

This week, Chris Whitty the Chief Medical Officer for England, warned that by October there could be up to 50,000 new cases of the coronavirus a day, due to a sudden rise in the infection rate.

As a result, the Prime Minister has introduced new restrictions and encouraged us to follow government guidelines, not just to protect ourselves but to protect others.

You see when it comes to stopping the spread of Coronavirus, we're told that there's value in putting other people first.

Well writing to Christians in Philippi Paul says that to stop the spread of grumbling and disunity in the church, the congregation there aren't just to look out for themselves but each other.

Verse 3 says: Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also the interests of others.

You see the danger for these Christians is to think more highly of themselves than they should.

So, for example I heard about a young woman once who went to see her Vicar because of a particular issue she was really struggling with.

She said: Vicar, there's a sin in my life that I just can't control.

You see every time I'm at church, I look round at all the other women and realise that I am by far the prettiest woman in the whole congregation.

What can I do about my sin?

Well in response the vicar replied, "My dear sister, I wouldn't say it's a sin, I'd say you have a problem with your eye-sight!"

You see there's always a temptation to think more highly of ourselves than we ought too, especially when we compare ourselves to other people.

As a result, there's a tendency to put ourselves before others, that in turn can quickly lead to all sorts of problems within a church.

And so, Paul says:

Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

And so, writing to the Philippians from prison Paul not only wants to encourage the church, thank them for their partnership in the Gospel, and give them a ministry update,

He also wants to encourage them to be united in the Gospel and not to fall out with each other.

So, for example in chapter 4 we see that two women called Euodia and Syntyche, have had a bust up that's affecting the church.

He says: I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, to help these women, who have laboured side by side with me in the gospel.

Now we're not told what the tensions were between these two women, but Paul wants them to shake hands and make up because this broken relationship's affecting the church.

And so, he reminds them of God's grace and their fellowship in the gospel.

Chapter 2 verse 1 says:

"If there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, and affection and sympathy; complete my joy by being of the same mind having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind."

Or to put it another way, Paul says BECAUSE, you've received and enjoyed all these blessings from Jesus be like-minded.

In other words, agree to have the same gracious and loving attitude towards each other, that Christ has towards you

And so, he encourages these Christians to live in such unity with each other; that there's no room for pride, unkindness, or division amongst them; because being united to Christ means they're united to each other as well.

And so, Paul says there shouldn't be any room for complaining, grumbling, or falling out among Christians, because that kind of attitude is just destructive and ugly, and destroys the mission of the church.

Paul says:

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others and do nothing out of rivalry or conceit.

Well last weekend British athlete James Teagle was on course to win third place in the Santander Triathlon in Spain, when two metres from the finish line he made a mistake and went the wrong way.

Well as a result another competitor, Diego Métrida overtook him; but noticing the error Diego immediately slowed down to allow Teagle to cross the line first.

Diego Mentrída said:

When I saw that James had missed the route, I just stopped because James deserved this medal.

Well that's the kind of attitude Paul's encouraging us to have when he says Let each of you look not only to his own interests but also the interests of others.

Or to give you another example,

A conductor was once asked what the most difficult instrument to play in an orchestra was.

In response he said the second violin. I can find plenty of first violinists, but to find someone who can play second violin with enthusiasm, well that's a problem. And if we don't have a second violinists, we have no harmony. It takes more grace than I can tell you to play the second fiddle well.

Well again that's the kind of attitude Paul wants us to have.

He says are you prepared to play second fiddle to each other in for the sake of Gospel unity within the church?

Well to encourage the Philippians even further Paul says in verse 5:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Now to say that Jesus didn't count equality with God a thing to be grasped, and made himself nothing, doesn't mean he became less than God when he took on human flesh,

What it does mean is that Jesus gave up the freedom to exercise of his divine rights

So, in his book Mere Christianity C.S. Lewis writes the

“The Eternal God, who knows everything and who created the whole universe, not only became a man, but before that a baby, and before that a *foetus* inside a Woman's body.

If you want to get the hang of that, think how you would like to become a slug!”

In other words, when the eternal Son of God took on our humanity, he put others first by giving up all his status, position, and reputation to become a servant, substitute, and sacrifice in order to rescue us from sin and death.

You know in 1936 Edward the VIII gave up the throne of England because he loved Wallis Simpson.

But he didn't really lose his status or privilege because he was still a prince and a duke.

But the Lord Jesus Christ out of Love for us became nothing.

As a result, Paul says in verse 5 have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.

Or to put it another way when I'm tempted to put myself, and my own interests first, Paul puts the spotlight on the Lord Jesus who's perfect example of humility and grace is something we're told to imitate...

Dr. Steve Lawson writes:

Paul is pointing to the ultimate example of humility. No one ever humbled himself or herself more than the Lord Jesus Christ. No one ever started so high and no one ever descended so low. No one ever gave up as much as he did. On that basis, the apostle exhorts every believer to be like Christ and lower themselves into humility before God and others. If he did it, how can you and I not be willing? What right have I to refuse when the One with every right to refuse didn't?

Well then in verse 9 we're told that following his humiliation and death

God highly exalted Jesus and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the Glory of God the Father.

In other words after being raised from the dead, Jesus ascended back to heaven to be seated in the highest place of authority, honour, and power; and one day, whether we acknowledge him or not, people will bow the knee and confess him as Lord.

Now of course putting other people's interests before our own can be really hard can't it, and so we need to pray and ask the Holy Spirit to help us to be more like Christ.

Because as Jesus himself says: For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

And so, I close with this as an encouragement to become more like Jesus as we work together in unity for the gospel, Loving God, Sharing Christ, and Serving One Another.

The quote says:

The point is that no one ever truly humbles themselves before God without being exalted by God.

Whether in this life or in the life to come, true humility will never be forgotten by God. God will see it, God will note it, and God will reward it.

And so, when I'm tempted to put myself before others, Paul says have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus:

“Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourself. Not just looking to your own interests but also the interests of others.”

Because when we do God will see it, God will note it, and God will reward it.

Amen.