

A Gospel Driven Lifestyle

1. Intro

- There was a story in a newspaper once about a divided church that was looking for a new pastor
- This is what the local newspaper reported
 - *"Yesterday the opposition groups both sent ministers to the pulpit*
 - *Both spoke simultaneously, each trying to shout above the other*
 - *Both called for hymns and the congregations sang two – each trying to drown out the other*
 - *Then the groups started shouting at each other*
 - *Bibles were raised in anger*
 - *The Sunday morning service turned into a bedlam*
 - *Through it all, the two preachers continued to try to outshout each other with their sermons*
 - *Eventually an elder called a policeman*
 - *Two came in and began shouting for the congregation to be quiet*
 - *They advised the 40 persons in the church to return home.*
 - *The rivals filed out still arguing*
 - *Last night one of the group called a "Let's be friends" meeting*
 - *It broke up in argument"*
- Disunity seems to be the norm these days
 - Not only in our society but also in our churches
- When we look at our society ... we see great levels of disunity
 - Disunity in the Liberal party > Tony Abbott's leadership is being questioned and challenged
 - Disunity in international affairs with fighting in places like
 - Ukraine
 - Afghanistan

- Iraq
- Jordan
- Sudan
- Disunity in families > divorce rates at record levels
- Disunity in moral values > heated debate on ethical issues such as same sex marriage, abortion, pornography,
- Disunity on national issues like treatment of asylum seekers

- Disunity seems so prevalent in our world

- When it comes to the people of God ... the Bible calls on God's people to stand as a light in that culture
 - To swim against the tide
 - To be different
- The Bible calls on God's people to be people of unity
- Their lives are to be shaped by this quality

- In our passage this morning the Apostle Paul says God's people are to display two types of unity
 - Unity in the face of external pressure
 - Unity in the face of internal pressure

2. Unity in fellowship contending for the gospel (1:27-30)

- Paul writing to church in Philippi [SLIDE]
 - Planted it some 10 years earlier
 - Healthy church > going well > partnering with Paul in the gospel over the last decade
 - Supporting Paul in prison in Rome > sending people to visit > bringing supplies
- Paul writing back to thank them and encourage them to

- Keeps standing firm in the gospel
- Keep maturing in faith
- Keep proclaiming the gospel

- He knows he's probably about to be executed
 - In prison, on death row > future uncertain ...
 - So he instructs them what to do if indeed he is executed

- So he says in v27
 - "Whatever ever happens"
 - That is, whether I live for another 20 years ... or if I die tomorrow
 - *"conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ."*

- This is what Paul wants for his readers above everything else
 - To live in such a way that reflects the gospel
 - To allow the truth of the gospel to shape and mold their life
 - That their faith would not just be a head knowledge they intellectually agree on ... but that it grips their hearts and transforms their lives in real and tangible ways

- One way that the gospel shapes people's lives is it brings about unity
- Paul wants to see the Christians in Philippi being united together in contending for the gospel
 - v27 – *"whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel"*

- The reason they need to be united together contending for the gospel comes in v28
 - It's because there's frightening opposition to the gospel there in Philippi

- Don't know the exact nature of the opposition, though we could have a good guess
- Acts 16 when Paul visited Philippi for the very first time ... not only did ppl hear the gospel and believe ... but others vehemently opposed the truth about Jesus
 - So much so that Paul and Silas were thrown in jail
- Reason there was opposition to the Paul and the gospel was because like most cities, Philippi was a pagan city full of polytheistic worship (many gods > Roman & Greek)
 - Roman colony, so emperor cult practiced there
 - Caesar was Lord > yet now these Christians are declaring Jesus is Lord
 - Treason! > Imprisonment! > Death!
- Paul says ... live according to your faith and be united together as you contend for the gospel
 - Don't be frightened of those who oppose you
 - You've got nothing to fear
 - But speak up, be united, don't stop living a life worthy of the gospel and contending for its truth
- So the temptation would be if you're a Christian in the church in Philippi in that time would be to
 - Keep quiet
 - Not declare the gospel ... so no-one would know you were a Christian
 - Not declare the gospel ... so no-one had any ammunition to make accusations against you
- Temptation would be to
 - Retreat
 - Stay silent
 - Stay within your little Christian ghetto and not venture beyond it

- To tone down the Lordship of Jesus so as not to risk undermining the so-called lordship of Caesar

- **Application**
- Sydney is not that different to Philippi
 - Christian presence ... but it's on the outer
 - On the whole our city is opposed to the gospel
 - People in Sydney have their gods, their idols ... and they don't like Christians voicing their opinions or what they believe

- Temptation is
 - To retreat > stay silent
 - Not to declare the gospel
 - Retreat to our Christian ghettos > hang out with Christians, go to school with Christians, go to church with Christians, mix with unbelievers as little as possible
 - Change the gospel so it's more palatable
 - Same sex relationships are ok, it doesn't matter
 - Hell isn't a reality it's just a metaphor
 - We all worship the same God, we just have different ways of getting there
 - Doesn't matter about sexual morality ... as long as you love the person you can do what you want

- But if we do that ... then we're allowing the culture to suppress the truth and hijack the gospel

- But when we understand the goodness and grace and mercy of God to us in the gospel ... we know it's a message that needs to be declared and made known and made public ... not just because Jesus tells us to ... but
 - Because the gospel is about the Lord Jesus

- The one who brings freedom from slavery to our idolatry we caught up in
- The gospel declares that Jesus Christ is the King of kings and Lord of lords ... and all knees will bow before him ... even the knee of lord Caesar
- The gospel declares that in Christ we can be citizens of heaven
 - not merely citizens of Philippi or Sydney
 - we can be citizens of an even greater city > an eternal city!
- It's a good news message for all who hear and believe

- So we need to be united in our faith contending for the gospel

- Whether that be declaring
 - Historicity of Jesus
 - Truth about his death and resurrection
 - Necessity of Christ to deal with our sin and bring reconciliation with God
 - Inevitability of judgment
 - Glorious hope of the new creation
- All things that people need to hear
 - Things we need to contend for
 - Because many people want to deny those truths
 - Jesus not a real man
 - Even if he was real, he's irrelevant
 - Sin is nothing to worry about
 - There is nothing after death so no need to bother about judgment, or heaven or hell
- And so the Christian church needs to be united in contending for the gospel in our culture

- But it's more than just declaring the gospel so that people know
 - We're sinners and we need saving

- But Christians need to be united in contending for the gospel in our culture ... because the gospel helps transform the culture

 - **Illustration – 50 Shades of Grey**
 - Movie 50 Shades of Grey was released this week based on the book of the same name
 - If you don't know what the plot is ... traces the relationship between a college graduate, Anastasia Steele, and a business magnate, Christian Grey
 - The story is notable for its explicit sex scenes involving bondage, discipline, dominance & submission
 - Of course it's the man in the story who's dominant, manipulative and abusive, and the woman who's submissive to that violence and abuse
 - Tragically, movies and books like this give a extremely unhelpful view of sex and relationships
 - Sexologist Patricia Weerakoon says
 - "What have we done to ourselves as a society that tying a woman up and beating her till she's bruised and bleeding is a popular thing to watch?"¹
 - A very real danger is that it teaches young men and women that this is what normal sex is about
 - That men are to be abusive and dominant
 - That women are to act like the porn star
- [Don't see it or look it up because we're talking about it – not helpful]
- But the gospel offers us something better than that
 - It gives us a model for relationships between a man and a women that is far more fulfilling

¹ <http://www.biblesociety.org.au/news/fifty-shades-grey-go-christians-sexologist>

- Rather than a model of relationship where one person abuses and dominates the other ... the gospel gives us a model for a relationship that is based on sacrificial love
- Rather than entering in a contract that specifies what sexual practices you must submit to for an agreed period of time ... the gospel speaks of a covenant where couples love and respect one another until death do us part
- Of course this model that we know as marriage is based on the wonderful model of Christ and his church
 - Where Jesus loves and sacrificially gives himself up for the church ... in the same men are to love and sacrificially give themselves up for their wife
 - It's a much better model for relationships between a man and a woman
- And so this year as we especially think about mission
 - both as we scatter to our work, neighborhoods, networks
 - and as we gather here at church
- That we must be united and contending for the gospel
 - Because not only does the gospel bring life to all who believe ...
 - It also transforms the culture by giving us something better than what its offering

3. Unity in humility looking to the interest of others (2:1-4)

- **Illustration** [SLIDE]
- Story of a division in a certain church where the rift became so big that each side took the other to court seeking to dispossess the other from church property
 - The story of course hit the newspapers and created a fair bit of interest
 - The judge wisely ruled that it was not for the court to decide on such issues but that it was a matter for the denomination to sort out

- So the dispute went before the denomination court who awarded the church property to one of the sides
- The losers withdrew and formed another church nearby
- A reporter did some digging into the dispute and found out that the denomination court had traced the dispute to its source ...
 - The trouble began when at a church dinner ... an elder had been served a smaller slice of ham than a child seated next to him!!
 - True story
- Lesson to be learnt?
 - Next time we have Pot Luck Dinner ... don't serve yourself more food than the parish councilors ... or you may just end up before Judge Judy!

- Tell that story because ...
- In 2:1-4 ... Paul knows that living a life worthy of the gospel isn't just a matter of being united in the face of external pressures ...
 - There's also the need to deal with internal pressures
 - Pressures from within the church

- In these verses Paul says that living a life worthy of the gospel means being united with **each other**
- They must be
 - Like minded
 - Having the same love
 - Being of one spirit and purpose

- For there's no way they can be united together if there's an attitude of selfish ambition and vain conceit
 - Vain-conceit literally means vain-glory
 - About seeking self-glory

- So what Paul's saying is

- It's impossible to contend for the gospel against those who oppose it ... while maintaining an attitude of selfish ambition
- It's impossible to long for the glory of the Lord Jesus while at the same time wanting our own glory

- Got to remember that the church in Philippi is a healthy church
 - Not like the Corinthian church ... full of issues and immorality
 - They're as close to a model church as you can get
- Yet ... Paul's warning them about selfish ambition and vain glory
- Why? Surely if anyone should have this unity thing sorted out ... it's the Philippians!

- So why?
 - Because it's a problem that's systemic in all of humanity
 - It's a problem of the heart
 - It's an internal problem
 - It's like a disease and we've all got it

- Now when it comes to diseases, you're never able to treat a disease unless you understand its source
 - If someone has appendicitis, you don't smash them with chemotherapy!

- Here Paul exposes the source for this lack of unity
 - Selfish ambition and vain-glory
 - Selfish ambition is the pattern
 - Vain-glory is the cause
 - Selfish ambition is the symptom
 - Vain-glory is the root

- The word for selfish ambition can also be translated = rivalry / strife / hostility

- It's the desire to fight and argue ... not because of truth or logic or moral value ...
- but because it's all about me winning and being right and being in the limelight

- And the root of our selfish ambition is vain-glory
 - This is the cause of selfish ambition
 - Because as human beings we hunger for glory
 - We want to feel important
 - We want to know we matter
 - We need to feel like we're significant

- We don't like it when we don't matter
 - What's worse than being hated?
 - Being ignored > not being noticed

- So we try to manufacture significance and importance and some form of glory for ourselves ...
 - And that manifests itself in selfish ambition

- **Illustration**

- Why do kids play up in school?
- Why do young guys work out in the gym?
- Why do young girls wear skimpy clothes?
 - To get attention! Vain-glory!
 - Better than being someone who is ignored
 - Better than being a nobody and getting lost in the crowd

- So that's the diagnosis – what's the remedy?
 - What's the thing that's going to overturn our desire for vain-glory
 - The answer is in v1

- *If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,*
- It comes from knowing Christ and our union with him by the Holy Spirit

- When we know Christ
 - Then we know of his great love for us
 - A love that was demonstrated to us by dying on the cross
- When we look at Christ and what he did on that cross ... we see Jesus came and **emptied** himself of his glory
 - He had ALL the glory ... yet by being willing to die on a cross for you and I ... he had to let go of his glory

- On that cross he was utterly ignored ... by
 - His disciples
 - Religious leaders
 - Crowd
 - And ultimately the God the Father himself
- That's why Jesus cried out on the cross
 - *"My God, my God why have you forsaken me?"*
- Jesus got the thing you and I are afraid of ... no glory
 - He took what we deserved
 - He was emptied of his glory

- Why would Christ empty himself of his glory
 - So that we would have **glory!** [SLIDE]
 - *Romans 8:30 - And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.*

- You see that!

- Jesus Christ gives up **his glory**, so that by trusting in him and his death for us ... we will have **eternal glory**
- Life forever, around the throne of God
 - Not ignored ... eternally but loved
 - Not insignificant ... but chosen by God
 - Not unimportant ... but children of God
- Isn't that amazing!
- That's true glory
 - That's far greater than any temporary glory we might obtain through self ambition
 - True glory comes when we're in Christ
- At the cross Jesus says
 - Who cares what others think of you when you know what I have done for you!
 - Why you trying to seek glory for yourself here when I have given you even greater glory
- As we understand that reality ... as we understand all that Christ has done for us ... it begins to transform the inside
 - We see how any glory that we chase after is nothing compared to the glory we have in Christ
 - And that frees us to let go vain-glory, let go of selfish ambition
 - Instead humble ourselves and as Paul says in v4
 - *Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others*
- You see what Paul is saying here
 - To live a life worthy of the gospel is not to be full of selfish ambition and vain-glory
 - You don't need to manufacture your own glory

- Christ has given you the greatest glory
- To live a life worthy of the gospel ... is not to seek after your own glory but to seek after the interests of others

- So you see ... the lifestyle driven by the gospel is one of unity
 - And if that unity is to happen there must be humility
 - Seeking the interests of others
 - Can't have unity where there's selfish ambition and vain-glory
- Paul's great concern here is that a healthy church will only survive the onslaught of external pressures but would also survive the attacks from within where *"each one looks not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others"*

- **Illustration – Second Violin**
- Conductor of an orchestra was asked [SLIDE]
 - "What is the most difficult instrument to play?"
- To which he replied
 - *"Second violin. I can find plenty of first violinists, but to find someone who can play second violin with enthusiasm – that is a problem. And if we have no second violin, we have no harmony"*

- What Paul's saying here is ...
 - Gospel driven unity will then shows itself in care for others ... looking to the interests of others

[SLIDE OFF]

- **Application**

- Great implication for the mission life of church
 - Putting aside vain-glory and selfish ambition will free us to serve here at church with real joy
 - Because it's not about getting kudos for doing something

- Not about being martyr and making yourself feel good or better than others
- It's about being united together in humility

- It will free us to serve in ways we otherwise wouldn't because we considered it too lowly
- It will free us to mingle with people who are new or we don't know ... rather than just looking after our own interests and felt needs
- It will free us to share the gospel without anxiety of being rejected because our approval, meaning, importance doesn't depend on how people respond to us ... our glory comes in Christ

4. Conclusion

- So friends ... we're called to live the gospel driven lifestyle
 - United in fellowship contending for the gospel
 - Because not only does the gospel bring life to all who believe
 - The gospel transforms life and culture for the better
 - United in humility looking to the interests of others
 - Because Christ emptied himself of his glory we have even greater glory
 - And that frees us to let go of selfish ambition and vain-glory
 - Instead be united in humility and looking out for the interests of others

PRAY