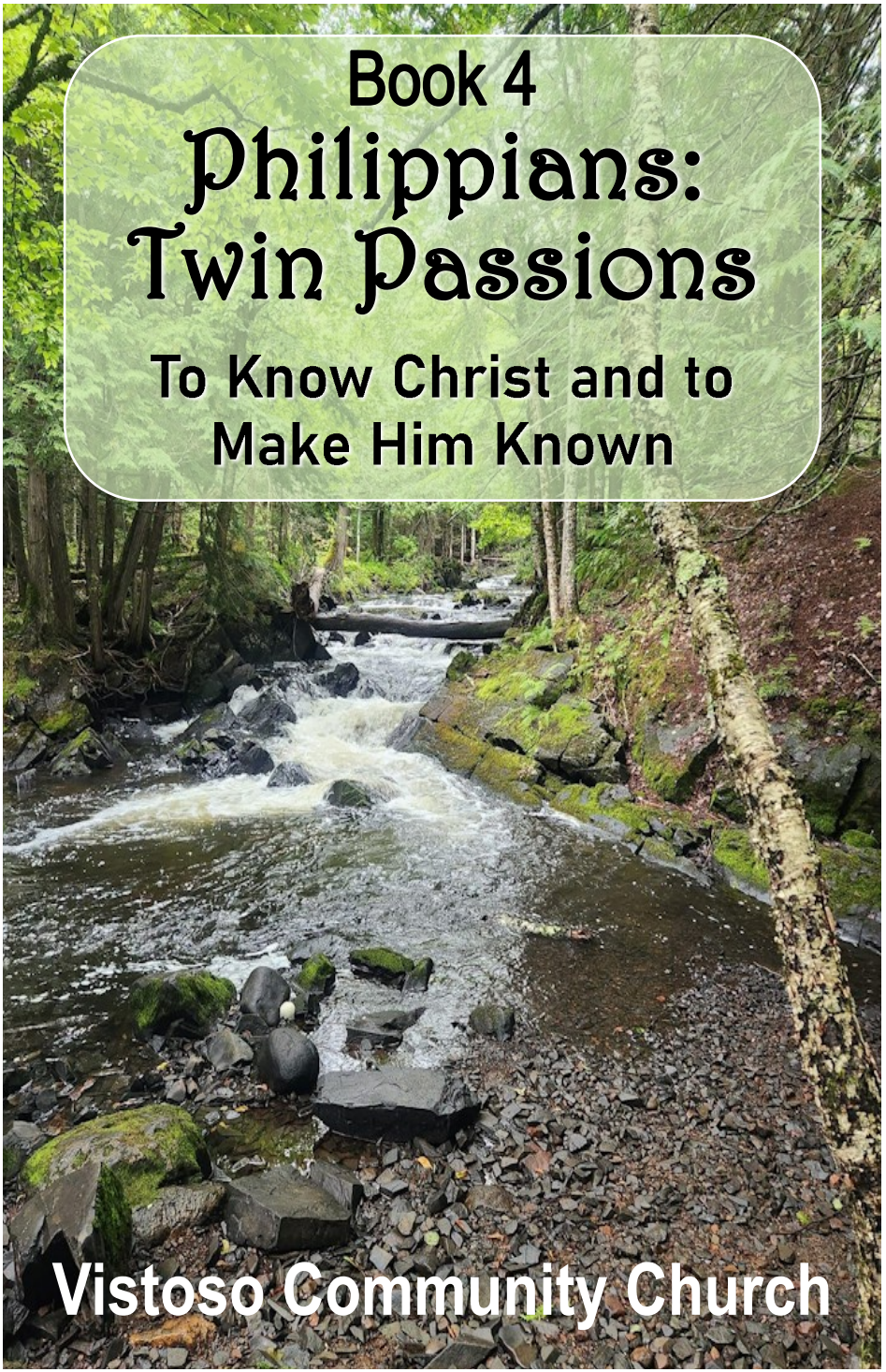
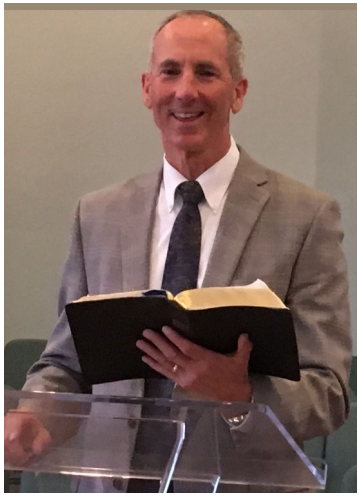

Book 4
Philippians:
Twin Passions
To Know Christ and to
Make Him Known
Vistoso Community Church

Foreword

I don't know how many times I've read through the Book of Philippians: a dozen times! Two dozen! And yet, I never cease to be amazed at what happens when I return once more to the infinite source, the Word of God, and ask,



"Lord, what do You have for us today?"

Part of the answer I received in Philippians is in these Philippians booklets, of which this is Book 4. I trust you will be blessed to the same extent as I have been!

In His grace,

Kevin Redig

All Scripture quotes have been taken from the NIV (1984 edition), the NKJV (1982 edition), and the Berean Study Bible (BSB), unless otherwise indicated.

Vistoso Community Church
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Continuing with Chapter 2

As we continue to work our way through the second chapter of Philippians, we dare not forget the mandate of Philippians 1:27. This verse acts as an umbrella over the text that covers everything down to Chapter 2, Verse 18.

A Reminder of Where We Are

So allow me to remind you of what it says:

> **Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ.** Philippians 1:27

After studying this passage extensively we developed an expanded paraphrase as follows:

> *Given the perilous nature of the times, never lose sight of your true citizenship, and concentrate on living a life that is worthy of the Good News entrusted to you by your Sovereign!*

We covered a number of ways in which we can be living a life worthy of the Gospel. Let me remind you that we do so when our thinking aligns with that of the Lord Jesus Christ! And, the Book of Philippians so clearly reveals the mind of our Savior to us:

> Jesus **… did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant … He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross … Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place …** Philippians 2:5-8



This led us to a simple, but very challenging point of application:

Have we learned to empty ourselves? By that I simply mean setting aside the independent use of our time, energy, and material resources in order to take up the Fathers calling on our lives. To do so would be to "deny self, take up our cross daily, and follow Jesus!"

This Is the *Normal* Christian Life!

That brings us to a new portion of text that provides further guidance on what it means for the *Bride of Christ* to walk worthy of its heavenly citizenship!

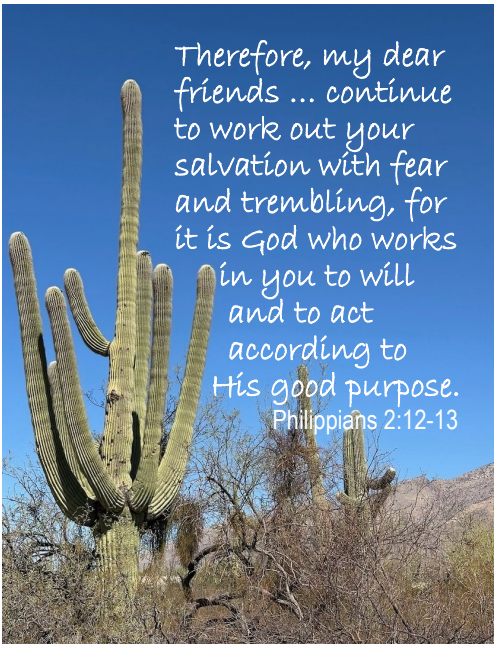
Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose.

Philippians 2:12-13

Paul begins with a word of encouragement. In essence, he is giving praise to the Philippian church where it is due: *You were obedient when I was with you, and to your credit, you have been obedient to the revealed will of God in my absence! Good work!*

Paul knows that when it comes to a spiritual walk that will be counted *worthy* by our Savior, we can never stand on our own laurels. If we desire to live a life of obedience that comes from dependent trust, then we must be ready to pass the test of both adversity and prosperity. There are times when the *world* pushes back in some form of ridicule or persecution and we need to keep trusting so that obedience results.

Then there are other times when there is a temporary absence of conflict and we have to be careful not to get distracted from ongoing devotion by the shiny baubles of this world. That is exactly what is on Paul's mind, as he provides ongoing guidance to the church in Philippi and, by inclusion in the Scriptures, to us!



A Basic Introduction to Our Text

I don't think I can overstate the significance of this passage, so we are going to work through it very carefully.

Paul's Audience

First, to whom are these two verses directed? What audience does Paul have in mind, that is, who are the *dear friends* of Verse 12? Or, going all the way back to the beginning of Paul's letter, who are *all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi …?* (Philippians 1:1) It should be clear that Paul is writing to the saved individuals that make up the church in Philippi. In fact, it may be so obvious to you that you wonder why I am even asking

the question. The answer is that there are many who teach that *working out your salvation* is part of changing one's eternal destiny—part of getting saved.

As you can see, that would be choosing the wrong audience for this passage. You see, the salvation that Paul has in mind is not one from hell to heaven, but the salvation of the time God has given us on this earth as Christians, as shown in the diagram. As we have seen, that involves a call to sacrificial service as part of our sanctification.



In summary, the guidance to *work out one's salvation with fear and trembling* is given to the believer in Jesus Christ, not to the lost. The singular call to the lost is to:

> **"... Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved ..."** Acts 16:31

The Process of Sanctification

The next issue of interpretation is to correctly understand the process of sanctification in the life of the Christian. As soon as we seek to apply it to this passage, two questions immediately come to the fore:

1. Are we working or is God working? The passage seems to imply both!
2. What exactly are we to *work out*?

These are crucial questions to get right if we are going to

walk worthy of our heavenly citizenship! Broadly speaking, there are two ways this passage has been handled theologically, and subsequently two quite different approaches to the Christian Life.

Approach #1. Philippians 2:12 and 13 establish God's part and our part. Our part is to apply ourselves to the fullest in working out our own salvation. In this approach, sanctification is the responsibility of the individual believer. God saved us from an eternity in hell, and now it is up to us to transform ourselves—and to be totally committed to doing so!

To be certain there is no confusion, I believe Approach #1 to be in error. I am certainly not against Christians applying themselves to the Christian Life, but our areas of responsibility must be very clearly understood. I feel compelled to call out the above as error because it is so commonly taught. In fact, it is taught by some very famous individuals. I would be hesitant to take a different approach if it wasn't for one thing:

> **I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature … I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out … I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner to a law of sin … What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me …**
>
> Romans 7:18-24

Do you see it? Any approach that makes sanctification my responsibility is doomed to failure! Paul certainly sought to apply himself and live a committed Christian Life and what was the result? *Wretched Man* syndrome! Naturally, God's ways are not wretched! In God's plan of salvation, our justification is a perfect work because it is

His work. As I hope to show you, in the plan of God our sanctification is possible because, once again, it is His work and not ours!

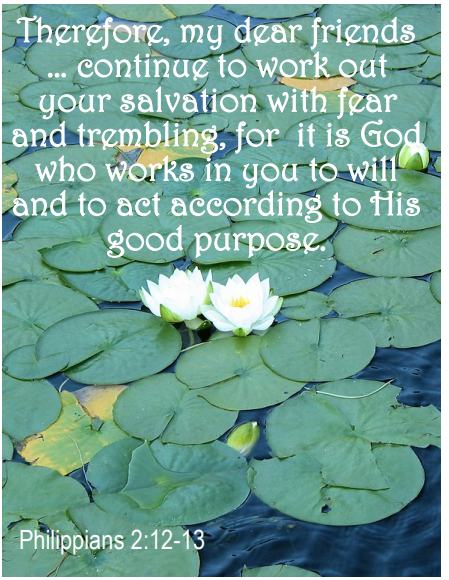
Approach #2. We come to this passage in Philippians from a place of mistrusting self, for nothing good comes from the flesh, nor can it please God. Instead, whatever this passage is teaching, it is going to require me to respond by faith and be enabled by the Holy Spirit. As I focus on abiding in Christ, I know the Spirit can produce fruit which I simply bear. I couldn't save myself from hell to heaven, and I am no more able to *save* my Christian life unto sanctified fruitfulness apart from death to self, the life of Jesus, and being enabled by His Spirit.

If you choose *Approach #1*, you have put yourself under law. It is perhaps not the Mosaic Law, but it is a rules-based approach to the Christian Life. Choosing *Approach #2* is to choose grace. It also realizes the Christian Way of Life is supernatural in nature and **not** something we can achieve from our dedication, our will-power, or our self-discipline. It is a supernatural quality of life, it requires supernatural enablement.

Our role is to grow into understanding the truths and promises of God's Word, believe them, and then trust the Spirit of God to do in our lives what only He can do. I have presented sanctification as every bit as much a work of God as is our justification. This is meant to be in stark contrast to thinking sanctification is our responsibility and a work we do. Of course, the deciding factor is what the Word of God has to say about these approaches.

For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life! Romans 5:10

This passage is found near the close of three straight chapters on our justification. Jesus' death dealt with our sins and is the basis for our being clothed with His righteousness. That's justification. Our reconciliation to God is completely dependent upon the fact that we are now righteous in His sight.



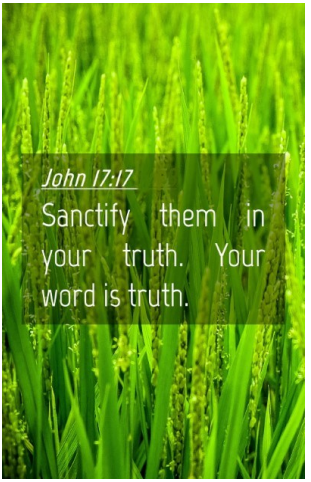
Having reached the point of being forgiven, reconciled, and justified, what comes next? How are we to live the life that follows? This passage gives a hint of the process of sanctification that is going to be developed in Romans Chapters 6-8. To be reconciled is to be saved for eternity. What comes next is to save the number of days God has given us on this earth. What is the means by which God is going to do so? *Through His life*—the life of His Son!

In keeping with Romans 6-8, we have a share in the resurrection life of Christ, as well the outpouring of His Spirit to enable that life. Sanctification is a work of God from beginning to end—as is our future glorification. We need to focus upon learning, believing, and walking by faith! Why do I think this is so important? It is essential because it determines the sum and substance of our lives. Whatever is not the *Life of Christ* being put on display in our lives is not the Christian Life. Whatever is not fruit that He produces is not works that will stand at the Bema Seat of Christ!

Back to the Text

Now, let's bring this back to our text in Philippians:

> **Therefore, my dear friends … continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose.** Philippians 2:12-13



We established that as *dear friends* and *saints*, Paul's audience is individuals who have already *saved* their eternal destiny. What's in view in this passage is *saving the days* God has given us on this earth—our progressive sanctification! The command to work out one's own salvation does give one cause to wonder if it really is our job to sanctify ourselves. But look what follows:

> **… for it is God who works in you to will and to act …**

That would make it God's work and not ours. So how do we put this together? We are going to study this very closely—nearly word for word. Before we do, let me share with you what we are going to find, so that you can begin to ponder and then see if it isn't precisely what the text is trying to communicate. Let me suggest the message of our text is this:

> *Live your Christian Life with such great care and reverence for God's ways, that you put yourself in a position so that God is at work in you both to guide your thinking and enable your actions. Then live by faith, by the Spirit, and with qualified confidence!*

Correctly Interpreting Our Text

Let's begin with some Greek language work. As a reminder, here is the text we are studying:

> **Therefore, my dear friends … continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose.** Philippians 2:12-13

- ***work out:*** This word carries the idea of bringing something to an expected outcome. In context, this is a call to be fully engaged in the process of sanctification—of setting one's life apart to the Lord.
- ***your salvation:*** Sanctification is an individual, a one-person-at-a-time, kind of thing. No one can do it for you and being part of a group does not guarantee it is happening in your own life.
- ***fear and trembling:*** Let me suggest that fear, used in a positive sense like this, is always a reference to a healthy *Fear of the Lord*. This means a recognition of who God is, a reverence for what He is like, and recognition of His capability to do all things. The word *trembling* matches well with the *Fear of the Lord,* for it describes the anxiety of one who distrusts his own abilities! When we reach the point of distrusting self and walking in the *Fear of the Lord*, God has us right where He wants us!
- ***God who works:*** The word translated *works* means to make operative or create an effect. And, just what outcome is in view? It is the good purposes of God! Again, in context, this is our sanctification. This should help greatly in clearing up any controversy

regarding who is responsible for sanctification in the life of the believer. The Christian is to *work* in the *Fear of the Lord* with a distrust of self, while knowing that God is the One who will functionally bring about the transformation of a life!

- ***for:*** Let's not overlook this little connective conjunction, which is used to explain or give cause. It makes the very simple point that once saved for eternity, we can move forward in the Christian Life because God is at work, willing to provide both content for the mind and the enablement to accomplish what He desires.

Let me liken what we have learned from this verse about living the Christian Life to a trip from Tucson to Flagstaff. As part of *working out* the trip, I might plan the route, choose the travel time, and check the tires, gas, and fluids. But, when it is time to go, what would you think if you heard me say, "We are all ready honey. Hop into the car" and then observed me start pushing the car down the street? What are my chances of making it to Flagstaff?

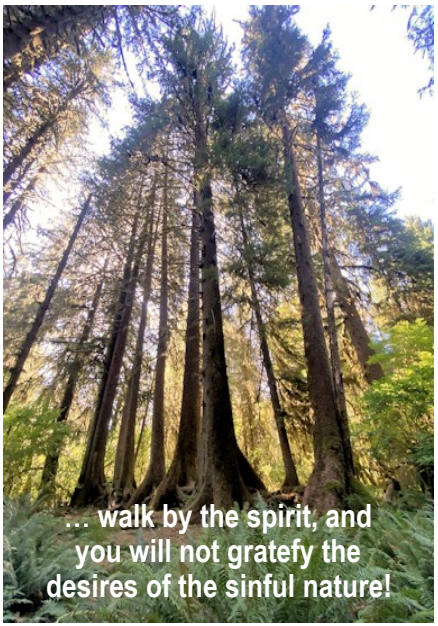
I can tell you this: You and I have no more chance of sanctifying ourselves than I do of pushing my car all the way to Flagstaff. As I push the car down the street, in very short order I will be saying to myself, "*What a wretched man I am!*"

If you were watching, what advice might you give me? How about something like, "*Why don't you try getting into the car and starting the engine. If you will put it in gear and step on the gas, you can be on your way*." I trust you have grasped the point: *Far too many Christians spend time pushing a car with a full tank of gas—because they have been wrongly taught sanctification is their job!*

As you can see in our text, the *work* we are to do is enabled by God. He is the one who is going to bring His plans to fruition in our lives by both guiding our thinking and enabling our doing! The specific means of how the *Spirit of Christ* enables the *Life of Christ* in the Christian is developed elsewhere in Scripture. But the truth that God is the prime mover in accomplishing His purposes in our lives is stated quite clearly right here in the Book of Philippians!

Making Application

Let's begin by qualifying our understanding: Is God at work guiding our thinking and enabling our actions under all conditions? Consider the three passages below:



Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual, but as carnal … there is jealousy and quarreling among you …
I Corinthians 3:1-3

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God with whom you were sealed.
Ephesians 4:30

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature … For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit …
Galatians 5:16-17

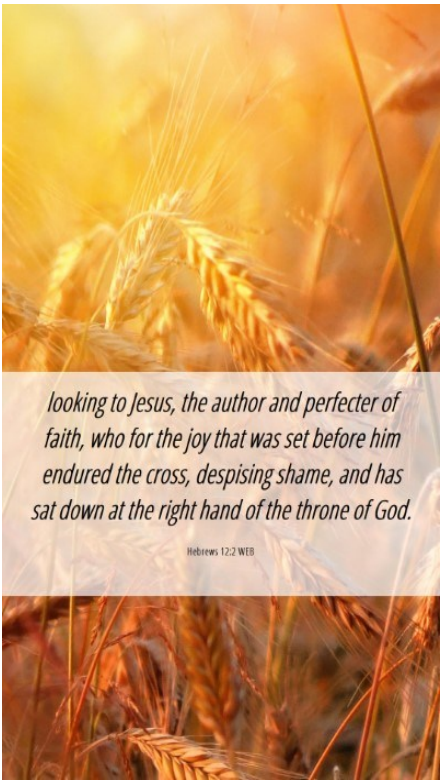
What I am asking is this: Should we expect God to be at work, to *will and to act*, in the life of the carnal Christian,

the Christian who is grieving the Spirit, or the Christian who is walking by the desires of the sinful nature? Of course not! All three conditions short-circuit the process of sanctification in the life of the believer. At such a point, the Spirit's ministry is limited to bringing about a conviction of sin that leads to repentance and confession—often through divine discipline. God's discipline has a role to play, but it is not how we accomplish *God's good purposes* in our lives.

The World Can Hinder God's Plan

As those with a heavenly citizenship, we must also realize there is much in this world that can ***hinder*** what God is desirous to do!

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes upon Jesus, the author and perfector of our faith …
Hebrews 12:1-2



Aside from sin and its consequences, there is much in this world that can hinder the working of God in our lives. These are things that are perhaps not sinful in and of themselves, but that get in the

way of our time in the Word, our time spent in prayer, and interfere with our thought lives. We need to *throw off* such things, and keep our eyes steadfastly fixed upon the Lord Jesus. At least we must do so, if we want to have the Lord guiding our thoughts and enabling our actions!

So, I bring you back to a point I made earlier—let me again share my understanding of our text:

> *Live your Christian Life with such great care and reverence for God's ways, that you have put yourself in a position so that God is at work in you both to guide your thinking and enable your actions—and then live by faith, by the Spirit, and with qualified confidence.*

As you can see, such a life is not guaranteed, we must work on it. In fact, we are commanded to do so! This does not mean that we are taking on the responsibility to sanctify ourselves. Rather, our focus is upon putting ourselves in such a spiritual condition that God is fully able to do what He is so very desirous of doing—conforming us to the image and likeness of His Son!

Putting Ourselves in Position

Let me answer this important question: *How do we put ourselves in a position so that God is at work to will and to act—to guide our thoughts and enable our actions*?

Let me suggest the following partial list as a place to start:

- We come to God's Word as sufficient to guide and as the object of our faith. (II Timothy 3:16-17)
- We rest in the *Cross of Christ* as sufficient to break the power of the sin nature. (Romans 6:6-7,11)

- We rest in the *Life of Christ* as the replacement for who we were in Adam. (Romans 6:11,13)
- We walk by the *Spirit of Christ* as the means to separate us from the misdeeds of the flesh and produce fruit that is acceptable to our heavenly Father. (Galatians 2:20, Romans 8:11-12)

In short, we *Abide in Christ!*

For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. … II Corinthians 1:20

If we are implementing this list in our lives, we should be able to live with *qualified confidence*. What do I mean by that? Moving forward in the Christian Life with a qualified confidence is part of both applying the concept of *fear and trembling*, and rejecting the claim that trusting God to guide and enable is somehow a passive life.

The Christian Life, lived in accordance with God's Word, is a very active life of thinking and trusting. It allows me to live out my days following a pattern like this:

- I believe God will guide and enable.
- I've removed hindrances from my life and put myself in a position of *eyes upon Jesus* so that I trust His leading and enablement to guide my thinking and my doing so that, as I am led, I go.
- If I am called to a specific task—I do it!

At this point I can't help but think of Martin Luther who said, *I have so much to do today, I am going to spend an extra hour in prayer!* That's an individual who realizes the importance of putting himself in a position whereby God was certain to be at work. Once we have done so, we can move forward with a *qualified confidence* that God

will do all that He has promised. Why the adjective *qualified?* Because I must remember to distrust myself, so that I do not take upon myself what only God can do!

Two Examples

Allow me to give you two examples of what I am talking about from the life of David. First, the Scriptures tell us that David was *a man after God's own heart*. (I Samuel 3:14) Let me suggest that to be a man *after God's own heart* is directly related to *working out our salvation with fear and trembling*.



Was that the case when David charged Goliath?

> David said: **"All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves, for the battle is the Lord's..." ... David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him.** I Samuel 17:47-48

Let me suggest that David was a man after God's heart because He trusted the Lord to win the battle. He put himself in a position such that God was able to lead him to attack and enable him to achieve a great victory.

In contrast, how was David doing in *working out his salvation* when he gave the order to:

> **... Go throughout the tribes of Israel from Dan to Beersheba and enroll the fighting men, so that I may know how many there are.** II Samuel 24:2

The answer is quite clear, given God's response:

> **This command was also evil in the sight of God; so He punished Israel.** I Chronicles 21:7

It is clear that David had removed himself from a condition where God was at work guiding his thinking. It is quite simple to explain: David was no longer looking at things from the perspective of the *Fear of the Lord* or discounting his or his soldiers ability. Instead, he was looking to take comfort in the size of his army rather than the power of his God! As a result, 70,000 Israelites died for David's sin.



Do you see that when we move forward, we must do so with *qualified confidence?* It is very easy to move away from a position where God is guiding our thoughts and enabling our actions. All we have to do is get tangled up in worldly thinking or our own plans and purposes.

A Final Piece of Evidence

One final piece of evidence to make clear who actually accomplishes the *work* of salvation. Consider the following excerpt from Romans 6:13.

> **… offer yourself to God … and offer the parts of your body to Him as instruments of righteousness.**
> Romans 6:13

The word translated *offer* means to put yourself at someone else's disposal—under orders to him. And, it is given

in the form of a command. This is clearly something we are to do, but do we make ourselves instruments of righteousness?

Think it through carefully when I give you the entire verse.

> **… offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to Him as instruments of righteousness.**
>
> Romans 6:13

Who identified us with the death and resurrection of Christ? It is a work that solely belongs to God. As believers, whose life are we to understand that we now have, and subsequently *put under orders* to God? It is the very life of Christ! Again it is something that God has provided.

Our role is to choose to put what God has provided, under orders to Him—by faith. The enabling power of the Holy Spirit will do the rest!

To Sum Up …

Why have I cautioned you quite strongly on wrongly thinking that our sanctification is either guaranteed, or something we accomplish ourselves? Three reasons:

- Because it takes your focus off of the perfect provision of God, and puts it on yourself—where it never belongs!
- Because it makes you likely to condemn a brother or sister in spiritual need, when what they actually need to hear from you is the truth about how to *work out their salvation*.

- Because it is an egregious assault on the plan of God as laid out in His Word.

As children of God who seek to love and honor our Savior:

- We do not seek a victory that has already been won.
- We do not try to transform a self that has been crucified.
- We do not try to provide a strength that is beyond us.

Spiritual victory in this life is found in only one place—the Lord Jesus Christ. God's plan calls for us to triumph in Him!

> **But thanks be to God, who always leads us triumphantly as captives in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Him.**
>
> II Corinthians 2:14

If you were to ask me how I seek to *work out my salvation,* I would tell you I do so with fear and trembling and by seeking to put myself in such a position that God is at work in my life to guide and to enable. I do that by: Reckoning myself dead to the flesh, walking in the newness of life that He has provided, that I might follow in the train of a triumph already won in communion with the Spirit He has sent.

In this way, I am always trusting my Savior to do what I cannot—to His glory and my great blessing. Whatever is not the life of Christ is not the Christian Life! Whatever is not fruit that He produces is works that will be burnt to ash at the Bema Seat of Christ!

That's why all of this matters! And, all God's people said, "Amen!"

Transitioning from the Individual to the Church

As we have learned, the individual Christian is commanded to *work out his or her salvation* by learning to:

> *Live your Christian Life with such great care and reverence for God's ways, that you have put yourself in a position where God is at work in you both to guide your thinking and enable your actions. Then you are to live by faith, by the Spirit, and with qualified confidence.*

Now, what do you suppose it would look like if an entire church fellowship responded to this call? That is the next subject as we continue to learn what it means to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of our heavenly citizenship. Here is our text:

> **Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.** Philippians 2:14-16



Initial Observations

To begin, I would like to make a number of initial observations from this passage and then develop each observation more extensively.

1. **Take note of the remarkably practical example of <u>progressive sanctification</u> within this passage.**

   As we seek to set our lives apart to the Lord, there are some things that need to go, we need to become certain of other things, and then there are things we need to be doing!

2. **After the <u>intensely personal guidance</u> of the scripture, we now move <u>to corporate guidance</u>.**

   We have shifted from the individual to the Church! This is meant to be the testimony of each fellowship of believers! This would be a great place for each local church to assess their witness to the world and to the area where they are called to minister.

3. **<u>The Church should be under no</u> illusions regarding the nature and character of its field of labor—it is *crooked and perverse*!**

   This is very helpful in reminding us that the world is not going to be our friend, and we are *swimming up-stream* as an ambassador for Christ in the Devil's world.

4. **The short phrase: *shine as lights in the world, holding fast* (forth) *the word of life* that presents <u>an interpretive challenge</u>.**

   Are we to *hold fast* to the word of life or *hold it forth* to the world around us? The Greek word has both meanings, and so we will consider this more closely.

5. **<u>On a personal level</u>, I want us to consider the distinctions between laboring *in vain,* laboring *faithfully,* and failing to labor at all!**

   These distinctions are important. They will help us to keep our focus on what it means to be faithful, rather than trying to force certain outcomes.

As you can see, we have our work cut out for us. Let's go back now and develop more fully each of these items that have come directly out of our text.

1. Progressive Sanctification

The word sanctify (holy is a synonym) means to be *set apart* for a special purpose or function.

> **For this is the will of God, your <u>sanctification</u>: … For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in <u>holiness</u>.**
> I Thessalonians 4:3,7



As you can see, this is undeniably one aspect of God's will for the believer—both individually and corporately. Please note that the underlined terms are the same word in the Greek showing their synonymous nature.

Sanctification—Two Aspects. Here is an important distinction for every believer in Christ to understand:

- One aspect of our sanctification is already complete—and that is the result of our position in Christ.

It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

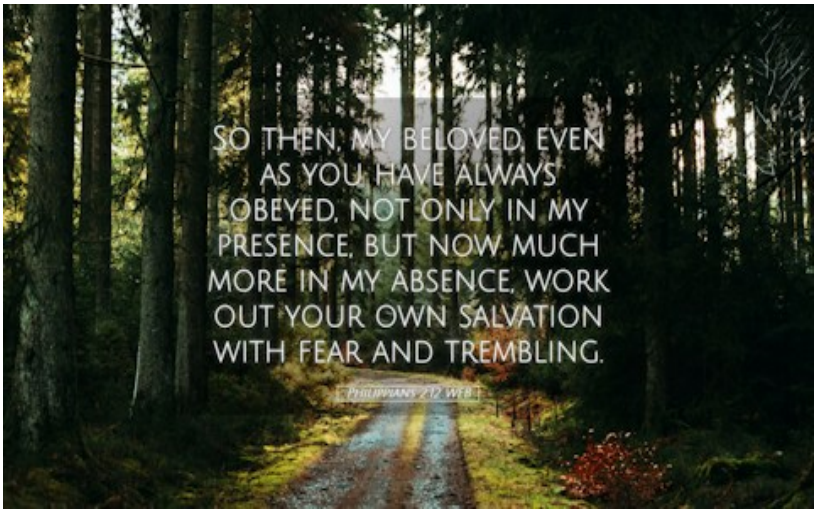
I Corinthians 1:30

We are holy in God's sight solely because we are in Christ. He is holy and so we are said to be holy. This is meant to bring stability to our lives, and also reveal God's ultimate goal for each of us.

- On the other hand, we are called to undergo a process of transformation!

For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. Hebrews 10:14

Given that we are holy in Christ, it is God's intent that we become, in our walk, what we already are in our position. So, we are meant to be in the process of *being sanctified!* This is also most certainly meant by the passage we just covered:



... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling ... Philippians 2:12

- To further clarify our understanding, we should be able to see both aspects of our sanctification in Paul's letter to the church at Corinth.

  To the church of God in Corinth, to those <u>sanctified</u> in Christ Jesus and called to be <u>holy</u> ... I Corinthians 1:2

  This passage says they are sanctified, and yet they are called to be sanctified (holy). How can both be true? We should be able to explain this: They are positionally sanctified in Christ as the result of having put their faith in Him, but there is much that needs to be straightened out in their Christian walk. In fact, in I Corinthians, Chapter 3, Paul says they are a group of *fleshly* Christians and the entire purpose of his letter is to promote progress in their ongoing sanctification.

Working Definition. At this point a working definition of what it means to be progressively sanctified should prove helpful:

(Progressive) Sanctification is the ongoing process of setting our lives apart unto God in terms of purity, priority, exclusivity and service—saints by virtue of <u>both</u> position and walk!

As believers in Jesus Christ, our lives are to be set apart from sin, set apart first and foremost to the Lord as exclusively His, and set apart for whatever service to which He might call. We are to be saints, literally sanctified ones, such that our walk is in agreement with the position that God has provided in Christ.

Allow me to remind you of the means of sanctification. Consider this a partial list:

- Walking in the Fear of the Lord
- Abiding in Christ
- Reckoning ourselves dead to sin and alive unto God (in Christ)
- Walking by faith
- Walking by the Spirit

I would like to point out that these are the very subjects we have been learning over the course of the past ten or more years. I mention this, because this is the process of spiritual growth: Accumulating one truth after another from the Word of God, putting them all together into a coherent whole, and then refreshing our memories over and over again so that we don't lose what we have gained!

Before we continue, allow me to suggest this point of application:

> *Progressive Sanctification in the life of the believer is neither accidental nor automatic! Because it is absolutely God's intent for His children, it is a process in which we must choose to daily engage over the course of our entire lives as Christians. If we are not progressing, we are going backwards!*

Sanctification Process. When we speak of the ongoing process of sanctification there are several questions that we need to answer:

- What needs to go? Everything that is part of the flesh and everything that is associated with this world.

Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. … let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God. II Corinthians 6:17-7:1

Take note, *perfecting holiness* is simply another way of saying *progressive sanctification!*

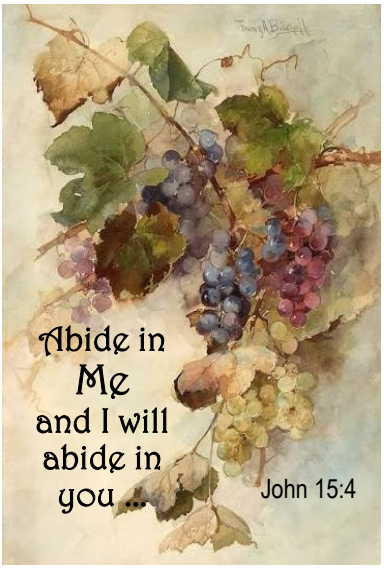
- What kinds of things do we need to become to be:

  … conformed to the likeness of His Son …
  Romans 8:29

- What kinds of things do we need to do?

  … work out our salvation with fear and trembling,
  Philippians 2:12

  Abide in Me and I will abide in you. … John 15:4



- When it comes to our text in Philippians 2:14-16, is it talking about our position in Christ or our walk before a watching world?

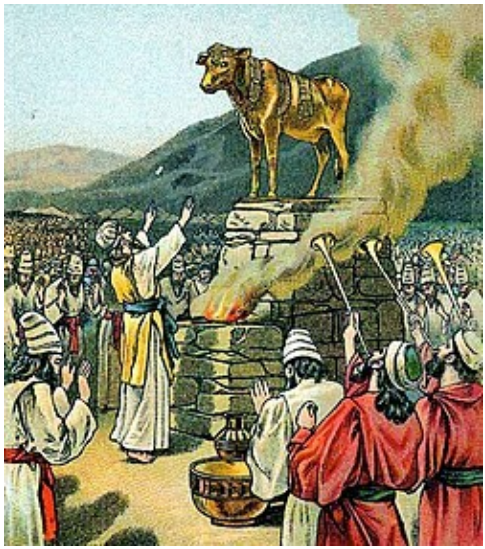
  Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain. Philippians 2:14-16

Among others, to *shine as lights in the world* is a pretty

clear reference to our corporate walk. In fact the above Scripture is all about our walk! So then, we need to explore these questions more thoroughly.

What needs to go? As a church body, we need to avoid behind the scenes complaining and murmurings! We must also rid ourselves of disputing, which occurs when a member of the fellowship seeks to recruit a following to his or her point of view.

If you want an illustration of what this looks like in practice, go back to the Book of Exodus. There was constant grumbling and complaining directed against Moses and God. This type of behavior is a complete failure of our heavenly citizenship and a *testimony killer* when it comes to our witness to a watching world.



Two things that will really help us get over this kind of behavior: the *Fear of the Lord* and having the *same mind as Jesus*! If we have a healthy view of who our God is and His capacity to reach out and discipline, it will cause murmurings and grumblings to die on our lips! Do we see Jesus even once murmur or complain? To share His mind is to share in His humble obedience to the will of God!

What do we need to become? We need to become *blameless* in God's sight; *harmless,* which really means to be innocent in terms of all of perversions of this world. We need to keep ourselves completely apart from evil and *without fault!* This means that, should our lives be held up to the light of God's scrutiny, there wouldn't be a single crack or blemish observed.

As you can see, this is quite a challenge for any local church. But, take note, if we can pass God's scrutiny, this will be the result of the world's scrutiny:

> **Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us.**
>
> I Peter 2:12

Here is something I find very convicting: Even the lost agree that hypocrisy is a sin! I pray to God they would never find it in our fellowship. If they want to find fault with us, let it be that we have rejected this world in our devotion to the Lord Jesus!

What do we need to be doing? We need to shine as bright lights by putting on display the *Life of Christ*! We are to both hold fast to the One Message that has the power to save and boldly share it with others. And, the One Message is the Gospel of Christ, a message centered in who He is and what He accomplished at the cross. Make no mistake about it, the quality of the life we live draws attention to our message!

> **For we are to God the sweet aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.**
>
> II Corinthians 2:15

2. From the Intensely Personal— to the Corporate!

I want to continue to keep this same text before you. Review it again and see if you can determine if Paul has the individual or a church fellowship in mind?

> **Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.** Philippians 2:14-16

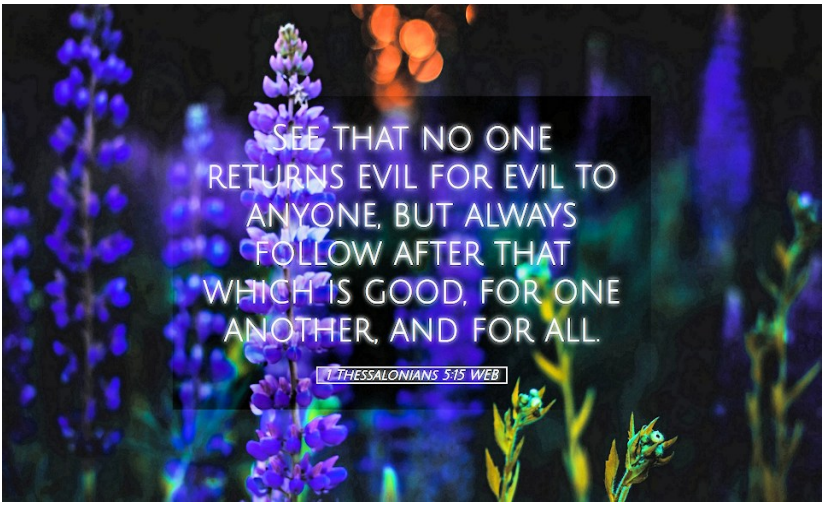
In the Greek language, every use of the word *you* is plural. This is no longer guidance to the individual, but to the entire fellowship as a whole. Let me go a step further and state that these instructions cannot be accomplished by one spiritually mature individual, who is blameless and neither murmuring or complaining in the midst of a church full of envy and strife! Such a church fellowship is not a bright light to the watching world!

Understand the Calling. We have a well-known saying, *It only takes one bad apple to spoil the whole bushel*. I don't know the number it takes in a church fellowship, but it doesn't take too many more than one to ruin a church's witness to the surrounding community either!

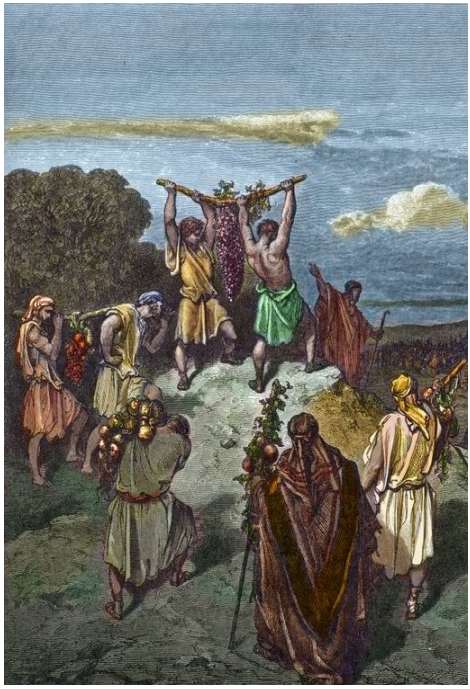
Think about the picture the Scriptures are painting: A group of those who have trusted in Christ— blameless and pure, without visible flaw—standing out in contrast to the world as they bear witness to the One who saved them.

Do you realize that this is not something any Sun City club can do. Neither can any political organization or non-profit. This is something that only an entity that has Christ at its head, that shares in His life, and has received the outpouring of the His Spirit can do. It can only be done by the Church—the Bride of Christ! I am not saying it will be easy, especially ministering in a fallen world, but what a glorious calling we have as the *Bride* of our Lord and Savior. And, what He calls us to do, He will enable!

Understand the Challenge. Since the church is made up of individuals who still have a sinful nature residing within, it will, of course, never be perfect! Further, a vital church, like we hope to be, always has new individuals being drawn into the fellowship. They will need to leave things from the world behind and join us in our pursuit of being *holy and blameless, without fault, lights that shine before a desperately needy world.* We must understand the end in mind and work toward it.



When the children of Israel reached the Promised Land, they sent in 12 scouts. Of those sent in to explore the *Land,* Joshua and Caleb stood head and shoulders above the other ten. But the witness of two was not enough to prevent 40 years of wandering in the wilderness.



We must always work toward a sufficient number of individuals who have matured enough to recognize murmurings and check them before *cracks* begin to show to the watching world. My job as a teaching pastor is first and foremost to model what I teach, and then to promote enough spiritual maturity in the congregation that the fellowship itself can mold and shape any who are just coming out of the world.

Those who are more spiritually mature have the greater responsibility! Let me ask: Should Philippians 2:14-16 occur in a local church, would it be noteworthy? Would it be noticed by the watching world as unusual? Would it attract the interest of those in need of answers? I believe it would—like a beacon of hope to a mariner searching for safe harbor! And, that is the kind of fellowship we should corporately long to be!

3. The Church Should Be Under No Illusions!

Paul tells the church in Philippi they are planted *in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.* It is easy for us to think:: "*Oh yes, the Roman colony in Greece was a bad place!*" But God included this guidance in a letter to the Church because we too live in the midst of a *crooked and perverse generation*! Again we think, "*Oh yes, those communist regimes, religious fanatics, and so on.*"

No! This is referring to our nation all the way down to the streets where we live! We are programmed to think that America is wholesome and good, but do abortion statistics, current cultural battles, and every other social statistic support our inherent goodness or our inherent depravity? This is hard for us to acknowledge, but our society is *crooked and perverse*—and it is getting worse!

Recognizing a Hard Truth! The world is crooked and perverse for the simple reason that Satan is crooked and perverse. He is ruler of this world. Let me remind you of his guile and deceit as he deceived Eve with this lie:

> **"You will not surely die," …** Genesis 3:4

She did and took Adam with her which, in turn, led to Satan's de facto rulership of this world:

> **We know that we are children of God and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.**
> I John 5:19

When it comes to the Church, the Bride of Christ, its nature as *blameless, pure, and without fault* is meant to

stand in stark contrast to *crooked and perverse!* With this contrast in mind, the Church should forever be on guard against contamination by the world and never be so foolish as to think the two could be reconciled. Let me suggest to you that in our day:

The Church has largely fooled itself and failed the test!

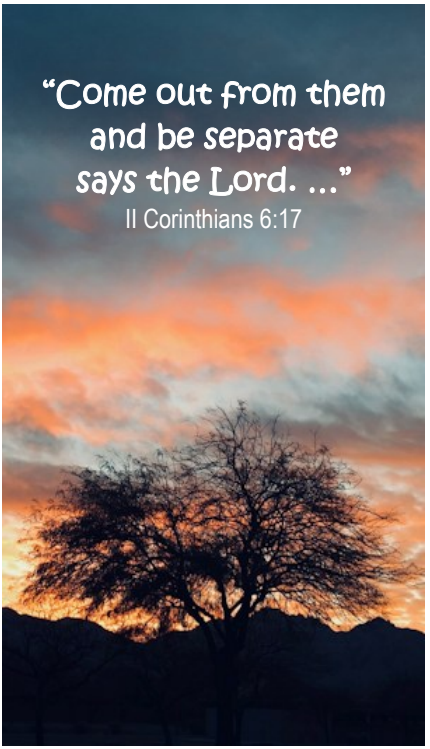
One way to explain the failure of the church in America to be *blameless, pure, and without fault* is to understand that the Judeo-Christian heritage of our nation, along with its tremendous history of blessing from the hand of God, has lulled us into thinking that:

- Holiness can be maintained without attention to detail.
- Citizenship in America was almost as good as citizenship in Heaven and something we don't have to wait for!
- Discipleship took on the meaning of personal enrichment. (All you need to do to verify this is look at the current best-selling books on the Christian Life—the majority deal with felt needs and happiness in the present!)

Understanding What Happened. What has happened to the Church while all of this has been going on? First, we forgot that God has labeled the world as *crooked and perverse!* And, because we grew up in a time of shared Christian morality, we thought it would always be that way. So we let our guard down and let the world into the church. However, as time went on, our culture went from lost and moral to lost and perverse and we barely seemed to notice. In contrast to my teenage years, the evils on display in our culture are simply unimaginable.

Yet shockingly, many of them have found their way into the church—not just tolerated but celebrated.

Second, in many cases, the Church is no longer a beacon of hope to the lost world because *blameless pure and without fault* are not just foreign concepts, but roundly condemned. The light we are meant to shine is greatly dimmed and the message we hold forth no longer has the power to save. The things which the Lord was so careful to indict in the churches of Revelation 2-3 seem to be our new normal: *left our First-love, allowed the worldliness of Balaam and Jezebel into the fellowship, and became lukewarm!*



In contrast to what the church in America has become, God's call upon His people has never changed:

> **Therefore, "Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." … let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.**
>
> II Corinthians 6:17-7:1

This is not something that can be accomplished just once and then that box is checked. This is a mindset that has to be rigorously pursued until we go to Him or He comes for us!

Understanding the Reasoning. At this point, you may either be wanting to argue with my assessment or are very discouraged by it. My reason for doing this is two-fold: We have both a very clear text, and a very clear way forward. We must avoid the mistake of thinking we need to accept cultural norms—*caulk the cracks* in our witness and learn to live with our impurities. That is not putting ourselves in a position such that *God is at work to will and to do!* Neither is it *working out our salvation with fear and trembling*!



There is just one way forward: repentance, confession of sin, and an ongoing commitment to *enlarging our territory while driving out the inhabitants of the Land!* That was God's call on the people of Israel when they entered the Promised Land, and it remains His call on the Church. Specifically, we are called to steadfastly pursue spiritual growth while being ever vigilant to drive out worldliness.

Have you ever noticed how easy it is to get distracted from devotion to spiritual things? All it takes is too much television, too much time online, or too much social media. Now multiply that by the 300 people who make up our fellowship and it is easy to wander.

The older I get what is most important seems to have become quite simple:

- In terms of the vertical, seek to know Him!
- On the horizontal, seek to create spiritual hunger in others!

4. An Interpretive Challenge

As mentioned, the short phrase: "*shine as lights in the world, holding fast (forth) the word of life,"* presents an interpretive challenge for us. Specifically, are we to hold tightly to the word of life or to hold it out to others? I have shown you both possibilities, and the Greek word involved can mean either. As a result, you will find various Bible translations handling it both ways. I trust you see that we are not dealing with *shades of meaning,* for the two possibilities are saying something that is nearly opposite in meaning. So how are we to handle this?

Interpretation Issue. First, let's consider whether we are to *hold fast* or *hold forth the word of life?* The same writer supports each concept elsewhere:

- The Church is to hold fast:

  … God's household, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

  I Timothy 3:15

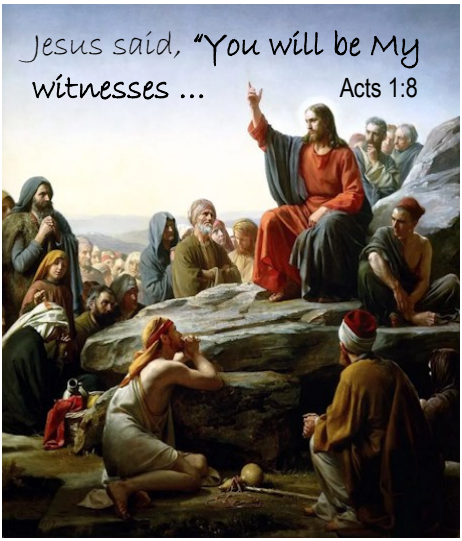
- The saint is to hold forth:

  I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. Philemon 1:6

The difficulty arises with the Greek word in view. It is translated five different ways in Scripture, so I cannot be

as certain as I would like to be. However, given the context of personal sanctification to one of corporate witness, I think *holding forth* the truth of the Gospel to be the best option. The light possessed by the local church in the person and work of Christ is not meant to be held onto, but shown forth!

In keeping with the above translation, I do know this for sure:



- We are to be witnesses to the person and work of Jesus Christ!

  "...You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:8

- We are to be Ambassadors—those with a heavenly citizenship meant to represent our Sovereign to the crooked and perverse world in which we live!

  ... And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us.

  II Corinthians 5:19-20

The Importance. You and I need to realize the magnitude of the situation:

- We have something no one else does—a message that has the power to save a lost individual for all eternity! (Romans 1:16)

- Those who need it are often clueless about their need and antagonistic to the message!
- Lost people need to be drawn to Gospel hearing. That is a work of the Father (John 6:44), the crucified Son (John 12:32), and the Holy Spirit (John 16:8). But, in the plan of God, it is also by a local church that stands *pure, blameless, and without fault* in contrast to its surroundings, and that *shines forth* a clear and compelling Gospel message.

As Peter says:

> **Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us.**
> I Peter 2:12

He certainly visits the lost when they hear the Gospel, so in terms of evangelism I like to think of the close of Peter's admonition to be:

> *They may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day they really hear the Gospel by believing it!*

5. On A Personal Level

Note the way our passage ends:

> **… so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.** Philippians 2:16

With all we know of the Apostle Paul, it is hard to imagine him *laboring in vain*. Yet he shares that very concern with us. By way of closing our study of this portion of text, I would like to consider the differences between *laboring in vain*, laboring *faithfully,* and failing to labor at all. I feel compelled to do this, so that we do not go beyond God's call upon our lives, that we do not take responsibility for something beyond our control, get

discouraged, and thereby fail to labor at all! Ours is to labor faithfully, no matter the response. Allow me to unfold this for you.

Disappointing Outcome—Yet Faithful! First, Paul is saying that if the Philippian church fails to do what God has called them to do—pursue sanctification, become pure and blameless, shine as bright lights holding forth a pure Gospel—then he will have labored in vain! The word translated *vain* can simply mean empty, but it also means to be *without effect* or to fail to reach a desired outcome.

Paul is not sugarcoating the situation. If the Philippian church does not respond to his guidance, his efforts will have been in vain because they will not have become the kind of church God desires for them to be. Do you see what I am driving at? Paul will have ministered faithfully; the fault will be in the response. It is possible for us to share a clear Gospel message to another to which they do not respond. In fact, was not Jesus perfectly faithful in presenting Himself as Israel's Messiah? It was the hardness of heart on the part of the Jewish people that his message simply did not lead to the intended result.

What is the lesson for us? Our call to ministry is to be found faithful—nothing less and nothing more. Let this drive us to the Lord and cause us to watch our lives closely so that we don't own any failure on the part of those to whom we minister!

From a purely human perspective, we may have reason to be discouraged because whatever ministry the Lord has given to us may not have produced the desired outcome. The truth I am trying to reinforce, is that our only real call is to be faithful *vertically*!

Whatever happens on the *horizontal* is in the Lord's hands, and owned by others! Consider the following:

> **My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ be formed in you …** Galatians 4:19

It is okay for us to care and care deeply about the response of others to both the Gospel and spiritual truth.

> **But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.**
> I Corinthians 15:10



Our real calling is to allow the grace of God to work through us, so that one day we could say the following:

> **I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness … and not only to me, but also to all those who have longed for His appearing.**
> II Timothy 4:7-8

This is all that we are called to do, and this is more than enough to occupy our full attention and all that is really under our control! But here is a most sobering thought. Failure on the part of others is one thing. It is a completely different thing to fail to engage in the responsibilities of the Christian Life because of unbelief or self-centeredness! I am finding the content of Philippians to be so helpful in preventing such a tragedy from ever happening in my life, or in the life of our fellowship, if we will just respond to God's truth as He reveals it to us.

One More Concept! We move now to the close of this lengthy section that began back in Philippians 1:27 where Paul insisted on: *One thing--make sure your manner of life is consistent with your true citizenship and worthy of the Gospel of Christ!* I find Paul's final thought, which includes a personal insight, to be particularly compelling!

> **Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me.** Philippians 2:17-18

Paul is both glad and rejoicing, and he thinks the church in Philippi should be glad and rejoicing as well. Before we look more closely, allow me to ask: *What makes you glad? What causes you rejoice?* I suspect we are going to find out that what has made you glad and rejoicing is not the same kinds of things that have led to Paul's condition.

Allow me to briefly introduce you to the essence of what Paul is saying before we work through it in detail. The thing that has gladdened the heart of Paul and caused him to rejoice is simply being poured out as a *drink offering* on the sacrifice and service of those to whom he has the opportunity to minister! You are likely thinking: *But what does that mean?* We are not familiar with the concept of a *drink offering*, so let's clarify that first.

> **Jacob set up a stone pillar to mark the place where God had spoken to him. Then he poured wine over it as an offering to God and anointed the pillar with olive oil.** Genesis 35:14

A *drink offering* involves taking something like wine and, instead of its normal use, pouring it out as an act of worship in recognition of who God is or what He has done.

A drink offering was a part of many of the offerings prescribed under the Mosaic Law. It was an act of giving something over to God rather than keeping it for personal use.

Now we are ready to make the connection to the life and ministry of Paul.

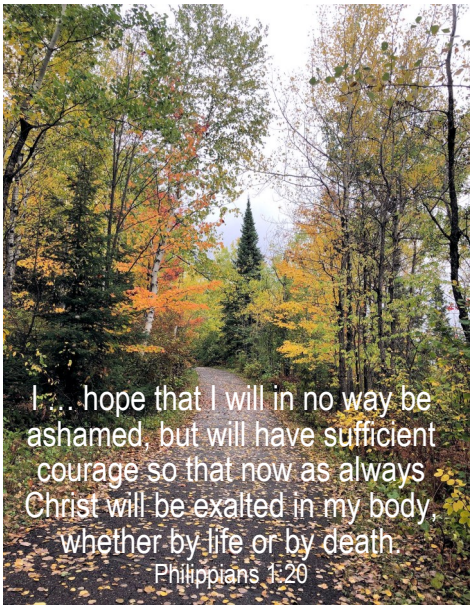
Understanding the Heart of Paul!

Recall that Paul is under house-arrest in Rome, chained to a guard 24 hours a day, his continued earthly existence uncertain from day-to-day. In what would be a very difficult environment for most, Paul has already been sharing his heart with us in Philippians Chapter 1:

… what has happened to me has really served to advance the Gospel. Verse 12

… now as always Christ will be exalted in my body … Verse 20

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. Verse 21



Paul's assumption is that, as he shares the Gospel with yet another guard and writes instructions to the church in Philippi, his life is drawing to a close. He considers the close of his life to be illustrated by the emptying of an

earthen vessel in the same way a drink offering is poured out upon the altar. And, Paul is very clear about the outcome upon which his life is being spent:

… on the sacrifice and service of your faith …

Philippians 2:17

Paul is fully engaged in reaching the lost and discipling those who are saved. And, it does not matter whether it is a saved Praetorian guardsmen witnessing to his compatriots or the church in Philippi having an impact on those in its periphery! In either case, the Gospel is being proclaimed and Paul is blessed to be able to pour out his life on such an outcome! Who thinks like this? Paul does, and what is more, he sees this as the natural state of affairs for those with a heavenly citizenship and a calling to engage in ministry *behind enemy lines*. Let me suggest that we could write Paul's testimony as follows:



What possible better use could I make of my life, than to "pour it out" in the advancement of God's purposes?

Isn't that very much what Paul himself says:

Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of His body, which is the church.

Colossians 1:24

He isn't rejoicing for suffering's sake, but for the benefit received by those to whom he is called to minister. And, it is not that Christ's work was inadequate, it is that any who take up a ministry of bearing witness to who Jesus is and what He accomplished at the cross are going to share in His sufferings!

> **"… If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you also …"** John 15:20

Not only is Paul rejoicing in his ministry benefiting others, but he also is teaching that those who receive the benefit should rejoice and be glad. In Paul's mind, even should he be executed, which eventually happened, those who were blessed by his ministry should rejoice in the benefit they have received!

I think what makes this possible is knowing they have a pending future reunion in a glorified state and in God's presence!

Application. Now, although this application is not directly taught by our text, I feel compelled to ask:

> *Could Paul's mindset toward the sacrificial outpouring of one's life be the normal Christian Life within the Body of Christ?*

For example, are we not given spiritual gifts for the *common good?*

> **There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit … Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.** I Corinthians 12:4-7

We can run down the list in our fellowship: the pastors studying, deacons serving, and all those engaged in every other aspect of ministry in which we engage. If we

do this correctly, it will result in the *pouring out* of time, talent, and treasure for others. The *others* are the lost getting saved and those within the *Body of Christ* being blessed!

To further reinforce that the *pouring out* of one's life in sacrificial service to others is the normal Christian Life, let me show you what Paul does for the rest of Chapter 2. All of a sudden he stops teaching and shares a few personal notes.



Pay close attention to the way the individuals Paul mentions are *spending* their lives:.

- First Timothy—there is no one else like him in caring for you:

  … I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly … For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the Gospel. Philippians 2:19-22

- Then Epaphroditus—he set his own well-being aside to supply what you needed

  … I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger … Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem; because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me. Philippians 2:25-30

Allow me to close this booklet with a *Point of Application:*

For some years now we have been learning that the Christian Life is not directly our responsibility. We are not the initiator in spiritual growth, transformation, or production. Rather, these are the work of God in the life of an individual who learns to walk by faith, by the Spirit, and by abiding in his or her life-giving Savior!

Stated another way: If growing into what it means to abide in Christ leads to the manifestation of His life and His production of spiritual fruit that we bear, then might it be likely that we too would pour out our lives in spiritual service to others as a natural by-product?

We see our Lord and Savior doing so:

Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant…He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!" Philippians 2:6-8

We see the mind of Christ at work in Paul's life doing so:

Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me. Philippians 2:17-18

What do you suppose our God might want to do through us as we manifest the Life of Christ by means of the Spirit of Christ? Perhaps it, too, would lead to gladness of heart and rejoicing of soul as we spend our lives in promoting the spiritual advancement and service of others! That service would be the lost getting saved and the saved growing to spiritual maturity. Truly, the Christian Life is far beyond our abilities apart from God's supernatural enablement!

VISTOSO
Community Church

He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit...*John 15:5*

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