

Striving side by side for the Gospel

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[0 : 0 0] Our Father God we thank you that you have not left us in ignorance and darkness but have given us the light of your word.

We pray now that by the power of your Holy Spirit that you would so move our hearts that we may believe your word and from our trust may come forth those good fruit that honour the Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray these things for Jesus' sake. Amen. Once again many thanks to your minister for his invitation to preach here today.

I simply indicated to him that I would be in Glasgow and despite my protestations that I would rather hear him he insisted that I do it. I think he regards himself as being on holidays.

But it's nice that you're here sir. We know about your church even where I am and we are glad to have this fellowship.

[0 : 5 8] We are very glad indeed to have this fellowship with you. It means a great deal to us. Thank you. The first chapter of the Philippians, the letter of Paul to the Philippians and particularly the verses 27 to 30 but not only those.

Now the passage begins in the New International Version at least with the words whatever happens. Captured in the ESV is only let your manner of life. I suppose whatever happens or under all circumstances whatever happens let your manner of life.

Now why? Why did the apostle feel the need to begin in this way? Because as he reveals in the first chapter of Philippians the circumstances were not all that happy and they could be worse.

The apostle was imprisoned for the sake of the gospel. The apostle, the apostle to the Gentiles, our apostle was in prison for the sake of the gospel. In chains he says.

In chains for Christ. Furthermore, although he was expecting to be released as he reveals yet nonetheless he was ready to die. For as he says for me to live is Christ and to die is gain which to us sounds like poetry but to him was reality.

[2 : 1 5] For him to live was Christ but to die and it was quite possible that his death was imminent to die was gain. In these circumstances of uncertainty, in these circumstances when their great leader was imprisoned it is not surprising that he says whatever happens.

Furthermore, he was beset by false friends. In this astonishing and hard to imagine section here in chapter 1 verse 15 he says some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry.

He says they preach Christ, verse 17, out of rivalry not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. It's hard to imagine the motives of such people.

But he finds that there were people who were sharing Christ in order to embarrass him. And so not only was he in prison and not only was the state against him but also from within his own house, amongst his own friends, amongst those who owned the name of Christ, he was being persecuted.

They were preaching the gospel for all the wrong reasons. More, the church at Philippi was obviously deeply distressed about this whole situation. They were convinced that they still needed him.

[3 : 33] They wanted him to see them again. They did not think it would be in their best interest were he to die. And so their apostle was in prison. His death was possible.

His false friends were afflicting him. And they themselves were deeply troubled and disturbed. And for that reason he says, whatever happens, or only, only, under all circumstances, in any case, make sure, whatever happens, whether I die or whether I survive, whatever happens, make sure you do this.

Now that gives immense power to the words that follow. For here, no matter what turbulence there may be, no matter how the seas may come up and ruffle you, no matter what is going on, make sure you do this, is what he says.

And as I say, it gives it great authority and significance as to what he says next. Now whatever happens is that they are to do as he does.

That even if the worst occurred and the standard bearer of the gospel, the standard bearer of the gospel were to perish, even if despite their need of him he were to depart and be with Christ, which to him would be far better, they were to be committed in a certain way.

[4 : 53] Now please notice that the assault which he was suffering from in being in prison and being assailed by his false friends was something that they too were suffering.

It's not as though the Philippians were sitting in tranquility over here, worried about their friend but not themselves under attack. For he refers in verse 29, am I right?

But it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer, but also suffer his sake, engaged in the same conflict. And so it was indeed for them, not only that they heard about his sufferings but also that they themselves were under assault for the faith.

And hence all the more significance that he should say, whatever happens, do this, whatever happens, no matter what circumstances you are in. And what of us?

Where do we find ourselves? As far as we in Australia were concerned, and I suspect it was true throughout the Western world, the time 50 years ago when I came to know the Lord and the great Graham crusade in Sydney was a time of buoyancy in the churches.

[6 : 04] The churches were full. In the post-war period, people came back to the churches and the churches were full of people.

The children were there in their hundreds and even their thousands. One of our suburban churches, for example, had a Sunday school of a thousand in 1958 or 59 and we built a huge building.

Today that church stands empty. The building was built for a thousand children and today we have just now reopened it with a Chinese congregation.

And that is symptomatic of what has occurred in the 60 years that opened up with the decade of the 1960s in the Western world. The great separation of Christ and our culture occurred 40 years ago.

A very fine book written by a Scottish historian, Cullum Brown, is entitled The Death of Christian Britain. And he actually identifies the year, if I remember correctly, 1963 as the crucial, pivotal year when the culture undid the rope and started to drift off in a different direction from the direction of its fundamental commitments.

[7 : 28] There was a separation that occurred 40 years ago. And it has become increasingly clear and if you've lived through this period you will know it as well as I. It has become increasingly clear that we Christians and particularly evangelical, biblical Christians have become true aliens in a culture which increasingly despises and disapproves of the things for which we stand.

Indeed, many of the faith commitments which we hold which were common in the whole of our society back then are now regarded as weird at best and perhaps dangerous at worst.

And we are accused and berated for holding on to beliefs that all of society held because they were beliefs that came from the scriptures. and now we are regarded as in a sense aliens in our own land.

I don't know if this is the experience that you have here in Scotland. I cannot read your experience into my experience in Australia. But I suspect it is part of the general experience particularly of the western world and particularly in places like the British Isles and also in Australia.

The culture in which we have now found ourselves following the 1960s is a culture which exalts individual individual rights. The individual is king.

[8 : 54] Whatever we choose the will of the individual is paramount. Whatever we choose. Morality and ethics have turned into so-called values.

In the 19th century they spoke of virtues because they knew their Bible. In the 20th century and the 21st century we speak of values because values are something that come from within us.

What is your value? What is the value of this school? What is the value of this company? What do you value rather than virtues which stand above and beyond us and to which we may aspire?

No one yet has to aspire to a value. They are the things you create for yourself. and in that contrast between virtue and value is a world of difference.

The world in which we live says that it values tolerance and so it does as long as you're not an evangelical Christian. The world in which we live says that tolerance is above all the value that matters whereas we say love is above all the value that matters.

[10 : 06] And our society our civilization 40 years ago would have said the same thing. Even those who didn't go to church would have said yes love is the chief value whereas now we hear that tolerance is the chief value a pallid sickly shadow of love.

Of course tolerance is a good thing but love is the greatest thing. Of course the danger with love is that it comes booming into your life it unites you with other people and it tampers with that beloved individual freedom which we think is the greatest thing of all.

There has become a terrible divide between what the Bible says about how we're to live our lives and what the culture around us at least in my part of the world is saying.

Now as a result this culture worships the body the material point of contact with the world the world of course is now empty of God and so the body becomes the key point of my contact with the world around me and sex is the supreme experience.

Well that may or may not be true these days a book was written recently in our part of the world which says that work is the supreme experience and we're too busy even for sex well whatever it is the fulfillment of my own personal drives of what I worship and the whole transformation that has occurred in sexual morality since 1963 I think Cullen Brown chose 63 at least if he didn't I do because of the invention of the pill 1963 the ready availability of the contraceptive pill symbolic of the huge change that's occurred as people have thought through gender roles have thought through sexual experience have thought through the whole question of marriage and the exchange of vows and promises we will not marry each other because marriage speaks of fidelity to promises of another person having some control over my life we prefer in fact to live together for some time so that my wonderful self individuality can be protected and I can choose my own way it has been an age these last 40 years of the deification of the self totally alien indeed to what the bible tells us is good for us as we've come to the end of this 40 or 50 year period evangelical christians experience verbal persecution and we are vilified and made to feel alien within our own culture we are called fanatics we are called unintellectual and we are despised for our inability to think straight we are called unloving and these things are often painful if you're trying to live for christ you find yourself unable to speak your words are censored people make sure you don't speak for christ and if you do try to speak for christ then it's interesting isn't it in the 1950s there were certain words which i will not repeat in church which you couldn't repeat anywhere in the community nowadays you can say them anywhere but there are certain things about christ and the bible that have become dangerous to say because you might be attacked and accused of certain things accused of being homophobic for example it's very interesting how censorship the censorship that used to exist against swearing and blasphemy now exists against biblical teaching furthermore the world has invaded the church so that the contest is on two fronts we are faced with a contest in which we must preach the gospel into this culture this world in which we live but unfortunately as well within the church itself there are those who have come to terms with the culture that they have become agents of the culture against biblical christianity and some of the most difficult and dangerous things that occur to us is when we find the disapproval of the world matched by the disapproval of the church of our fellow christians when we say things which make it look as though they are out of touch with the world's morality there is danger both within and without now the present crisis that afflicts the church of scotland as i say is only something that is afflicting the church all around particularly the western world it is your version of something that's occurred in many other places it is dear friends a gospel issue it is that important don't fool yourselves at its

[15 : 18] heart you see it's not about sex at its heart it is about god's authority the lordship of christ is christ lord or not is christ lord of his church or not is christ the head of this church or not and this issue to do with homosexuality in your church is of such an order that it confronts that question and forces you to ask and to answer that question for yourselves is christ the head of this church or not for it is perfectly clear in his word what his view of these activities is that is not really an issue it is perfectly clear furthermore in his word that the sort of activities of which we speak are ones which are of life and death significance this is not to be trifled with it is not a light thing it is not a marginal thing it is a fundamental thing and therefore as you go into this next few weeks this next years you as a church are confronted with an issue which you cannot put to one side for if you do try to do that you will be avoiding your responsibility for the defence and proclamation of the gospel no matter what happens

Paul says now let's see what he says let your manner of life verse 27 be worthy of the gospel of Christ let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel let your manner of life reflect the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ what's that mean well think of what he prays for them for example go back to verse 10 my prayer is that your love verse 9 your love may abound more and more with knowledge and with all discernment our churches ought to be oases of love and faith and hope you ought to be so abounding in love that you will have knowledge and all discernment for it is love which enables you to see other people the way they need to be seen it is love which gives you discernment of the will of God as you love God and please him filled with the fruit of righteousness he says that comes through Jesus

Christ to the glory and praise of God if you are to involve yourselves in a contest for the sake of the gospel the defence and proclamation of the gospel then look to yourselves do not engage in it out of mere contentiousness do not engage in it out of pride do not engage in it in any spirit of malice or ill will towards others if you are to be those who maintain and defend the gospel may you be men and women of love may this church be a church in which love abounds with all discernment and knowledge and in which righteousness dwells let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel as you involve yourselves in the defence and proclamation of the gospel in particular as the apostle goes on later in I should say in Ephesians say make sure that you speak the truth the evil one is the father of lies wherever he is you will find lies and deception and frauds and gossip if we are to engage in the defence and proclamation of the gospel we must be men and women of truth and particularly truth in our speech we must speak the truth in love as

Paul says elsewhere we must be involved we must be certain that we will not become involved in deception or lies as the evil one will then have a field day amongst us if you are going to be involved in the defence and proclamation of the gospel let your life be worthy of that gospel and the gospel is the word of God it is the truth of God then we must make sure that we ourselves speak and act in ways that are truthful be worthy of the gospel especially as the apostle goes on here so that when I come and see you or I'm absent I may hear that you are standing firm in one spirit with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel in the defence and maintenance of the gospel whether it is into this present difficulty which you have in the church of

Scotland or whether it's your main job which is speaking the gospel into this culture it is essential that you reflect the gospel in your unity now speaking for myself I'm not so much interested in church unity if it involves great diplomatic discussions that are going on between the Roman Catholic Church and the Greek Orthodox Church and so forth and so on no doubt they're important in their own way but that's not what unity is about unity begins and the most important form of unity is the unity of the congregation the unity of those who gather Sunday by Sunday in this place that is the chief form of ecumenicism if you like that is where unity really really matters and the apostle says to the Philippians that when he comes and sees them he wants to hear and to know that they are standing firm in one spirit and striving side by side for the faith of the gospel and I want to say to you dear brothers and sisters today that I wish and trust and hope that this congregation will be famous for being that united in one spirit standing side by side shoulder by shoulder not simply as a club may be united or as a rugby team may be united to play rugby but for the faith of the gospel to be united like this you have to know what the faith of the gospel is hence the importance of the expository preaching of

[22 : 07] God's word which is heard here Sunday by Sunday by Sunday so that you know what the faith of the gospel is your unity must be in the gospel not simply that you happen to live in the same locality or attend the same building or something like that your unity must be in the gospel of the Lord Jesus but your prayer must be as the apostles is in Ephesians chapter 4 that you will maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace the evil one hates it when he sees Christians united united in the unity of the gospel and if you wish to be worthy of the gospel then you must seek and long for and maintain the unity in the gospel it will work itself out very practically if you go back into chapter 1 for example he speaks 1 verse 5 your partnership in the gospel the word is fellowship your fellowship in the gospel from the first day till now partnership's a lovely translation of it though isn't it partners in the gospel and have a look at the practical way of which it worked itself out go to chapter 4 verse 14 it was kind of you to share my trouble he says 4 14 it was kind of you to share my trouble and you

Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel when I left Macedonia no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving except you only even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again not that I seek the gift but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit he says one of the most practical ways in which you can show partnership is by your gifts of money fellowship in giving is an important biblical way in which we partner with our fellow Christians I trust that you are a generous people I think believe you are a generous people I'm saying to you that your generosity is going to be called on again and again and again and I trust that you will abound with generosity in this congregation for the work of the gospel in that way in the abounding in generosity you are standing together side by side for the work of the gospel

I've said to you earlier in this interview that I hope that you're going to be generous with your minister in the present crisis he is going to have to I believe be active beyond this congregation congregation I trust that he is going to have to be active beyond this congregation but never without this congregation I trust that you are going to yield him that fellowship in the gospel which Paul so rejoiced at in the Philippian Christians what he called the partnership in the gospel so that the work of the gospel could go forward one of the things that gets in the way of such partnership in the gospel dear brothers is pride self-will lack of humility and it's unfortunately true that in our churches we often come across pride a desire to hold on to what I have to what I know a desire to keep to myself the good things an insistence that things be done my way or they're not done at all and dear brothers and sisters if we are to keep the gospel if we are to adorn the gospel with our lives be worthy of the gospel the spiritual sin of pride is going to have to be dealt with in us we are to be humble with each other we are going to have to be willing to give up cherished things for the sake of the gospel itself and the

Lord is going to have to sort us out so that we will be able to stand side by side for the sake of the gospel in the Christian rugby team there aren't too many places for prima donna wingers if I can put it like that I speak as a front row forward let the reader understand wingers who wants them excuse me what's that got to do with preaching the gospel I'll press on please notice by the way that our true unity is in Christ it is a unity of believers not even of structures yes we may have denominational unity that's a good thing it's not a bad thing but unity in Christ transcends denominational unity it's a very gracious thing indeed for you to have an archbishop here this morning thinking of the history of archbishops in Scotland and I seem to remember 1630 anyhow we won't go into that now you no doubt know those stories as well as

I do but our unity in Christ has to transcend denominationalism and that's part of the thing sometimes we have to give up in order to have the unity by which we can adorn the gospel be united and stand for Christ now there's another thing how else can we adorn the gospel read on one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel please notice what we're united in the faith of the gospel not something else and the next point not frightened in anything by your opponents I made the point last night of the meeting we had here that most people don't go to church to have fights I'm glad to say we don't want to be constantly fighting arguing quarrelling who wants to be in the church like that who wants to be in a denomination like that that's perfectly true but there comes a moment in the life of a congregation or of a denomination when we have to be fearless we have to stand for the truth and be fearless we can only do so if our confidence in God is strong that he is the sovereign

[28 : 31] God if our confidence in God is strong that his word is true it is a test preeminently of faith faith in our sovereign God whose word is true and the apostle tells us here that we're not to be frightened in anything by our opponents we struggle in the end you see not against flesh and blood and if there is contest in your church and if there are disagreement and if there are people who hold violently different points of view remember always that we contest not against flesh and blood but against the powers of the wickedness of the air it's very important in any great dispute in the churches that we pray for those who oppose us that we do not fail in our love for them even though we differ from them very strongly indeed but that we care for them too for we remember in the end the contest is not against flesh and blood they are sinners in need of

Christ as much as you are as much as I am and we must not allow bitterness malice anger to take hold of our hearts and to demonise those who are opposed to us that having been said it means that we are not frightened in anything by what they say about us many times terrible things are said in times of dispute and difficulty malicious things are said and you can if I may speak personally here I can open the newspaper in my own hometown and find things said about me that even my mother wouldn't agree with awful things have been said about me personally terrible things and many of them I have to say untrue

I tell you that simply in order for you to know that I have had that experience not in order to either boast of it or to say that I suffer particularly but I do tell you this from personal experience I've had to learn to just bring it to the Lord I've had to learn not to fight back and to let my heart be filled with malice about this I've had to say I will not be frightened by it because the Lord is in charge and he will overrule and his sovereign purposes will triumph in the end suffering is part of being Christian look what he says don't be frightened anything by your opponents this is a clear sign to them of their destruction your attitude your worthiness your gospel attitude is a clear sign to others the truth is on your side for you are living the truth of the gospel a clear sign to them of their destruction but of your salvation and that from God for you are living clearly as Christ wants you to and listen to verse 29 it has been granted to you for the sake of

Christ now you receive faith by gift we rejoice in that well here's something else you're going to be gifted with suffering it has been granted to you for the sake of Christ that you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake engaged in the same conflict you saw I had and now hear that I still have the conflict that arose from Paul who gave himself to the defence and proclamation of the gospel now dear brothers and sisters please notice that these words are addressed not to the ministers or put it this way not only to the ministers but to all Christians sometimes we think the church is a bit like a service organisation we pay the minister he's got to be here unless he's on the holidays and therefore we don't have to be here sometimes we think the minister is the church nothing could be further from the biblical truth it is fascinating how frequently the apostle speaks not to the ministers of the church but to the people of the church every one of us with great spiritual responsibilities and I trust that you are not a passenger in this church but a partner in this church

I trust that you don't think that coming oh well I'm a bit tired to go this week the minister will be there we pay him to be there is your attitude but I trust you see that this congregation of God's people is a congregation where every person within it is a partner of this gospel that if one suffers all suffers I trust that you see that all of you have to be engaged in the same conflict for the defence and proclamation of the gospel that the apostle was engaged in it is not just the minister or some sort of star Christians but it is a matter for us all well we always imagine that these are crucial days most people always say well these are days of crisis no matter what year it is and in a sense that's true there are always critical days for the gospel but there are certain critical moments and I believe you are living in one of them now in this church at stake will be the authority of

[34 : 38] God's word and consequently the fullness of the gospel the contest may not be in the area you would choose to fight it but if you do not engage where the fight is most difficult then it will be cowardly you have to engage where the fight is not where you would like it to be at stake is the authority of scripture and ultimately the uniqueness of Christ this church is a bastion of orthodox teaching always has been I think in that sense it's a light to Scotland and the world God be thanked but what is essential is that not only from this pulpit but also in your pews there will be men and women eager to take responsibility to contend for the gospel and to be united in contending for the gospel that is the calling of this church at this time may you be worthy of it

Amen