

Practical Christianity

by Doc Greenway

Doc Greenway's sermon emphasizes the practical aspects of Christianity, focusing on serving joyfully, living holy lives, and witnessing effectively in a challenging world.

Duration: 34:42

Scripture: Philippians 2:1-4, Philippians 2:12-16

Topics: "Practical"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher begins by emphasizing the importance of unity and love among believers. He highlights the blessings we have in Christ and how our deep experiences with the Lord should be the basis for our unity. The sermon then shifts to discussing acceptable service for God, emphasizing the qualities of spontaneity, giving without counting the cost, and simplicity. The preacher also emphasizes the importance of letting our light shine in the world and offering salvation to those in darkness. The sermon concludes with a reminder to maintain contentment and godliness in our lives.

Transcript

Philippians 2, 14-16. Just a short passage. Do all things without murmurings and disputings, that ye may be blameless and harmless to sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.

Holding forth the word of life, that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither labored in vain. I don't know why it is the Lord has directed me to respond to the word, but I'm sure he has a purpose in it. And I've just tried to be obedient to his leading and his guiding by the Spirit, and to look to him to undertake in the exposition of his word.

I think it's true to say that very often we are told by the opponents of Christianity that the Christian faith is too idealistic, is too otherworldly. It isn't related as it should be to our day and age. It isn't relevant to our situation.

It's not realistic enough. And actually nothing could be further from the truth. Because it is certain that there is no religion in the world so practical as the Christian faith, the Christian doctrine.

I believe that even if we were to take this one epistle, one to the Philippians, and make a study of it, we would soon see how practical it is in its application of truth. Even the chapter from which we have taken

this passage contains some profound revelation. As you know, in chapter 2 of Philippians you have the deepest and most challenging testimony in the Spirit to the absolute deity of Christ.

And yes, although you have this profound statement of Christ's essential deity, yet you soon discover that the theology of it is expressed in practical terms so that we cannot mistake the real drift and objective which the Spirit of God has when it comes to these wonderful truths. You know, of course, how the chapter begins with the character of Concord in the opening verses. How wonderfully the Apostle is led by the Spirit of God to show us what we possess in Christ and how it is our deepest experiences in the Lord that become the basis for our unity as those who love Him.

If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies fulfilling my joy, that it be like-minded, and so on. That's how it begins. Then this is followed by an exposition of the life of lowliness.

As God intended, it should be lived. Verses 3 and 4. Let nothing be done to strike, or obey in glory, and so on. That's practical enough, isn't it? And then when the Apostle unfolds the mind of the Master in verses 5 to 11, instead of a great doctrinal statement of argument we might have expected, what we have is the whole concept linked with a practical outworking of the purpose of God in the life of the believer.

So I say again that when you talk about a practical religion you must think in terms of what Christianity really means. It's linked with our day, it's relevant to our age. In the Bible, as we know very well, the highest ideals in theology are always being interpreted in the most practical terms possible.

This is eminently true of this Philippian letter. Some call it Paul's love letter because it contains less of censure and more of praise than any other of his writings to the Church. Notice that having traced the seven downward steps that Jesus took in his self-emptying condescension and then shown how the action of God was revealed in highly exalting him, from that point Paul links this deep truth of the Christian faith with a Christian's duty.

Verses 12 and 13. Therefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. Work out means to carry to its ultimate completion or conclusion this salvation, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

Providentially, this is the in-working of God which makes the out-working possible. Then in the passage we are looking at, verses 14 to 16, we are shown what makes the Christian's life balanced and distinctive from the standpoint of practical Christianity. The first thing which is brought to our attention is gladness in our serving, verse 14, to all things without murmurings and disputing.

Without murmurings is really without grumbling. I suppose you've heard the proverb that the excellency of the work is always measured by the gladness and contentment of the working. And this is how it should be in our serving God.

Without murmurings, without grumbling. I believe that every believer has a work to do for God that no one else can do. It's uniquely and specially a vocation given to that believer.

He is certainly saved to serve. I said this at the Bible College the other morning, and one of the students looked very puzzled and perplexed, and then he spoke up and said, excuse me, but is this all that we are saved for? I said, not really. But this is part of our life as believers, the life of service.

We are called to serve. We are chosen for a vocation. And so there is a service that we are to render to the world.

It may not always be in the limelight. It may not always seem very important in the scheme of things. But because God has asked it of us, then it should be done, first of all, I think, with sincerity.

That's important to the Lord. Sincerity in our serving Him. This surely will avoid the grumblings and the murmurings if we serve Him with sincerity.

As I said a moment ago, our service for Him, or the action that we perform, may seem to be very small and insignificant, but not in His eyes. It's important to Him. Sir Michael Coster, the great conductor, was once conducting an orchestra, and he stopped in the middle of their playing, and he said, the piccolo, the man that was playing the piccolo realized that he had a very small instrument, and probably the sound of his instrument was lost in the sound of all the music that was going on around him.

But when he ceased to play, once the conductor called out to him, and I'm sure that God knows and understands and comprehends that we don't play the piccolo too, because it's so small and insignificant what we can do for the Lord. Paul wrote to Timothy, he had told him in the first epistle, the sixth chapter and the sixth verse, Godliness with contentment is a great gain. And how true that is.

Service with contentment is great satisfaction, both to the Christian and to the Lord. When service is rendered without grumbling, in sincerity, which is the first essential in a chapter of the service, the Lord sets a value upon it, far above our own understanding. I was talking with Norma the other day about Mary bringing her box of ointments to the Lord.

There you have a case in point. It was a very difficult occasion. We were all there because Lazarus had been raised from the dead.

Then took Mary upon the ointment, thank you, she broke the box. She put the right valuation upon what she did. From her standpoint, not a little of the ointment, but the whole pound was gone.

She breaks the box. Then she pulls it upon his feet, not upon his head, but in lowly submissiveness and worship, on his feet. She handled the true conception of what worship is all about in action.

Then she wiped his feet with her head. So the blessing she pulled out upon his feet, he turned upon her own head. What is the outcome? The whole house is filled with the fragrance of the ointment.

Then Judas began to interfere. Remember what the Lord said? Let her alone against the day of my burying, that's what she said. She didn't know that.

She had no knowledge of that. But she was inspired and prompted to do something for the Lord. She did it.

And he saw in it far more than she could ever have seen. And so his commendation, it didn't do her. A simple act, yes, but it was precious in his sight.

And I think the second quality in acceptable service is spontaneity. Do all things without grumbling. Now I don't think it's possible for any person to perform an action complainingly and spontaneously at the same time.

No more than a mule can kick and pull at the same time for every one thing or the other. And so spontaneity is a quality in acceptable service. We are told and we often say the Lord loves the cheerful giver.

Whatever the area of the giving may be, whether it is money or time or strength or talent or whatever, it is done spontaneously. It's an enrichment to the person who gives. It's a blessing to others who receive and it is glory to the Lord who looks upon it.

Spontaneity. We take out the grumbling, the murmuring, the spit. Wendell Wilkie, the American statesman, once asked Franklin Roosevelt, why do you keep Harry Hopkins, that poor, frail, sickly man, always at your elbow? And Roosevelt answered him, there's an incessant stream of people always coming to me and all of them want me to do something for them or give something to them.

But Harry Hopkins isn't like that. He doesn't want a single thing from me. All he wants is to serve me.

That's why I keep him near me. What a testament. And I'm sure that this is what the Lord requires of us.

That there shall be in our service this element of spontaneity, of giving, of counting not the cost. Then his heart will surely be pleased. The third quality in acceptable service for God is simplicity.

And I think that this quality of simplicity is always present when love is the motivating force in what we do for him. You know that great classic on love, 1 Corinthians 13, verses 4 and 5, remember, we read, Love suffereth long this kind, Love envieth not, Love wanteth not itself, Is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseen, Seeketh not her own, Is not easily provoked, Or really is not provoked, Thinketh no evil. The S way translates this deeply.

Love is long forbearing, Is all kindness, Love knows not jealousy, Love does not parade her gifts, Swells not with self-conceit, She flouts not decency, She grasps not at her rights, Refuses a table-fence, Has no memory for injuries. And this sort of service that springs from this kind of love will be stamped with a hallmark of simplicity. As I said a moment ago, what we do for him may not seem very much in our sight or in the estimate of others, the estimation of others.

But in his time, it is something valid. I remember years ago in Australia there were a company of God's servants deciding upon commencing a mission among the Aborigines in the northern part of Australia. In a place called Gialop.

And there was a family in Melbourne, Mr. and Mrs. Stevens, and they had several children, young children. One day while he was praying, the Lord said to him, what are you going to do by Gialop? He said, well, he said, I don't know much about the Bible. I couldn't preach or teach.

And then the Lord reminded him, yes, but you can build. You are a handyman and you can build. So he went along to the leaders of our Gialop, if you will.

And he went with his family. And he built the houses of the necessary, the school houses of the necessary children. And there with his family he stayed for many years.

And he did this work as unto the Lord. And the Lord blessed him and blessed his family and certainly blessed the missionaries for what he was able to do. He did it spontaneously.

He did it with love. He did it with spontaneity. He did it with sincerity.

He did it without moaning, without grumbling. And this is the kind of gladness in our service for which the Lord looks. And then without disputing this, the world here is logged as online.

Without discussions, without debates, without arguments, serving God in mystery. There was a missionary in New Guinea who served God there for many years. And when he returned, a friend of his asked him several questions.

Fragile. What did you find in New Guinea when you got there? What did you preach to the people? What were the arguments of Christianity which you presented him? And his missionary friends had argued. I did not argue.

I lived before them. I saw a little child crying when I tried to comfort him. I remember one day I found a man with a broken leg, and I set that man.

Sometimes when people were in distress, I took them into my home. Then he said, at last they came to me and they asked me, why do you do these things? And I didn't argue about Christianity. Without disputing.

Without arguing. God asks you to do something for him. Don't waste time arguing with him.

You don't know how to do it. And you cannot do it. Just report to duty and ask him how he wants it done.

Without disputing. Without arguing. Let nothing be done to strive for vain glories as Paul and the Philippians in the third verse of this chapter.

But in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Or, if you want it in a literal translation, let there be no thought of righteousness, none of empty arrogance, but in the true spirit of humility still regard your fellows as superior to yourself. We are not called to argue about the truth, but to be an argument for the truth.

So without disputing, without arguing, so often the righted truth is obscured in the smoke of heated argument. God wants us to look to him and to serve him in a way that is pleasing to him. Without murmuring.

Without disputing. The second thing that is practical in this passage is holiness in our living. Verse 15.

That he may be blameless and harmless as sons of God without leaving. Practical holiness is not innocence. It is conquest.

It isn't religion with a hero. It is life with a purpose. According to Paul's description, what kind of people ought we to be? Well, as he expresses it here, that he may be blameless, this means not deserving of censure.

So deserving, no censure. It is possible to be blameless and yet not to be unblamed, of course. Jesus was blamed, although he was really blamed.

But here is a life lived out in the conscious presence of God with a conscience void of offense before God and man. We are told that time heals all things, but it never does heal a sin. Here, then, is a life in which the problem of sin would be dealt with in conviction, in contrition, in confession, where necessary, in restitution.

In reconciliation it may be, but the problem of sin or practical holiness, deserving no censure, that he may be blameless. Christian holiness is not the eradication of the sin principle. Here, then, in 1 John 1, 8, we read, if we say that we have no sin, no sin principle, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

1 John 1, 8. It's not eradication but counteraction, the counteraction of the Holy Spirit against the influence of the sin principle, that he may be blameless, deserving no censure. And then, possessing no mixture. We have the word unharmed.

This means unmixed, unadulterated where there is holiness in our living. It is not only the question of sin that has been dealt with, but the problem of self. The conflict between the flesh and the spirit has been resolved in this kind of living.

For they that are after the flesh, as Paul in Romans 8, do mind the things of the flesh. For they that are after the spirit, the things of the spirit. In verse 7 of that chapter, because the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

The Christian who lives a life of holiness has used his God-given prerogative to say yes to the Holy Spirit and to say no to the flesh. This is practical holiness. This is what Paul is contending for in Galatians 5, 16.

This I say then, walk in the Spirit and ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. And again, verse 25, if we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. I say to you, again the literal translation, order your lives by the Spirit's guidance and there will be no fear of your gutty fire and the craving to be a sensual nature.

Since it is by the power of the Spirit that we have our new life, by the guidance of the Spirit let us also order our conduct. Though mixed motives here, none at all. No clash of priorities, no confusion of prerogative.

It is clear that this kind of service, this kind of goodness, this kind of practical Christianity has dealt with the problem of sin and with the problem of self. I heard of a young Christian girl who was talking to a minister some time ago and she was trying to defend her action in going to some place of amusement but she didn't feel it was quite right. So she just tossed her head at the young woman and she said, I can take Jesus Christ with me anywhere.

He looked at her and he said, now isn't that remarkable? I thought that Jesus was the leader and that you were the follower. And the question of taking him wherever you want to take him but of following him wherever he's going to lead you. And that's so different.

This is part of the life of holiness, possessing more midst and then displaying more failure as sons of God without rebuke. For the children of God who are irreproachable. Here the leading idea is that they are displaying no failure particularly in the area of relationship.

They are seen in their character as children of their heavenly father. And so they are irreproachable when they exhibit their father's likeness. Put it this way, my father is righteous.

If I am unjust, I don't appear to be like him in the child of God. And so I am not irreproachable. My father is loving.

Do I bear his likeness if I am unloving toward him or toward his children? My father is merciful. If I am unforgiving then my conduct is not unworthy of rebuke. I am not irreproachable in his sight.

My father is truthful. How can I be a child of God without reproach if I am harboring or living a lie? So it's a question of relationship. How does John put it in 1 John 4:20? If a man say I love God and hated his brother he is a liar.

For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen. And here the word hated is a relative term because John defines it in this very verse by saying loveth not. So he who loveth not is the one who is hated.

It's not active hatred. It may not be conscious hatred. But if there is no love for your brother whom you can see then how can you love God whom you have not seen whom you cannot see? This surely is a sound argument, isn't it? So to be children of God without rebuke in an irreproachable relationship in this context is to be displaying no faith.

Then finally in this passage which is so practical there is faithfulness in our witnessing in verses 15 and 16 and the location of our witness where is it? Where do we witness? Here it is in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation. The children of God are set right in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation or in the midst of a society morally warped and spiritually perverted. The word crooked is turning away from the truth.

The word perverse is distorted, twisted a stronger word really than crooked. Because the God of this world hath blinded their eyes then the world always bears the description an evil generation. Society is not getting better and better with the passing of time as some would have us believe.

But the world as Jesus said is once in worse and worse speaking of the former life of the Ephesians Paul could say of them for he was sometimes darkness not in the dark but darkness incarnate he was sometimes darkness. You remember that Jesus uttered this indictment in John 3:19 this is the condemnation that light has come into the world and men love darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. The place in which we live is the place of deep darkness right here in the very midst of it.

God has set you and me we might do something for him in our witness and testimony. Here then is the location of our witness the function of our witness among whom he shined as lights in the world holding full the world of light. This is the function of our witness as illuminants amongst whom you shine out clearly like stars in the world's sky holding out to it the world of light.

The same Lord who said of himself I am the light of the world said of his followers didn't he? We are the light of the world we are to let our light shine not make it shine never a challenge to the world's darkness only as we maintain the vital glow in our testimony. Holding full the world of light to hold full so as to offer that's the thought behind this. So offering salvation to a lost world offering the world of light to a world in darkness.

This is the function of our testimony and the lights must not flicker it must not fade the storm unites or may even come and the ship was making for Cleveland Harbor the sky was pitch black someone ventured to say to the pilot are you sure that this is the harbor ahead of us? There's only one light shining we believe that this is Cleveland Harbor but there's only one shoreline burning because the others are the lower lights are not burning they ventured forward they pounded many lives were lost and out of this experience came the hymn of P.P. Blissell brightly beamed our father's mercy from his lighthouse ever moving to the keeping of the lights along the shore let the lower lights be burning send a gleam across the waves some poor struggling fainting human give me rescue you may say father's light is burning but the lower the other ones are out of tune let your light shine gladness in our soul holiness in our being faithfulness in our

witness this is practical Christianity live like this Paul seems to say and then he adds the word I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain neither labored in vain for so shall I exult in anticipation of the day of Messiah's coming in the thought that I have not run my race I have not run nor toil for an elusive will that's A.S. Ray's translation it's a beautiful translation well as I said at the beginning I don't know why the Lord elected me to this passage of his will but I believe that he did rather and I trust that the Holy Spirit will open to our understanding the very things that he would have us see because surely We have the same God, the same Holy Spirit, and He can help us. Bless the Lord, and may God bless His world.

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