazing God.

As Christians we must remember that we are not the authors of our own life story. All the world would have us believe that we are and that we should reach for the sky in our personal achievements.

But when we become new creations in Christ then we are part of God's story. He is the author of our lives.

We are part of His story and our earnest desire is to do His will. And you know that means humble service, sharing the love of God with others.

[32 : 16] And so often that's simply giving a cup of cold water or washing feet.

Let me conclude with a quotation from John Caldwell in his book Radical Church. John says that the church has three options.

One, compromise and die. Two, hide in the trenches and die a little more slowly.

Or three, hold fast to truth, engage the world and see what God does.

Everybody needs Jesus. And our God-given commission is to go out there and to engage them and share Jesus with them in so many available ways.

[33 : 22] However we must prayerfully discern God's spiritual, strategic vision for us here at St. Columbus.

So each of us must respond well, giving our utmost for His highest. And may God have all the glory, the honour and the praise as men, women and boys and girls will yet be saved.

Amen. Let's pray. O gracious and ever merciful God, we thank You for Your Word that speaks truth into our hearts and into our minds.

We pray, Lord, that we would take deep within us these pearls of spiritual wisdom that You have presented to us.

O Lord, that we would not hear the words of the One who stands here, but rather of yourself from heaven. And that each of us this morning would be challenged, but yet we would be encouraged because You are a faithful God.

[34 : 35] And indeed, Lord, we earnestly pray for those who are heavy on our hearts, flesh of our flesh and bone of our bones and friends and colleagues and others who we would earnestly seek that this would be the year that they would be yet saved.

So may Thy kingdom come, may Thy will be done on earth, and may You, Father, Son and Holy Spirit have all the glory, the honour and the praise. And we ask it in Jesus' most precious name. Amen. LOL