

Please turn in your Bibles to Philippians chapter 2. As we continue our series in this letter we are now coming to some incredibly practical teaching from the Apostle Paul. He has just exhorted the saints at Philippi to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” Now he comes to expound upon this doctrine of sanctification and how salvation is to be worked out. Hear now the Word of our Lord from Philippians chapter 2 beginning at verse 14.

***Read Philippians 2:14-18*
*Pray***

Perhaps one thing we all agree on is that this world is a dark place. In fact, this statement may not even be very controversial to many who are unbelievers, though their understanding of the darkness of this world would be different from ours. Take a moment and think about the world in which we live. The evil of this world is so plain to see: homosexuality and all other sorts of perversions have become not only acceptable in society but commonplace; false religions and idolatries and heresies are not only practiced throughout the world but they are promoted and protected by wicked civil magistrates; the blood of babes flows through the streets of nearly every nation on earth; there are wars and killings and all sorts of violence which occur each and every day. This world truly is a dark place. Darkness has so permeated this world that to attempt to walk through it is like attempting to crawl through a cave in which no light is able to penetrate. I don't know if you've ever been inside the depths of a cave and experienced the darkness found within. When I was in middle school and high school I got into outdoor adventuring. I would go hiking and camping, swimming in creeks and jumping off of waterfalls. Included in this adventurous time in my life was cave exploring. A group of us would go to different caves and do guided explorations of them, seeking a cheap thrill and hoping to experience something that no one else had come across.

Going into the cave was usually the easiest part. Most of the time it involved simply walking into the mouth, but other times it was a tighter fit. As you go deeper into the cave the light from the mouth would slowly grow fainter and fainter, and the tunnels you travel through would grow more and more compact. We went through this one that got so tight we had to go single file on our bellies with the top of the tunnel rubbing our backs as we moved. Eventually the tunnel opened up into a massive cavern filled with stalactites and stalagmites. It was a beautiful scene. Then our guide told us all to turn off our headlamps. If you've never been in total darkness before it's hard to explain the experience. We were so deep inside the cave that there was not even a sliver of light to be found. The guide told us that if we spent too much time in total darkness eventually we would go blind from our eyes straining to find light. Whether or not that is true, it does make a good illustration for what it's like to live in the darkness without the light of the Gospel. You become blind to it, desensitized to the wickedness. Just when the sense of dread began to overcome us in that pitch black cavern the guide struck a match and suddenly everything was illuminated with what seemed like the brightest light we had ever seen. Brothers and sisters, that is what you are called to be, a match in the pitch black cavern, a light shining forth in the darkness. That is what the Apostle exhorts the Philippian saints unto here in our text this morning. So the exhortation to you as well, dear believer, is live your lives so that you shine as lights in the midst of this dark world. We will consider this exhortation in our text by looking at three headings: first, the principle; next, the practice; and finally, the product.

Let us first turn our attention to focus on the principle emphasized here in our passage. What's interesting in that Paul emphasizes this principle by way of presenting the negative. We see this in verse 14, "Do all things without murmurings and disputings." What Paul is teaching these saints in Philippi in this passage is what he has been teaching them since chapter 1: the need for unity and

humility. He is combatting a known problem among these saints, that there are murmurings and disputings among them. While not openly rebuking them at this point, he does seek to correct them by way of simple exhortation and instruction. The nature of these murmurings and disputings is not made known to us, but we can be sure that they had risen to the level of risking the unity of the body in that place. Divisions were beginning to arise among these brethren, and Paul is seeking to instruct the saints towards unity and humility. You may be thinking that nowhere does Paul mention pride or the need for humility in this text. Lest you be tempted to believe that this is being read into the text, remember the context in which this passage was written. These five verses cannot be divorced from all that precedes them. Pride fosters in the soul a murmuring disposition towards God, and a contentious disposition towards man. Humility counteracts them both. Charles Simeon writes, “The absence of a murmuring disposition, is to a certain degree the same as positive contentment; and the absence of a contentious disposition as positive love.” Murmurings and disputings are alleviated by pursuing contentment and love, unity and humility.

Friends, we must guard ourselves from falling into the same trap as the Philippians did. You may be thinking that we could never fall into this trap here at Westminster; we are united in our faith and humble towards one another. Yes, I praise God that He has preserved us from major division and strife among the body, but that was not always the case. There has been issues in the past and we should not be so naïve as to believe we are immune from issues arising in the future. We are not better than our forefathers leaving Egypt for the promised land. In Exodus 16:1-3 we read, “And they took their journey from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came unto the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departing out of the land of Egypt. And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness: And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we

sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

A murmuring or disputing spirit is an expression of ingratitude to God’s providence and of lovelessness and pride towards others. It is a denial of grace; it is working against salvation rather than working salvation out into every aspect of your lives. Murmuring and disputing are easy, instinctive almost. Biting your tongues and serving in humility even when you don’t like it out of love for Christ and His people — now that’s hard! But this is a basic part of working out your salvation with fear and trembling, a fundamental response to the person and work of Christ for you. Do not forget of how great a salvation you have in Christ like the Israelites did. Do not resort to murmurings about the present state of things. Do not turn to disputings, riling up discord and divisions among the body. Instead live out the principle which is laid before you this day: to seek after unity and humility, otherwise the enemy will gain and foothold even here in this congregation and will do everything in his power to bring about the destruction of this body of believers.

So how are you to do this? How are you to live out this principle of unity and humility? How are you to guard yourselves from the attacks of Satan against the body? You must take this principle out of the theoretical and place it into the realm of the practical. This leads us now to consider the practice. Look with me at verses 14 through the beginning of verse 16, “Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the 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.” These are fruits of that humility to which Paul had exhorted them. God’s adoption of us ought to be a motive to a blameless life, that we may in some degree resemble our Father. Although there never has been such perfection in the world as to have nothing worthy of reproof; believers can be said to be unreprouvable, or blameless, if they aim at this practice with every

part of their beings. We should endeavour not only to be harmless, but to be blameless; not only not to do hurt, but not to come under the just suspicion of it.

You are so to walk, that others may see clearly in you a transcript of the mind and will of God; and that, conforming themselves to your example, they may advance daily in the paths of righteousness and grace. Calvin writes, “You are, it is true, inclosed in the midst of the wicked; but, in the mean time, bear in mind that you are, by God’s adoption, separated from them: let there be, therefore, in your manner of life, conspicuous marks by which you may be distinguished. Nay more, this consideration ought to stir you up the more to aim at a pious and holy life, that we may not also be a part of the crooked generation, entangled by their vices and contagion.” And so you must shine as lights in the midst of the darkness of this world. You, brothers and sisters, are the bright lights in an otherwise dark world; you are the stars by which others may learn to chart a course to the safety which can be found only in Jesus Christ. Be that match in the midst of the pitch black cavern, lighting every square inch of what was once consumed by darkness. Believers, it is true, you were once children of the night, and there is in the world nothing but darkness; but God has enlightened you for this end, that the purity of your life may shine forth amidst that darkness, that his grace may appear the more illustrious. Christ is the light of the world, and good Christians are lights in the world.

Think of it this way. You are candlesticks: the doctrine of the Gospel is the candle, which, being placed in us, diffuses light on all sides. You do injustice to the Word of God, if it does not shine forth in you in respect of purity of life. You are to be holding forth the word of life. The Gospel must be put of display in your actions, in your life, in your practice. If you have been given this glorious Gospel, if you have experienced its life-giving nature, why would you not hold it forth and let the light of the Word shine forth in the midst of this crooked and perverse nation? Christ uses this same imagery in Matthew 5:14-16, “Ye are the light of the world. A city

that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” There is this apocryphal saying which is often attributed to Francis of Assisi which says you are to preach the Gospel at all times and if necessary use words. The origins of this saying are uncertain, but it most definitely did not come from the lips of Francis. And when looking at the saying itself, I hope you quickly see the flaw in it. The Gospel is only proclaimed by using words, for **“faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”** (Romans 10:17) But this apocryphal saying can be a helpful reminder to live out your Christian experience and let the light of the Gospel shine forth in your life both in word and in deed.

If you do these things, if you seek after unity and humility within the body, if you “do all things without murmurings and disputings,” if you live lives “blameless and harmless” and you hold forth the Gospel of Jesus Christ shining “as lights in the world,” there will be an effect. You will witness the fruit of your labor for Christ’s sake. So let us now focus our attention on the product. Look with me at verses 16 through 18, “That I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain. Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all. For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me.” Here we see that the product is two-fold. The first aspect of it pertains to the minister, or when looking at this passage in particular, the Apostle Paul. He loved the saints at Philippi; he rejoiced with them in what God had been doing in their lives. He rejoices in the fact that his labors among them is bearing fruit, that they are walking in accordance with the Gospel which has transformed their lives. He rejoices in knowing that, should these men and women persevere unto the end, that he will rejoice with them in the day of Christ. What a joy it must have been to the Apostle to look upon the faithfulness of the saints and then to look

upon his chains and to know it was all worth it; it was all for the glory of the Lord and He blessed the work of His servants.

This hope, this rejoicing that he would not have run in vain or labored in vain, is not unique to Paul. Brothers and sisters, this is my hope and expectation as well. I eagerly look forward to the day of Jesus Christ when I will stand before Him and will give an account for the souls which He has entrusted to my care. And it is my hope and expectation that I too will rejoice just as Paul did concerning the Philippians. This is why I pour myself out as a drink offering in service to you dear saints. This is why there is such an emphasis in the preaching, teaching, and conversation of this church to grown in grace, to mature in the faith, to pursue unity and humility. To see you all fulfill the duty which has been given unto to you by the Lord Jesus Christ in being His would be a great reward. I rejoice in the Lord that my labors among you are not in vain, for even now I see the Spirit's work among this congregation. Do not lose heart, dear saints, but be encouraged that your efforts do not go unnoticed and that Jehovah will bless the fruit of your labor. I know this may sound cheesy, like some hallmark card, but I want you to know dear saints that you are my joy and I thank God for you and your striving in the Gospel. Whatever may come our way, whether good times or bad, persecution or revival, I will count it all as joy for the sake of Christ being exalted here in this place.

But there is another side to the product, one which pertains to all of us. We must do all these things out of an abundance of gratitude for the work Jehovah has done in purchasing salvation. And friends, the product of your efforts ought to be to rejoice alongside your brethren, alongside the saints at Philippi, alongside the Apostle Paul, alongside your elders here at Westminster. Look to the sufferings and turmoil of those who came before you and know that their labors were not in vain, and that no matter what you go through, if you remain faithful the joy of the Lord is your reward and your labors are not in vain. Your trials may be great; but you shall be enabled to bear them. Your difficulties may be great; but

you shall be enabled to surmount them. Nothing shall be impossible to you, if only you live by faith in Christ Jesus. In the midst of temptations you shall “be preserved blameless,” and our “light shall shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.”

I’ll close with the words of Rev. Simeon, “Beloved brethren, if another person could do and suffer so much for you, what ought not you to do or suffer for the welfare of your own souls? Should it be any difficulty to you to devote yourselves to God? or should you regard, for one moment, the contempt or obloquy which you can incur for His sake? Methinks, you are blushing for your lukewarmness and cowardice: you are ashamed, that the things of time and sense can retain such influence over your minds. And, in truth, well may the most diligent amongst us be ashamed, when we think how near we are to the borders of eternity; and what a sacrifice they must become to the justice of God hereafter, who have not surrendered themselves as living sacrifices to his honor in the present world.” Brothers and sisters, do not be ashamed, do not hold anything back, but go forth and live your lives so that you shine as lights in the midst of this dark world.