

A Shining Church in a Dark World

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[0 : 00] Good. We're going to turn now to our reading this morning, and Edward Lobb is continuing a series in Philippians. So please turn with me if you have your Bible. If you don't have a Bible with you, we have Bibles available at the back, so do feel free to go and grab one. They're at the back, and the welcome team will happily pass you a Bible. But Philippians chapter 2, we're reading this morning, and from verse 12. Philippians chapter 2, and we'll start on verse 12.

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence, but much more in my absence, 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. Do all things without grumbling or questioning, 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, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. 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. Likewise, you should all be glad and rejoice with me. I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. For I have no one like him who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. For they are, they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, and I trust in the Lord that I shortly, I myself, will come also. I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need. For he has been longing for you all, and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill.

Indeed, he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I am the more eager to send him therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men. For he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me. Amen. May God bless his word to us this morning.

Well, good morning, friends. Very good to see you all. And my greetings also to those who are listening elsewhere, Bath Street and Queen's Park, and perhaps at home as well. Well, let's turn to Philippians chapter 2 and verses 12 to 30, which is our passage for today. Philippians chapter 2, verses 12 to 30. And my title is A Shining Church in a Dark World.

[3 : 52] Well, let me start this morning with an observation about how we read the Bible. If you've been coming here to the Tron Church for some time, you'll have noticed that in our preaching, we usually work consecutively through a Bible book. Not invariably, but usually we start at chapter 1, verse 1, and we work our way through to the end of the book. It's what I've been doing with Philippians over the past few weeks, and God willing, I hope to go on to finish it in the same way.

Now, the reason why we do this is that we understand any one passage of a Bible book far better if we see it in the context of the whole book. Now, that's fairly obvious, isn't it, when you think about it.

But just think of the way that you read a 300-page novel. You start at page 1, and you read consecutively through until you get to page 300. If you were to start at page 145 and read to page 160, you would understand something of what was going on, but you'd miss a great deal. Really, you need first to read pages 1 to 144 before you read page 145. The assumption of the author is that you'll read the story from start to finish, and then you'll really understand it. But if you just read it in small random sections picked out from here or there, you'll get bits of the story, but you'll have a very inadequate picture of the whole thing. Now, it's just the same with a Bible book.

When Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians, his assumption was that the Philippian Christians would read all of it from start to finish, because it has a message that gathers force and power as the letter unfolds. So we'll understand chapter 4 much better if we've studied chapters 1, 2, and 3 first. So that's why we preach consecutively through books of the Bible. And it applies, too, to our own personal, private reading of the Bible at home. It's much better to work our way through books if we possibly can. Now, with Philippians, we're reaching more or less the halfway stage today. And before we get into our passage, chapter 2, verse 12, I'd like us to think about Paul's thinking so far, the message so far, that we'll better feel the force of this second half of chapter 2.

So the bare bones of the story so far are these. Paul's reason for writing to the Philippians is to strengthen their spines, to strengthen their resolve to live the Christian life without fear, and to preach the saving message of Christ to the citizens of Philippi. Just look at chapter 2, verse 15, and you'll see how Paul describes the world in which the Philippian church is set.

[6 : 40] He says to his readers there, you are living in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world. Now, this world was the pagan world of the Roman Empire, ruled by the Roman emperor, who exercised great power through a developed administrative system, which was backed by the formidable Roman army. Slavery, of course, was endemic in the whole system, and slaves, who were often treated brutally, provided the manpower to get everything done that needed to be done. And the Christian church, only some 30 years old at this stage, was buffeted and harassed by forces that objected to the idea that Jesus might be Lord, because the watchword throughout the empire was, Caesar is Lord, and anyone who began to say that Jesus was Lord was liable to get a punch in the ribs, or something worse. Now, the universal church of Jesus Christ is never ultimately vulnerable. Jesus himself promised that he would build his church, and that the gates of hell could not prevail against it. But a young and small church, like this one at Philippi, can be vulnerable. And that's why Paul wanted to strengthen its members.

So let's just trace through the main line of Paul's thinking as he expresses it in chapters 1 and 2. Remember, Paul is in prison in Rome. And in chapter 1, verses 19 to 26, he tells the Philippians that he doesn't know whether his prison sentence is going to end in his release or in his execution.

Is he going to live? Is he going to die? He doesn't know. But whether he's released or executed, his main concern for them, for the Philippians, is expressed in chapter 1, verse 27. So he says, only, meaning whatever happens to me, whether I live or die, make sure that your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you're standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel and not frightened in anything by your opponents. Now that's the heart of the message of Philippians. The church has opponents. They are potentially frightening. But the answer to the threat they pose is for the Philippian Christians to stick together, to be of one mind and one spirit.

chapter 1, verses 29 and 30 also tells them clearly that suffering and conflict will be involved in their united stand as Christians. But Paul is saying, that's all right. It's granted to you by God to suffer. It's all part of the package. Now the lesson for us in our generation is obvious.

We too face opponents. There are individual people who hate Christianity, who hate the very message of the Lord Jesus. And as well as individuals, there are rampant ideologies which attack and defy the Bible's teaching about God and about the nature of man. Therefore, we too need to develop and strengthen our unity and strengthen each other so that we're not frightened by the opposition, so that we don't quail and withdraw like snails into our shells. Now chapter 2, verse 1. So, so, following on from what I've just said, it is crucial, verse 2, that you develop the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. And that is only going to happen, verse 3, if you stop the rivalry and selfish ambition which I've been hearing about, and if you start to learn in humility to count each other as more significant than yourselves. And you'll learn to do this if you will follow the example of Jesus, which I'll show you in verses 5 to 8, how he emptied himself. He made himself nothing. He didn't empty himself of his deity, but of his glory. And he took on the very nature of a slave. And, verse 8, he humbled himself by becoming obedient right to the point of death, a terrible death, death on a cross.

[11 : 00] Now that is the example to follow, my beloved Philippians. Paul is saying, Jesus, our glorious, exalted Lord, humbled himself and was obedient. Obedient. Obedient to whom?

Well, to God the Father. Therefore, chapter 2, verse 12, my beloved, you too must be obedient. The obedience there in verse 12 is a reflection of the obedience in verse 8. You must be obedient.

You've always obeyed. What he means by that is you've always obeyed me because of my authority as Christ's apostle, Christ's mouthpiece. But you must keep on obeying. How? Verse 14, by avoiding all grumbling and questioning or disputatiousness. Because those attitudes, like the rivalry and selfish ambition of verse 3, they will undermine your unity as a church.

So do you see how Paul is driving a straight furrow here from chapter 1 into chapter 2? Develop your unity. Accept suffering and conflict. Don't be dismayed when they come. They're part of the package. Stop bickering. Don't be little prima donnas. Learn to look up to one another rather than looking down on each other. And then, chapter 2, verse 15, you'll be able to shine as lights in the world in the midst of this crooked and twisted generation.

Now, the lessons for us today are fairly obvious, but I'll try to draw them out as we get into the details of the passage. I want to take this passage in two sections, two very different sections, as you'll see, verses 12 to 18 first, and then verses 19 to 30. And I think we'll see that in both of these sections, Paul's aim is to continue his theme of building up the unity and strength of the church.

[12 : 52] First then, verses 12 to 18, apostolic authority commands unity. Now, in this section, Paul doesn't use phrases like side by side or of one mind and one spirit or full accord. He has used those striking phrases in chapter 1, verse 27, and chapter 2, verse 2. But he's building on them in chapter 2, verses 12 to 18, and he's drawing out the implications of unity. He's describing what unity looks like in real down-to-earth church life. What, then, is going to build up the unity of the Philippian church back then and the unity of a church like ours today? Well, let's notice four things. First, Paul presses them to be obedient to his teaching. Verse 12, therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed in the past, so now, in the present, keep obeying. And still in verse 12, it's even more important that you obey in my absence than in my presence. So what does that imply? Well, it implies that Paul's authority lies in his letters, his written words sent from hundreds of miles away, just as much as when he's actually with them in person. And for us today, it means that we learn to see Paul's letters as the word of God to be obeyed. Obedience. Now, it may take some time for younger Christians to accept this idea of obedience. Since the 1960s, we've been living in an anti-authority culture in which it has not been cool to obey a higher authority. The watchword has really been, do your own thing, man. Carve your own niche. Plow your own furrow. You're an individual, aren't you? Therefore, be indie. Paul says, however, you must obey. Now, some people might say, well, I'm happy about obeying the teaching of Jesus because he's God. He's the son of God. But with Paul, isn't he a lesser authority? Can't I be a bit picky and choosy when it comes to Paul's teaching? The answer is, no, we can't. Because the apostles, by definition, are the mouthpieces of Jesus. They speak for him. They carry his authority. Another apostle, Simon Peter, writing in his second letter, says this,

You should remember the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles. Jesus commands us through his apostles. Jesus broadcasts his commands through their words. The apostles that he chose, that he commissioned to be the teachers of the churches in every generation. So there's the first thing, obedience to Paul's teaching. Then secondly, from verses 12 and 13, Paul commands that we work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. With fear and trembling because it is a fearful thing. It's a fearsome thing for a person to be remolded and reshaped by the hand of an almighty father.

In these two verses, there's a great challenge, but there's a great reassurance. The challenge is, work out your own salvation. And that means take responsibility for becoming and behaving as the person God wants you to be. Your salvation, it's not some airy-fairy concept. It needs to be actualized, embodied in the sort of human being that you're becoming. And therefore, you must work at it.

Now, friends, that is very challenging. But then comes the great reassurance in verse 13. For it is God who works in you. He is reshaping you. He is conforming your life to his will.

Look how Paul puts it in verse 13. He is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. So God works into us, and we have to work it out. And his work in us is to change our hearts, to redirect our energies and motivations, to recalibrate our inner life so that our native self-centeredness is increasingly replaced by a heartfelt desire to take pleasure in everything that gives God pleasure.

[17 : 20] Paul is saying, in effect, learn to please him. That's one of the straplines of Paul's teaching throughout his letters. He says in 2 Corinthians, our aim is to please him. But just notice in verses 12 and 13, the repetition of this word work. It comes three times. First, the Christian's responsibility, work out your own salvation.

Now, that requires grunt work, effort. But we can grunt and make effort because secondly, God is at work in us. It's God who takes hold of the moldable material of our lives and wondrously reworks it, changing our very hearts and desires.

So that thirdly, we are able to work for and to will the things that give him pleasure. This is what it means to grow as a Christian, to grow more mature, to be changed by the Lord God.

So Paul is saying, obey my teaching, work out your own salvation. And now verse 14, reject grumbling and disputatiousness. Now, this is a very concrete down-to-earth example of what it means for us to work out our own salvation and indeed what it means to promote unity in the church.

There's a lot of Old Testament background to verse 14 and verse 15, which will help us to understand what Paul is getting at. Paul, of course, knew the Old Testament backwards.

[18 : 49] And the problem of grumbling or complaining was one of the chief things that spoiled the lives of the Israelites on their 40-year journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. Now, the reality about that great journey was that God really was caring for them during those 40 years.

He fed them with manna. He provided them with water to drink. He protected them from their enemies. The problem was they were not happy with the quality of his provision.

So they complained about things. They complained about their food, this wretched manna, they said. They complained about lack of water. They complained about Moses' leadership. So they became grumblers and murmurers.

They developed what you might call a culture of complaining. But it was really an expression of unbelief. Because they were really saying, God is not looking after us properly.

He's not much of a God. His provision for our needs is woefully inadequate. Now, when we complain about our lives, it's really just the same thing.

[19 : 55] It's really saying that God is a rotten provider. So we might say, for example, God has allowed me to have a rotten job with a rotten salary and rotten colleagues at work, especially my boss.

And my accommodation is rather poor. And my family aren't very nice to me either. And my health is rather less than I would expect a loving God to give me. We can even complain about things in church, rather than expressing huge thankfulness for everything that the church brings into our lives.

And Paul is saying to the Philippians and to us in verse 14, don't be like that. Just look at the wording in verse 14. Do all things without grumbling.

All things. Your work, your leisure, your service in the church, the part you play in the life of your own family. Don't be a grumbler. Grumbling is a mark of unbelief, of not trusting God.

If a person becomes a habitual grumbler, their influence in the church corrodes the joy and the unity of the church family. Now, what is the answer to grumbling?

[21 : 03] I think the central answer is another word that also begins with GR. And that is the word gratitude. And once we develop a culture of gratitude in our own hearts, we then begin to say, well, my job is difficult.

My salary may be a bit under par, but I'm so grateful to have a job and to have some income. And my food, my accommodation may be a bit sparse, but I'm so grateful for them in a world where many people have no home and virtually nothing to eat.

And my parents, they may be a rough pair of old rogues, but I'm very grateful for them for bringing me up and sending me to school. And my health, well, yes, it may be a bit under par, but I'm so grateful to be able to do the things that I can do.

So let me ask, is there anyone amongst us who is nursing a culture of grumbling deep down in your heart? Friend, don't do it. Sack that culture. Send it packing.

Paul is saying that it spoils your life and it harms the unity of the church. But it's not just Paul who says this to us. It's God who says, do all things without grumbling or disputatiousness.

[22 : 11] It is a key element in growing as a Christian, growing into maturity. And then Paul spells out in verse 15, what the church's life looks like when we stop grumbling.

Do all things without grumbling or disputatiousness, so 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.

Now, just if you will fix your eyes on those words, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation. Now listen to what Moses says in his great song at the end of Deuteronomy.

He's talking here about the Israelites on their journey when they fail to trust God in the wilderness. And he says this, they have dealt corruptly with God.

They are no longer his children because they are blemished. They are a crooked and twisted generation. So what Paul is doing here is taking the words of Moses in Deuteronomy chapter 32 verse 5, and he turns them around.

[23 : 21] He turns their negative use into a glorious positive, which beautifully describes the church when it's functioning well. This is the beautiful pattern to which a church like ours can aspire.

Isn't that a lovely description of the church's place in the surrounding culture?

We live in the midst of a crooked, twisted generation. We're not to hate that crooked and twisted generation. On the contrary, we're to love it, as we'll see in the next verse, verse 16.

But we're to recognize the crookedness and the twistedness of secular society, with moral values all askew, very often missing altogether. Idolatry everywhere, a determined godlessness.

People putting their fingers in their ears against the gospel, doing everything they can to suppress the truth about God. And Paul says, among whom you shine as lights in the world.

[24 : 29] Now, Jesus is the light of the world. And he says to his followers, you are the light of the world. And talk about light makes no sense unless there's a great deal of darkness about.

So if we are able to shine as lights in the world, it means that those who are stumbling about like blind men in the darkness of godless thinking will then begin to notice the church because it's shining brightly.

They'll blink with astonishment. They'll begin to say, how attractive the way of life of these people is. These people are joyful. They don't seem to complain like the rest of us.

They know how to live with joyful self-discipline and a firm sense of right and wrong. Perhaps I must look into this Christianity more. Isn't that in fact how many of us became Christians in the first place?

We noticed other people whose lives shone as lights in the world. And we wanted what they had. And by the grace of God, we received it. So there's Paul's third command to the church.

[25 : 32] Reject grumbling and disputatiousness and shine as lights in the world. And then fourth, from verse 16, hold fast to the word of life.

A better translation would be, as you hold out or hold forth the word of life. The Philippians are to hold forth the word of life to the people of Philippi.

And that phrase, the word of life, means the gospel. It's the message of life. The message of new life. Sins forgiven. A new identity as members of Christ's people.

And the promise of eternal life. And Paul is saying to the Philippians, and he says it to us, hold forth the word of life. Open your hands. Offer it freely. Don't be like a hungry man who has found a loaf of good bread, but is hiding it under his jacket so that nobody else can have a slice.

No, hold it forth. The world is starving, even if it doesn't know it's starving. The most valuable thing that the church can offer to the world is the word of life.

[26 : 39] Now, we know that churches and individual Christians have done many other good things for the world. In fact, so much which is good in the Western world has its origins in Christian endeavor and Christian hard work.

Christians have founded schools and developed educational systems, have founded hospitals and developed medicine, have campaigned, sometimes very successfully, against social injustice.

Now, these are all excellent things for Christians to do, and let's keep doing them. They express love for our neighbor. But it's interesting that Paul doesn't mention these types of endeavor at all in his letters.

His concern is that the church should hold forth the word of life. Now, why does he elevate that above everything else? Surely for this reason, because Paul knew that the day of judgment was coming.

He knew that heaven awaited some and hell awaited others. I once heard our friend Dick Lucas say this, the focus of Paul's gospel is always fundamentally eschatological.

[27 : 46] That is to say, it concerns what happens in the world to come. This life is so quickly over, isn't it? But eternity is not. Paul's concern for the people of Philippi, the pagan people of Philippi, is that they should hear the message of life, eternal life.

People's response to the word of life will determine their eternal destiny. As John puts it so powerfully, God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

You see, it's what happens beyond the end of this world and the end of this life. And those are the two alternatives, eternal perishing or eternal life. If any person listening here today has never responded to the message of life, consider the issues, consider your eternal destiny.

Everything hangs on your response to the invitation of the Lord Jesus to follow him and to trust him and to have eternal life. And Paul shows here in verses 16 to 18 how deeply he longs for the Philippians to be resolute in holding forth the word of life.

Look at verse 16. Do this so that in the day of Christ, that's the day of his return to judge the world, I may be proud that my labors over you Philippians should not prove to have been in vain.

[29 : 12] It's the day of Christ, the day of judgment that will reveal the true worth of any church's work. The work of the church is to hold forth the word of life.

And in verses 17 and 18, Paul is saying, if you hold out the word of life, my dear Philippians, to the surrounding society, I don't really care what happens to me. I may be executed in the near future, poured out like a drink offering, but it's all right.

I'll be rejoicing with you even as the executioner takes his sword out of its sheath and prepares to dispatch me. And I want you to be glad and rejoice with me.

my joy will be sustained by the knowledge that you kept your nerve and kept preaching the gospel despite the pressures of hostile opposition.

That's the challenge to us, friends, to keep our nerve and to keep preaching the gospel. So Paul is stiffening their spines and his message is designed to stiffen our spines as well.

[30 : 14] Obeying his commands because they're the commands of Jesus through his apostle, working out our salvation with fear and trembling, rejecting the grumbling and disputatiousness that will prevent us from shining as lights in a dark world and holding forth the word of life which alone can bring other people safely through the day of judgment.

Well, let's move on to our second section now, verses 19 to 30. I'll be briefer on this, but it's a most interesting little passage. I don't think there's a passage like this anywhere else in Paul's letters.

I think we could sum it up if you want a title or a strapline. We could say that it shows us how Paul is most concerned that Christians should understand each other and not misunderstand each other.

Good understanding of one another in the church builds up our unity, whereas misunderstandings can undermine our unity. Now, you'll see it's all about the comings and goings of Paul's colleagues, Timothy and Epaphroditus.

And you'll see that Paul is explaining to the Philippians why he is not sending Timothy to them right away and why he is sending Epaphroditus to them right now.

[31 : 30] See, they're both with him at the time, both Timothy and Epaphroditus. But he's sending the one and not the other. Just look at verse 19. I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon.

Then verse 23. I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, which I think means when I know the outcome of my trial, when I know whether I'm to be released or executed.

So there's Timothy with Paul in Rome while Paul is writing this letter. But although Paul is keeping Timothy with him for the time being, he's sending Epaphroditus to them right now.

Look at verse 25. I've thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus. Now almost certainly it was Epaphroditus who carried this letter, Philippians, back to Philippi.

But he has come from Philippi. Just look on to chapter 4, verse 18, if you will, 418, where Paul says, I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent.

[32 : 39] So Epaphroditus, who is himself a Philippian, a member of that church, has been sent to Paul by the church in Philippi bringing gifts to Paul with him. Perhaps things like clean clothes, maybe some money, maybe gifts of non-perishable foods like dried figs and so on.

Tangible support and encouragement. Very interesting to piece this diary together. But there's another important element in the story. Epaphroditus has become seriously ill, possibly during his long journey from Philippi to Rome.

Remember, it was over 600 miles as the crow flies. And pubs or hotels or wherever you'd stop for the night would often be contaminated, drinking water, maybe eating bad food.

Traveling was very hazardous and exhausting in those days. So becoming ill was a real possibility. So he'd reached Rome with these gifts for Paul, but he was very unwell.

But chapter 2, verse 25, suggests that he's now recovered because Paul is planning to send him back now to Philippi and he couldn't have attempted to go back there if he wasn't at least more or less fit.

[33 : 49] Now the question is, why does Paul go into all this detail about the journeys of these two men? If he had just wanted to send greetings from Timothy and Epaphroditus to the church at Philippi, surely he would have just added their greetings at the end of the letter as he does with many of his letters.

There's clearly something more going on here. So let's do a bit of sleuth work and try to understand what Paul is doing. Let's take Timothy first. Now the Philippians knew Timothy.

Timothy had been with Paul 12 years previously back in about the year 50 when Paul first went to Philippi and preached the gospel there and Lydia became a believer and the jailer and his family and so on.

Timothy was there with him. So the Philippians knew Timothy. He was Paul's right-hand man. As Paul says of him in verse 20 here, I have no one like him. So we can be sure that the Philippians loved Timothy and valued Timothy.

He'd actually been back to Philippi with Paul on subsequent occasions. And it seems that now in 62 AD they were expecting a visit from him which would have been a great boost to their morale especially with Paul in prison.

[35 : 02] So Paul in these verses is carefully explaining to them, he wants them to understand things, he's explaining to them that he, Paul, has taken the decision to retain Timothy with him for the time being.

Paul, awaiting trial, needed Timothy's support even more than the Philippians needed Timothy. So Paul was keeping him until the outcome of his trial should be known.

You see, Paul doesn't want Timothy to be criticized by the Philippians for not showing up. He doesn't want them to be saying, we were expecting Timothy, and where is he? He's let us down.

And for this reason, Paul is careful to give Timothy very high commendation. Look at verse 20. I have no one like him who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare.

And verse 22, you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father, he has served with me in the gospel. The subtext is, friends, please don't criticize Timothy.

[36 : 05] He is worth his weight in gold, as you know. Nobody is as concerned for your welfare as Timothy is, but it's my decision to keep him with me for the present. Then Epaphroditus.

Now, as with Timothy, you'll see that Paul commends him very highly. Just look at verse 25. Epaphroditus, my brother, not his sibling brother, but his brother in Christ, my brother, and fellow worker, and fellow soldier, and your messenger, the one who's brought your message to me, and minister to my need.

Paul's description of him here in verse 25 suggests that he was probably a leader in the Philippian church. But just think of Epaphroditus now carrying this letter, Philippians, back to Philippi from Rome.

You can imagine the arrival of this letter would have been a big event. The church would have been gathered together. Paul has written to us. We must listen to what he says. So there they are, all listening, and somebody stands up and reads out the letter to the gathered congregation.

There's a bit of coughing, a bit of humming and hawing at the end of it. And people say, how does Paul know about this rivalry and selfish ambition? Why is he writing to us about grumbling and disputatiousness?

[37 : 25] Epaphroditus must have sneaked on us, given us a rather bad report. Is that what you've done, Epaphroditus? Have you told Paul that we're not in great shape? Did you tell him about this awful row between Euodia and Syntyche?

Just look on to chapter 4, verse 2. How else could Paul have known about that particular problem unless Epaphroditus had told him? So Paul is wanting to protect Epaphroditus from unjust and unhealthy criticism.

Look at verse 29 here. Receive him in the Lord with all joy and honor such men. If you're tempted to dishonor him and say bad things about him, don't do it.

4, verse 30. He nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what you were unable to do for me yourselves. So these two little paragraphs, so carefully worded, are a master class in caring for good relationships between Christians.

Paul knew the human heart so well. Paul himself had been on the receiving end of unjust criticism very often during his years of hard work. And he wants to protect his valued, hard-working colleagues from unjust criticism.

[38 : 39] And he's wanting to protect the Philippian church members as well by giving them no grounds for voicing bad feeling against Timothy or Epaphroditus. So you see, these two final paragraphs of chapter 2 are also written to promote unity.

Unity and love between the church members and their senior leaders. They are written to close off possible sources of unfair criticism which would undermine the love and the joy that the church experiences.

So just look back again to chapter 1, verse 27, which is really the strapline of the whole letter. I want to hear of you that you're standing firm in one spirit with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel and not frightened in anything by your opponents.

Now friends, I rejoice personally, I rejoice daily in the level of love and unity which it seems to me exists in the Tron Church. I find it a great privilege to belong to such a united fellowship.

But we mustn't take that unity and love for granted. We're sinful men and women. We can mess things up for each other if we're not careful. So let's allow Paul to keep on training us in unity because then we can work for the gospel in Glasgow today side by side and whatever opposition comes our way we shan't be frightened by it.

[40 : 07] Well let's bow our heads and we'll pray. our wonderful Holy Trinity Father, Son and Holy Spirit three persons in one God we praise you for the perfect love joy and unity that eternally binds you together.

bind the hearts of your people together with increasing love and joy we pray so that we too can shine as lights in the world as we hold out the word of life in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation so that many more people will hear and believe and be brought to eternal life and we ask it in Jesus name Amen.

Amen. Let's go which way will they be in Manhattan and streams onward and as well in the midst of awan in deity anien there and people are in out and in the name in the ■■ are those in a are out in