

Responding well

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[0 : 00] This morning I'm really looking at the theme of responding well because that's what Paul is writing to the church at Philippi, the church of New York, is encouraging them in the face of persecution really to respond well. So the background here is that Paul wrote this letter to the church at Philippi which is a leading city in the district of Macedonia, Roman colony, probably around about AD 61 and we believe that Paul was this time imprisoned in Rome. Paul had a great love for this church in Philippi and of course we needed his first involvement with them there. Paul and Silas visited Philippi in Acts 16, you can see the record there. And the church too had a great love for Paul and they were very supportive of Paul's ministry, prayerfully and of course financially as well. And later on in chapter 4 and verse 10 and further, he thanks them particularly for the financial gift that they sacrificially gave him to partner with him in his ministry. Now remember the Apostle Paul was very clear and independent and he never wanted to be a burden on any of the churches that he went to and that he nurtured.

And he always earned his living independently of course he was a tent maker and he would often do that and sometimes with his dear friends Aquila and Priscilla who were also tent makers. But there were times when finances were tight and there was great needs.

He needed help and this church and particularly helped him out and provided for him. Friends, there's a reminder in this for us too that it is a scriptural requirement that we are to love and we are to respect and we are to care for our pastors and ministers and our leaders.

And in 1 Thessalonians 5, 12 and 13 we read, Respect those who live among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you and esteem them very highly in love because of their work.

So here we have Paul who is especially fond of his church and the church within. Paul here had the privilege to see that his work had flourished, rather the Lord had flourished his work here in Philippi and it was a great joy and the church was thriving.

[3 : 08] However, however, however, there was persecution for this church because there was infiltration here with corrupt teaching.

And this is a pattern that Satan would follow in all churches. That's what comes in the tale of truth. And here the church were coming under persecution of false people.

So then as we pick up to chapter 1 here, verses 27 to 30, he is exhorting them now how to respond, how to conduct themselves in an obedient God honouring way.

Whatever circumstances is facing them. And he lays out for them some advice. And indeed, some advice for us as a flection church as we move forward into this new year in God's prophets.

Now, the word of God tells us in Proverbs 27, verse 1, these book of wisdom there, that we are not to boast about tomorrow, but we do not know what tomorrow brings.

[4 : 35] We do not know what's going to happen tomorrow. We are not in control of our future. We are not in control of our future. And God is sovereign in all things. And we must pass ourselves on to the Lord and all of that.

Isaiah reminds us in 55 and 89 that God's ways are not our ways. God's ways are much higher and the thoughts are much higher than others.

So let's just look then at the teaching we have here in these few verses. So firstly, Paul of course says, whatever happens.

And then, he reminded us as we look to the future, nobody knows what will happen. Friends, who could have predicted in 29th century that there would be a pandemic?

And then this COVID virus would be among us and throw everything haywire for the following two years, radically changing the daily life of man time.

[5 : 40] Remember lockdowns, remember virtual meetings and all the restrictions that we had then. And that seems to have rolled on to days of global economic collapse, poverty, strike and all that has been compounded in these present days by wars.

The ongoing war and situation in Ukraine, Russia, Gaza and stretching out through the Middle East. Nationally, so many different situations affecting our lives as a nation.

And these are exceptional conditions. But that apart, we are in a never changing world. A world that's changing all the time.

For good and for bad. And as Christians, we are continually persecuted by the pressures of the secular society in which we live.

And that pressure, that persecution, eventually finds its way, that corruption through the power of power and ultimately presents through the government legislation.

[7 : 12] And therefore we have, as we have in our present time, hate crime bill in Scotland. Abortion and assisted suicide, both sides of the border.

In fact, the assisted suicide, the Bledbetter bill has gone through its first stages in England and Wales. Gender recognition reform bill and so on.

We still have the assisted suicide bill to come before the Scottish Parliament as well.

But, you know friends, we're living in days, with the words of, I remember the late theologian Francis Schaeffer, decades ago, Schaeffer said this, these words are coming through.

He said, I believe that pluralistic secularism in the long run is a more deadly poison than straightforward persecution. As we live in these days of ideology, of woke culture, woke country culture and so forth.

[8 : 26] So this worldly secularism has for many years also been pervading many sections of the Christian church in our lands.

And not least, sadly our national church. You know, we now live in days where we accept terms such as postmodernism, even in the church, i.e. there is no absolutes.

And that's widely accepted. In fact, I remember back in 2016, you know, the new word of the year that was added to the Oxford Dictionary, that word was post-truth.

And the meaning of post-truth is the disappearance of shared objective standards for truth. Basically, anything goes.

Whatever I think is truth is truth. And that does bring into sharp focus, doesn't it? Remember John 18, 38, Christ was before Pilate.

[9 : 41] Pilate, under these words, he said, What is truth? What is truth? Of course, truth didn't matter to Pilate. He was motivated by experiencing.

And likewise today, truth does not matter to the skeptic. We have no desire of knowing it.

But, friends, we are thankful that we have the Bible, the word of truth, to inspire the inner and infallible word of God.

And by name. And in here, we read, John 14, 6. The Lord Jesus Christ, who tells us, what did he tell us?

He says, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No might come upon the Father, but by me. So, Paul then goes on to say, whatever happens, he says, conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

[10 : 52] Conduct yourself 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. Because that applies to us, each and every one of us as Christians, individually and collectively as a body.

And it does, of course, present us with immense challenges in the realities of our daily lives.

Because we must be the defenders of Christ.

In how we live out our lives. In a shadowy and distorted society. Where identity politics overcome everything.

And there is no respect for other opinions. We are now living in a society where democracy is drifting to autocracy.

[12 : 09] Where liberty and principles are drifting to anarchy. And this, of course, creates astonishing division. For everyone wants their own way.

Everybody wants to be the star of the show. They want their own agenda to prevail. And people even build their own distorted image of God.

Friends, all of that comes from Satan himself. It comes from the evil one.

So, how are we then to be image bearers of Christ?

How are we all going to be image bearers of the Lord Jesus Christ in these difficult days? Well, let me just share with you one or two practical ways.

[13:17] And by the way, this is not an exhaustive list. This afternoon you go home and you'll think of other things as well. Just one or two simple things.

Firstly, we should conduct all our affairs in a God-honoring way. Decently and honestly and fairly. And we should be generous to others. For instance, we should always bear bills on time. We should exercise consumer responsibility. What I mean by that is we should really exercise discernment of what we buy.

Was it produced by child labour? Was it produced in the sweatshop? And will for ordinance is where the fence is here. Because we can make an effort to find out.

We should stand up for social justice. We should champion the oppressed. Jesus always did that. We do not adhere to worldly politics.

[14:21] But we adhere to God's way. That's the way that we live. And these are only just a few ways that we can express our transformed image as Christians.

We are also to be critically discernment. Discernment is an important gift. And it's a reality.

And for that we rely on the Holy Spirit. You see, there are great dangers of rampant individualism. And that leads to confusion and isolation.

We can so easily, you see, by our own self-discernment, We are off on the wrong path. That can lead to disaster. I know that.

You know that. But rather, the word tells us we are to keep in tune with the Holy Spirit and the word of God.

[15:29] And also, we should continually appraise ourselves. How am I doing? Because you see, disciples are disciplined.

In that respect, it is good for us to come together with one or two trusted Christian friends.

To regularly meet together and hold each other to account for our actions. Because we are all members of the household of God.

And we are to monitor and mentor each other as we meet together. My friends, we are to live as individuals but together under Christ.

Ephesians 2, 20-20, all there, writes to us of indeed being members of the household of God.

[16:38] That we are, He is our foundation. Galatians 3, 28, that we are all one in Christ. And of course, Christ in the high priesthood prayer in John 17.

When He was, when He was before the Father, before He was with the retired goal. When He finished the work. But His great, great desire was in Christ 21.

Was that He would be as one. And He would be as one Father, as you and I are as one. Christ prayed for our unity.

And above all, it's a spiritual responsibility for us to live as Christians.

To shine for the Lord. Because, you know, people watch us. On a Sunday, there's very few, I don't know about your street, there's very few in our street, they go to church.

[17:40] But people watch you. They go to church. They say they go to church. They watch what you do. They watch your movements. The way you walk. The way you talk. How we conduct ourselves.

So therefore, we must always do that in a manner worthy of Christ. Because we are His ambassadors. Ambassadors for such a time as this.

Like a high point. Because we represent the King of the Lord. The poem is all meant to say, he says, Then, whether I come and see you, or I only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man in the faith of the God.

So, call this year, reinforcing perfectly, firstly, the accountability of the church.

We have an accountability as a church community. And individually, within that community, to stand firm.

[18:54] It's not only about the minister, the elders, the leaders. It's not only about them, but it's everybody's responsibility. We're all set, part, players.

And he emphasizes, Paul emphasizes, this togetherness of the church members.

I.e. we're to stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel. You see, of course, a wonderful example of this in the early church, in Acts 2 42-47, where we read that they devoted themselves to apocalyptic teaching, to the breaking of bread, to fellowship and to prayer. All the believers were together and that everything in common they shared. And they shared with the community out there. They were out there in the public square, making themselves known to the people.

Just like yourselves, the church pastors here in Winfra. And they were praising God. And they enjoyed the favour of the people.

[20 : 11] Because they were connecting with the people. And they were doing things together. And if anyone was in need, then they met that need. So they were living out the Christian life in the community.

And then we read all of that. And in verse 47, we read that wonderful word said, And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

That's what we pray for here, isn't it? For Winfra. That the Lord would add to our number. And this would expand here.

And he says here, note, that we are to stand firmly together. Like there's in Hebrews, in Hebrews 10, 24, 25, he says, Do not give up meeting together.

Continue to meet together. To encourage one another. To love and to good deeds. And also, we have to stand firm forces in the Holy Spirit.

[21 : 19] And the living word of God. Because, Paul reminds us in Ephraim 6, We must always remember this.

That 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. Friends, we're in spiritual warfare. Because there's an adversary out there. And he's working through his ancients.

So we must put on the full armor of God. As listed there in Ephesians 6, 10, 18. And stand firm. And above all, always remember.

Put on that final piece of the armor. Prayer. Keep on praying for all the saints. And of course, we do especially remember. Those who are continuing in the church. Many, many parts of the world. Our brothers and sisters.

[22 : 15] And then he says, verse 28. Without being trusted in any way. By those who oppose you. God. 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.

without being trusted 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 is saying be bold before your adversaries because the battle belongs to the Lord. Christ has already won through his crucifixion and through his resurrection power and opportunity for all time. We've got to realise we are on the victory side when we are in Christ. So, do not in any way, he says, be frightened by those who oppose you.

You see, Paul wants the Philippians and he wants us to have that same holy boldness in the face of opposition that he has.

[23 : 26] These spiritual enemies, they use particularly two weapons, fear and intimidation against us.

And we can all testify to that. And in our human weakness, the reality of that. Because we all come under it.

However, the more that we mature in our faith, the more we encourage one another, the more that we walk with the Spirit, the more that we are into the Word of God, then the stronger we become.

So, therefore, we can, as Paul commends us to do, really exercise that power and that authority of Christ that is within us. And that we, too, like him, as he says further on in Philippians 4, 13, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

But we can do all things through Christ that, that we are not to do all things through Christ and we, too, are not to do all things through Christ.

[24 : 48] And that we, as Christians, by being persecuted, it is a sign of our salvation. salvation. And furthermore, when these spiritual enemies fail to make us afraid, then they fail completely.

Because you see, they really have no other weapon than fear and intimidation.

And then he says in verse 29, For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him. As Christians we have been granted by grace alone, the greatest privilege than any human being, that ever have that salvation, we faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus, who I quoted already, John 14, 6, 10, I am the way, the fruit in the life, no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. Acts 4, 12, 11, I am the name under heaven given amongst men by whom we must be saved. That's our redemption.

Third, a man called Bill Delveree. Bill's name in glory. I'll look at you and you're all probably too young to remember Bill. She and I remember Bill Delveree. He was a wonderful saint.

Bill, he was a tremendous copy of grace. He grew up in the 1950s in Glasgow Gangland. He was a member of the Stippet Gang. He was a very, particularly vicious gang. So he was brought up in a very rough background. He was independent and drugs and crime and all sorts of things.

Bill was wonderfully saved in that temple mission meeting in Glasgow. And then he went on to work for Scripture Gifts Mission and that brought him to many churches where he would share his testimony and other things for Scripture Gifts Mission. And he would also speak to students.

[27 : 20] And on one occasion he was at St Andrews University speaking in the younger hall to students here at St Andrews. St Andrews is a lovely and very formal university and the sacrist would introduce him to the students who were assembled. So he came along and he said to Bill, he said, Mr.

Gumpir, remind me, what are the letters after your name? Now, we were willing to the gallery it was a wee bit perplexed with this, but he quickly responded and he said, ah, this is a thing. And I don't know if to this day the sacrists realise what really his letters stood for. Because you see, Wollingolbeer had given the sacrist his credentials that he was a sinner, saved and saved by grace. And if you're sitting here this morning, then your credentials as a Christian, your credentials are S.F.E.G. A sinner saved by grace. That's all we are. And that's wonderful. So then, a sinner saved by grace, like these

Philippian Christians, we have the privilege to suffer for our Saviour. The privilege to suffer for our Saviour. The Apostle James reminds us of James 1, 2 to 4 there, the privilege that is ours. James says, consider it to joy, my brother, whenever you face trials of many times, 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.

It's God our maturing and making us into the men and women that God wants us to be. And then, that final verse, first verse, first thirty then, Paul says, 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 grievers here who's Philippi and in Greek to us, Paul now points out that the struggles that they and we are going through are the same struggles that we saw Paul had when he was with them.

[30 : 02] And here I say, probably nothing to me is this guy Paul had, where he was beaten with rods, he was thrown into prison, into the stocks of the deepest dungeons, where he was continually harassed, had to free for his life.

And he continues to be a lot of people, and he continues to have, because he's now in prison in Rome. And here we read the word struggle, and the NIV, and the King James Version, the word conflict. And that conflict, the word in Greek is agon. Of course, from that we get to agony and agonise. So that's what we go through our suffering.

So if the Philippians and we have falls, anywhere near falls, kind of conflict, then we will also equally have Paul's kind of joy and fruit. This is instant, right all.

Because Paul could go on in the age of the church in Rome, in Rome, in Rome in 828, where he could say, All things work together for those who love the Lord. No matter what you're going through, brothers and sisters, believe you in me, nothing is ever lost in God's economy.

And there's many out there, many of the martyrs who have been pissed at heart. Anyway, let's try and throw this together, and just bring a few points of application as we wind this up.

[31 : 56] Firstly, let me draw you attention to the dangers. There is dangers. Dangers in that we can also easily create our own God.

The image that we want him to be. Yes, we can say, I believe in Jesus Christ as my personal savior.

That is what I'm saying. I don't really want to be actively involved in a church and have a commonality with other believers.

That's a danger that some folks fall into. That they can be a Christian on their own. Well, of course they can't. Because there's no thing that's a kid as a solitary Christian.

Because they're all one in Christ. And the Bible is cheered in that. And then, we can also have someone who says, Well, listen, I belong to church. And I live outwardly as a Christian.

[33 : 21] I can take all the boxes. I go to the church in the morning and the evening. I go to the midweek prayer meeting. I'm a Christian.

Ah. But do you have, do you have that radical, personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ? I'm a Christian. I'm a Christian. I'm a Christian. I'm a Christian. I'm a Christian. You see, we cannot be a free image bearer, unless we are called to be.

And unless we have that personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. so it's about a personal relationship and communal as well that we're all one in Christ that we're all as Peter puts it living stones in that social tense or as Paul gives us in the body of Christ in the anatomical sense that we're all parts of the living body and we all need each other so how then can we be image bearers individually and together as we move forward into these uncharted waters of this new year in 2025 according to the Lord's will and by image bearers I mean in the context of 1 Corinthians 15 49 where Paul says so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven so we need to be open and display our transformation our new image of God we share not only our individual testimony as a worthy child but also as a community as a community here as being one in Christ we need to share that to which for us this is the place to be able to come together how can we do it better together how can we reflect the image of God better together in our sciences well that's our ongoing challenge for 2020 fam

God has presented us with so many opportunities out there to reach people here in our community here in Winchborough individually and together we're giving 2 Corinthians 3 and 18 and we who with unveiled faces all, all reflect the Lord's glory are being transformed into his likeness with an increasing glory with power from the Lord who is the Spirit brothers and sisters I don't have the answer I don't have the answer as to how we as individuals or we as a church are going to do this but do you know what?

[36 : 32] God does and it begins in prayer we need to be on our knees and pray to the Lord for his spiritual strategy for us and remember this we are all accountable to our heavenly Father there are immense challenges for us as a church as we do serve again in our community and in our society in general but Paul reminds us in Ephesians 3 24 and we hear encouragement he says now to him who is able to be in measurely more than all we ask to imagine for the discourse is that working in us to him to be glory in the church and Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever since we serve an amazing God and an amazing God who can do amazing things here in which God as Christians we are not the authors of our own life stories the world will help us believe that that we are that we should reach for the sky that we should reach for our own personal achievements be the man the woman that we want ourselves to be but when we become new creation to Christ then we are part of God's big story he is the author of our lives we are part of his story and our earnest desire is to do his will talking about all he is a living sacrifice his story and steps both to him as is our reasonable service so that means humble service sharing the love of God with others just as simple as a couple of cold water or whatever we read so in conclusion then

I'd just like to leave you with a quotation from a book by John Caldwell called Radical Church and John says here that the church has three options this is the generic church three options number one compromise and die number two fight in the trenches and die a little worse longer or number three hold fast to truth engage the world and see what God does you see everybody needs Jesus and our God given commission is to go out there and engage them and share Jesus with them in so many available ways together we must carefully discern God's spiritual strategic vision for us here in the world so friends let us respond well giving our utmost for his and his hands and may God have all the glory the honour and the praise as men and women and boys and girls are yet saved and let me assure you

I do pray for you as a church and for the past here I pray for you if you're a church worker here today you're a preacher here too if you're a seeker here today you're just here to find out I pray for you and you will find the Lord maybe you're a sceptic maybe you're in a clinging course with God then we're delighted that you're here because we love you and we pray too that you will find the

Lord Jesus Christ Amen Let's pray Dear Lord we thank you for your word that speaks truth to our hearts and to our minds we pray that it would take root now and that it would be meaningful to us individually and collect the history we thank you Lord that the word that was brought through your mouth does not be thanks to your voice but it would accomplish that from which you sent it and the purposes for which you desire and the earth we pray that you will accomplish your purposes here today so Lord we pray that it will be your word from heaven not the word of the one who stands here but we pray that you would go with us and lead us and guide us and bless us in our going out and our coming in and be faithful in Jesus in your precious name
Amen Amen