

Today we continue to look at Paul's instructions to the Christians at Philippi and his instructions to us today. The crazy culture that the Philippians faced is similar to the crazy culture we face today. A culture torn apart by conceit, pride, and selfishness. Paul calls/commands the Christians to change their ways and conduct of living to not reflect the world in all its pride but to reflect Christ in all his humility demonstrated in the gospel of his sacrifice. In verses 12-18, he continues with the theme of harmony through humility and shows the importance of reflecting Christ in how we live.

I have a question after the last couple weeks of messages: What's it look like for you to not get caught up in a culture torn apart by conceit, pride, and selfishness? For some of you, maybe you recognize the toll social media is having on your relationships. Instead of looking into your children's eyes as you eat dinner, you're busy staring at the Facebook timeline. Parents, you only get 18 years with your kids. Are you going to spend it satisfying your desires looking at how many likes you have on the Gram? Maybe to live a life of sacrifice means sacrificing your social media. Like seriously, deleting every social media app on your phone.

What does it look like for you to reflect Christ and not the culture in your life context? Maybe it is how you talk to or about your spouse? Sadly, I

have witnessed the passive-aggressive comments amongst married couples—throwing the other under the bus in front of friends, heck in front of parents. *Mom, you wouldn't believe what my husband did today?* Maybe to reflect Christ means to set aside your complaints and embrace compassion.

What does it look like for you to reflect Christ and not the culture in your life context? Maybe it is by cultivating a life of service? Perhaps it is not turning on the game after dinner and choosing to serve your spouse by doing the dishes or putting your kids to bed. Maybe it's sacrificing a night at home on Thursday to volunteer in our Jr. High Ministry.

What does it look like for you to reflect Christ and not the culture in your life? Maybe it is developing a life of sacrifice? The sacrifice of discipline. It is a discipline of bouncing your eyes off that attractive woman as you do your best to cultivate eyes for one. A discipline of not engaging in that flirtatious conversation. The discipline of not exercising emotional dependence on your co-worker. Maybe it's a discipline with food, watching what you eat.

While our life may not involve carrying a literal cross to Calvary, we are presented with opportunities, daily, to moment-by-moment follow what Jesus says, "Deny ourselves and pick up the cross." (Mt. 16:24) As Paul

says, we are to empty ourselves just as Jesus did and live a life of sacrifice for others. In v.12-18, Paul desires to do what I just did, which is to apply his illustration of Jesus' humility to the Philippian church. He does this using the conjunction "Therefore."

"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

Work out what God has worked in. (v.12-13)

Saint Athanasius once wrote,

"He became what we are that he might make us what he is."- Saint Athanasius

People have used v.12-13 to promote a works-based faith. To prove that to have salvation, one must work at it. But that is taken entirely out of the context of the entire letter. If we continue in verse 13, we see Paul assert that God (not us) works in us to *will* and *act* according to his useful purpose. These verses make us ask the question: Whose job is spiritual growth?

Some psychologists say that one of the primary causes of conflict in households involves a dispute over what's generally called Division of Labor. Who makes the bed? Who does the dishes? Who changes the diapers? Whose job is it to work out our salvation? Salvation does not only refer to salvation from sin, but it also can mean wholeness or

restoration. Experiencing salvation is more than just the experience of eternity. Still, it is the experience of restoration to who we were created to be before sin was even a thing. Salvation through sanctification is something we can experience today. Paul is saying that we must work out our salvation in how we live life by breaking free from those hurts in our lives, those habits that destroy and those hang-ups we can't seem to kick. We can work out those sins in our lives by allowing God to work in us.

We must work out what God has worked in through sanctification, which is the journey of becoming more human, not less. Sanctification is a joint project between God and us.

I love how Paul says to work out your salvation with fear and trembling. Paul is not talking about an emotion or a feeling but an attitude. To fear something means to respect it. Paul is not saying that we must work out our salvation with a sense of anxiety, not knowing whether it's going to good enough for God. Instead, Paul uses the phrase to refer to a humble attitude of dependence. He's suggesting that we have a role to play in sanctification, but we don't control it.

We can control some things in our lives. We can control when we eat, send a text, and hop on an airplane. Yet there are some things we have no control over. For instance, the weather. Paul is getting at the relationship of us working out what God has worked in—for example,

going to sleep. God has worked in sleep, it's how he created us. However, we can't make ourselves go to sleep the same way we can turn the tv on. However, with sleep, we can work out sleep by going into a dark room, laying down, closing our eyes. Sailing is an illustration we use all the time here. When one is sailing, one is not passive. One has to hoist the sails, steer the rudder while being utterly dependent on the wind.

What Paul is getting at is that in our lives, we must work out what God has worked in. Through the gospel and the work that Jesus did on the cross, he has worked within us a new DNA. And our job is to live into that DNA by submitting, by positioning our sails for the Holy Spirit to fill them in how we act and will.

Transition: With that understanding, Paul then commands.

"Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life." - Philippians 2:14-16a

Working out what God has worked in is attractive (v.14-16a).

In these verses, Paul gives us an example of what a life that conducts itself in a manner worthy of gospel practically looks like. It's a life without arguing and complaining. That type of life is attractive. It stands out. As I was studying these verses, I ran across a tremendous mental exercise that

illustrates how attractive this type of life and community is by a well-known preacher, Dr. Donald Sunukjian.

Let's suppose you and I go out to a restaurant. We walk in and I get ready to signal "two" to the hostess, but she's not looking at me. She's looking down because the manager is scolding her. We hear him say, "How many times have I told you not to seat people until the table is cleared? Wait until it's bussed and wiped! That's not too hard to remember, is it? Don't let it happen again!"

He walks away, and I signal her "two" again. She grabs a couple of menus and says, "Follow me." As we walk toward a table, she says, "He's such an idiot. He got promoted to manager last month and he thinks he's such a big shot. Well, he's not. He's turning everybody off. Two waitresses have quit and I know two more who are thinking of it. I'm talking to a temp agency. Here's your table. Notice it's cleared off!" Then the hostess leaves.

Soon our waitress comes by. "Hasn't your busboy brought water yet?" she asks. "I don't know why I have to do his work and mine, too. Alex, can you get some waters and table settings here!" Then she says to us, "I'll give you a couple of minutes to look over the menu, then I'll come back for your order."

The busboy comes by with the waters and table settings. As he's laying them out, he says, "She's supposed to share her tips with me, but I think she's stiffing me. When I clean up her tables, I see what people ordered. I know what kind of tips she should get. She's supposed to give me a percentage of that, but I think she's stiffing me. I've half a mind to let her set her own tables." He leaves.

In a minute the waitress comes back and asks, "What will you have?"

I order an omelet and you ask about the burger, "Is it good?"

"Meh...It's okay."

You decide to order the BLT instead.

"What do you want to drink?" she asks. You order a Diet Coke, and I ask for coffee. Pretty soon, she's back with your Diet Coke, but no coffee.

"They forgot to start a new pot. I have to do everything around here. It'll be a couple of minutes on your coffee."

Our table is not very far from the cooking area. When the plates are ready, the cooks put them on the shelf for the waitresses to take to the tables. We overhear two waitresses arguing at the shelf: "That was my hamburger order you took. Wait for your own order to come up. Next

time you take my order, I'm going to sneak some Tabasco into your spaghetti sauce and see what kind of a tip you get!"

Just then, another waitress comes up to the shelf and complains to the chef. "What's taking so long on my meatloaf? Let's get some efficiency in there. Man, what do they teach you in cooking school?"

We finish our lunch, and we leave. We had talked through some of our business but ultimately decided to meet again a week later to finish up. Out in the parking lot, before we get in our cars, we pick the time and place for next week.

"Where shall we have lunch? Shall we come back here?"

When you are complaining and arguing, you drive the crowd away. When you're grateful and gracious, you draw them in. It's true in a coffee shop. It's true in your marriage. Have you ever had dinner with that couple, the ones bickering at each other all the time? It's not fun. It is just as true in a church. By working out a life of humility and a life of harmony, friends, a visitor can see it and know, "God is in this place." We become attractive. We can shine like stars in a world that is so dark and divisive. Paul continues,

In order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing. But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the

sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me. - Philippians 2:16b-18

Working out what God has worked in releases a sweet aroma of joy (v.16b-18).

Paul shares with the Philippians his hopes and feelings. He longs for the Philippian church to heed his instruction and commands of humility and harmony so that the race of his life won't be a race he ran in vain.

However, he assures them that he is proud of how obedient they have been so far in their faith. After all, what he has done so far is just that, a libation, a drink offering.

When a sacrifice was offered to God, it was put on the altar, and the fire beneath it created an aroma that rose toward the heavens. It was customary to pour some wine or oil on the sacrifice—to add a drink offering to complete the fragrance or aroma. With that in mind, Paul says, *Maybe my imprisonment will result in my death. But if that's the case, it'll merely be my last small part added to what you have become before God. And I'll be so pleased.*

Friends, to pour out our lives as a libation means to empty all of the cabinets of our lives onto the altar of Christ through humility and submission. When we pour out our lives in our marriages, it's in how we

speak to our spouse. "Love, I love how you parent and take care of our children, Your love and sacrifice for our kids... no one could do it better." (SPRAY) "Put your feet up. I would love to do the dishes tonight." (SPRAY) To pour out our lives means to display humility so we can encourage our co-workers. "Rick, I noticed how you went above and beyond on that project to make sure our business succeeds." (SPRAY) "Sarah, thanks for being willing to own that failure. I trust you have learned from that and will do better next time." (SPRAY) This means pouring out your life with humility in your friendships. "Mark, I can see how I offended you, brother... I am so sorry." "Elizabeth, I can be there to help you move." (SPRAY) To pour out our lives means to display humility in how we do ministry. "Buddy, I would love to help volunteer in your Jr. High Ministry." (SPRAY) "Sarah, I see why you feel it is necessary to wear that mask, so out of love for you, I will do the same." (SPRAY)

Within our culture, there is an odor of division within social media, church, politics, and families. It is time to start pouring out our lives over the altar of Christ. It's time to start living a life of humility, releasing its sweet aroma into our homes, church campuses, restaurants, grocery stores, etc. Wherever I go, friends, like Paul, I want my life to be a sweet aroma of Christ that helps draw people to Christ.

You smell that, friends? Doesn't that smell make you smile? It's funny what scents can do. They can take you back. They can remind you of good times. I pray that the fragrance of your life devoted to Christ reminds you of the joy within Christ.

So you too should be glad and rejoice with me. - Philippians 2:16b -18

Friends, a life that works out what Christ has worked in is a joyous life. There is nothing more that. I would be willing to devote my life to that, to Christ. Everything else will burn up in the end, but a life of humility and surrender to Jesus is a life of joy. A life of libation. So, friends, let's leave here with joy coursing through your veins amid a pandemic, during grief, amid sickness. Allow the aroma, the joy of Christ to bleed from your life.