

Philippians 2:12 - 30

(Matthew 5:13-16, 43-48)

Philippians 2¹² *Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,* ¹³ *for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose.* ¹⁴ *Do everything without grumbling or arguing,* ¹⁵ *so that you may become blameless and pure, ‘children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.’ Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky* ¹⁶ *as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labour in vain.* ¹⁷ *But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.* ¹⁸ *So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.* ¹⁹ *I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you.* ²⁰ *I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare.* ²¹ *For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.* ²² *But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel.* ²³ *I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me.* ²⁴ *And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.* ²⁵ *But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs.* ²⁶ *For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill.* ²⁷ *Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow.* ²⁸ *Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety.* ²⁹ *So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honour people like him,* ³⁰ *because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me.*

We seem to live in an increasingly divided world. Throughout Europe, there has been an alarming increase in nationalist and separatist movements and we certainly have not been immune from this in the UK. Over the last few years it seems that most of the home news has been taken up either by arguments with the EU or by the infighting that’s going on inside our main political parties. It is part of the human condition – think of Adam and Eve arguing after they had disobeyed God; think of your own families, however lovely they maybe, at times arguments break out. That means that tragically often churches aren’t immune either and struggle with division and arguing. In fact I’d say that all churches struggle with this from time to time. The trouble is, the more important something is to us, the more passionate we feel about something, the more likely it is that passionate argument will turn into division – and what is more important than our relationship with God.

Division was certainly a problem with the church in Philippi. In many ways it was a great church. We saw how Paul began his letter by saying: ³*I thank my God every time I remember you.* He says they are fellow ministers in the gospel and ... *I have you in my heart... God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.* And because Paul had such a love for the Philippians he was particular concerned to hear about there being arguments and the potential for division. So as you heard last week, at the beginning of chapter 2 he pleads with them *to make his joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind...* and that they should not be *looking to their own interests but each to the interests of the others.* And then he gives them the example of Jesus who so wonderfully has put our interests above his own, who *humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!*

And now Paul continues that theme **Therefore...** he says, in the light of the example of Jesus and all that he has done for us; in the light of the basis on which God’s kingdom works i.e. God exalting the humble and where the greatest is the one who is the servant of all; in the light of the love of God and the indwelling Spirit – this is how you should live:

v.14 *Do everything without grumbling or arguing,* This is no small matter: Paul tells the Philippians this is all part of *working out their salvation.* *Working out not working for their*

salvation. He is not saying you had better behave otherwise you won't be saved. No, he is saying God has saved you – now live it out. *Like being given a beautifully fertile farm. The inheritance is a gift. It's yours but you need to work it out – farm it carefully. Or c.f. marriage*

Because *salvation* is not just being rescued from death and judgement but includes all the new life that we are saved **for** as children of God's family, members of the body of Christ and citizens and ambassadors of his kingdom

Paul says do this *with fear and trembling* – Why? Because our calling as Christians is one of the most important things in our lives; we cannot take it lightly, or risk wasting our lives or ignoring what God wants us to do and how he wants us to live.

Alan Redpath – Christian, accountant for ICI, playing rugby for Northumberland. "Saved soul, wasted life"

Paul himself took this responsibility very seriously. He knew his role within God's kingdom was to be an apostle to the gentiles – not just sharing the good news of Jesus but establishing churches. V. 17 He is desperate not to have run the race or laboured in vain. He talks about being *poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service* of his protégés.

We may feel too weak-willed to work out our calling and so may well be filled with fear and trembling, but we are not called to work this out on our own *for*, as Paul says v.13 God is working in us - in our will and to enabling us to act (*Work = energeia i.e a dynamic power*) not because we deserve it – but *in order to fulfil his good purpose*. . God wants the very best for us as individuals and as a church and that's we he is working in us to change us and transform us *c.f. chapter 1 v.6 he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus*.

The interesting thing is Paul gives us no clue as to *what* we should do in order to work out our salvation, because for him the most important thing is *"it ain't what you do but the way that you do it (that's what gets results)"* And the way that we need to do it is *without grumbling or arguing*. In other words in our relationships. Both grumbling and arguing stem from pride: *grumbling – I deserve better than this; I don't see why I should have to put up with this*.

Arguing: my way is best – how dare you do it a different way. Neither grumbling nor arguing are the way of Christ who humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross – without grumbling or arguing. Neither way puts others before ourselves. Neither grumbling nor arguing serves God's church or his kingdom. So when you are tempted to grumble or argue, Paul says v.15: remember who you are: *children of God, without fault – you have been clothed in the pure spotless robe of the righteousness of Jesus*.

So act accordingly – be the *blameless and pure people*, God has made you in Christ.

Paul says this is absolutely vital if we want our message about Christ to be heard by the world because the world is not like this. It is a *warped and crooked generation*. 'i.e. the world's values are distorted *e.g. re God, re marriage, re sexual relationships, re honesty* – we see this in the way people *grumble and complain when we are the most privileged in the history of the world*

So if you find yourself tempted to grumble or argue or criticise, ask yourself *Am I acting like a child of God without fault, or is this acting like one who doesn't know Christ?* If we want people to be open to the *word of life*, they need to see the real difference that it makes to us. Paul has this beautiful image of us shining like stars against the backdrop of a dark sky. We may think that the world is going to pot, that our culture is getting darker and darker, but that means we can shine all the more brightly if we remain faithful to that humble, loving, serving, encouraging, way of Jesus.

We have 3 lovely examples in Timothy, Ephaphroditus and Paul himself:

Timothy had genuine concern for the Philippians' welfare (not a feigned concern. *What are we like over coffee?* and contrasting with most people looking out for their own interests), Paul describes Timothy as not only a fellow-servant *in the work of the gospel* but as being like a son to him. in fact, Paul says there is no one else like him i.e. he is the very best of men.

What an encouragement Timothy must have been to Paul, as he languished in prison and faced the very real prospect of a death sentence, and yet such is the love that Paul has for the Christians in Philippi, such is his concern that they should be encouraged in their faith that he genuinely hopes to be able to send Timothy his dearest companion, to the Philippians.

And then there is Epaphroditus: Timothy may have been like a son to Paul but Epaphroditus is a brother. He actually came from Philippi and had made the long trip to Ephesus or even as far as Rome (we are not certain *where* Paul was in prison at this time) in order to provide comfort and support for Paul. (*The Carters in Mexico - Gill S and Tim Harle – but 1 week not months*) Paul describes Epaphroditus as his fellow worker and fellow soldier (*soldiers often talk about the amazing closeness of army friendships where they have been through conflict, battle and critical danger together* – Paul felt this same closeness to E who had risked his life in order to help and support him – *health-wise or with the authorities*). No wonder Paul says to the Philippians *welcome him with joy and honour*. Paul shows the depth of his love for Epaphroditus when he admits that if Epaphroditus had died it would have been for Paul sorrow upon sorrow. So again, how amazing that he was willing to send this dear friend back to Philippi – why? Because of his love not just for Epaphroditus but also for the Philippians. He says, *I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad...*

So Paul, Epaphroditus and Timothy are all lovely examples of men seeking to live out their identity as *blameless and pure, children of God*. This calling is all about love, putting others before ourselves, humbling ourselves when we feel tempted to grumble and argue. It may seem an impossible ideal – indeed Paul describes it as *sacrifice and service* - but we are not doing this on our own; God is dynamically at work within us; Christ died on the cross to make this possible, and now lives in us and is at work in us by his Spirit. So let's live it out, let's live up to our calling.

