

Partakers of Grace in a Darkening Culture

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Partakers of Grace

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Bible Text: Philippians 2:12-18

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A number of years ago I was speaking to a group of missionaries in the country of Ivory Coast. It was the first time I had been to West Africa but it was similar to the violence and the poverty I had observed in a number of other third world countries and the missionaries made it very clear that where the conference was being held was relatively safe during the day but that changed rapidly when the sun went down. All the properties had these high masonry walls with shards of broken glass and even barbed wire at the top. That's pretty typical in poorer countries around the world and, honestly, I didn't give it a whole lot of thought as I was driving to that conference site. When I arrived, they put me up at a little house that was about a mile or so down a dirt road from where the conference was being held and I'm still trying to get over the jet lag and all of that so I spoke a couple of times in the morning, a couple of times in the afternoon and then I went back to where I was staying. I just walked down that little road to grab something to eat and review my next presentation. Take a shower; get cleaned up for the evening sessions. So I did all that. I ate and went over my notes. That's such a standard practice for me, I could do that in my sleep. Then I jumped in the shower. Got dressed. Grabbed my briefcase to walk down to the conference site and when I opened the door, that's when I first realized that the sun had gone down while I was taking a shower. Now, I realize you might say, "Well, you're not very sharp." Well, let's just assume that, okay?

So now it's dark. I didn't have any way to contact anybody and I really had cut it pretty tight. I typically do in situations like that so I didn't have a lot of extra time before they were expecting me to speak so I just decided, "Well, I'm just going to walk down that road." Just going to walk down that road. The first thing I noticed was how absolutely dark it was. You know, in our culture, at least near cities, you can always look around at least on the horizon and see lights. This was the kind of, I can't really even see my hand in the dark kind of dark. The second thing I noticed was how little I pay attention in the light because now I'm trying to remember, "Now, how far down this road was the conference site?" Since everything is behind these high masonry walls, how will I even know when I get to the right place if I do? So I threw up one of these telegraph prayers, "Lord, please protect me in spite of my carelessness." It's almost like you hear from heaven, "Again?" "This will be the last time, Lord, but please?"

As my eyes became a bit more acclimated to what was happening, I noticed that there were actually these little streetlights if you want to call them that, along this dirt road but streetlight isn't really the right phrase. It was actually like a lightbulb that you might have in your house at home strung up on a high pole just every so often down the road. So it just illuminated just a little, little spot and then there are huge swathes of darkness. But here's the plan I made: I'm going to jog from one little light to the next and then I'll just stop at each one and listen to see if anyone or anything is about to attack me. So that was the best plan I was able to come up with at the time. You know, your mind, it starts working overtime on you in situations like this. Like, "What was it they were telling me about those poisonous snakes again? And does it hurt to be cut with one of those machetes? I mean, do they sharpen them so it hurts." Just all kinds of craziness. Now, I realize before you send me some sort of a text or email, I do understand in hindsight it would have been wisest for me just to go right back in that little house. They would have eventually realized that I was not there when it was my time to speak. They would have sent somebody over to get me. I understand all of that but that's not what I did.

So I start jogging from little light to little light. Yeah, there were all sorts of Africa kind of noises going on but it wasn't overly alarming until I'm right in between one little light and the other where several things happen simultaneously. First, all those little streetlights went out at once followed by a blood-curdling scream, followed by a bunch of African voices yelling in a language I couldn't possibly understand. That's when I decided there are few things worse than being in the dark and how I would have given just about anything to have access to even a little bit of light.

With that in mind, open your Bible now to Philippians 2, if you would. That's on page 155 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you if you need that this morning.

You know, one of the many metaphors used in Scripture to describe what our lives were like before coming to Christ was that of walking in darkness. For example, Matthew quoted the prophet Isaiah to describe the early part of Jesus' ministry by reporting, "The people who were sitting in darkness," think about that. Not just physically or literally but spiritually. "The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great light, and those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, upon them a light has dawned." What a great way to announce the coming of Christ.

In the same passage that contains what is probably the best known verse in the Bible, John 3:16, three verses later Jesus explained this, "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God." Powerful words, huh? Powerful words: walking in darkness, living in darkness.

That's why it's so delightful that the Lord describes the process of becoming a follower of Jesus Christ in these very terms. Paul told the Corinthians, "For God, who said, 'Light

shall shine out of darkness," what a great way to think about what it means to come to Christ. "'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." Chew on that, huh? Praise the Lord for that.

Now, please look for that same metaphor in our text this morning. We're in Philippians 2, beginning in verse 12, very important words. "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling." I wonder what that means? "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." Huh? Huh? What? Now, as soon as you kind of get over that mentally, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing." Uh-oh. "Do all things without grumbling or disputing." Why? "So that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as," what? As long as you're not grumbling. As long as you're not disputing. As long as you're working out your own salvation with fear and trembling you then and only then can appear as "lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain. But even if I am," Paul said, "being poured out as a drink offering." What an incredible way for him to think about his possible pending death. "Even as I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me."

Now, I realize I'm notorious for not finishing my stories. What happened next on that dark night in Africa was the appearance of a tiny little light further up the road. I later learned it was a bulb no larger than one that you might have in your nightlight in your bathroom at home and it was connected by just a little battery kept at the security guard's post for the many times that power went out in that part of the world. Of course, I didn't know that yet. I'm standing there in the darkness listening to all these voices and screams and I just see this little bitty light so I figure, "Well, I'm just going to head for that light." I had to decide run from it or to it. You thought later, "You know, that could have been the light they're trying to attract you to before they cut something but I'm going to head for the light and see what happens."

So I got to it and the light was over just this steel door you often find in these masonry security walls and so I just knocked on the door. Just knocked on the door. A little trap door opens and all of a sudden there is a bright light right in my face and then he turns the flashlight around and shines it in his face and I somewhat recognized the guard who was there at the conference site that I had seen earlier in that day. He starts saying all sorts of words that I didn't understand and as funny in that situation, people think if they say them louder you will understand them so he's yelling and just all that kind of stuff.

He finally opens the door and he lets me see inside that compound and now I can actually start to see the missionaries. They are setting up generators. Apparently that happened all the time so just going right back to the conference and doing their thing. Of course, then I

had to act all cool, like I was showing up for my session on time just like the dependable, fearless, conference speaker I always am. But the lesson is when you're really in the dark, when you're really in the dark, there is nothing quite like a little bit of light, huh? Nothing quite like that.

Well, this morning we're talking about partakers of grace in a darkening culture and with the time we have remaining, let's think about four principles to guide our ministry of the Gospel. I'm assuming that you came to the Lord's house on this beautiful day to let the word of God help you evaluate your heart and life. Did you? And all the ways that you're in line with this text. I hope you're going to praise God. But for those ways that you're not, whether it be in your home or your job, your neighborhood, your extended family, your church, I hope you came ready to repent, huh? Because we don't get any better unless we're willing to let the word of God really have its impact on us and I would just...speaking of telegraph prayers, they really work. Do you know that? We find them throughout the Bible. This might be a good time to throw one up to the Lord right now and say, "Lord, would you allow your Spirit to help me be honest with this text?" That would be a good thing to do. Good thing to do.

Four principles to guide our ministry of the Gospel. 1. Clearly, work out the practical aspects of your salvation. Now, no question about this and I'm glad for it: these verses give us an opportunity to flex our principles of Bible study muscles. Did you know you had them? Yeah, you should. Principles of Bible study muscles, formerly that's called the study of hermeneutics which the art and science of Bible interpretation and we think there are principles of language, there are principles of logic that must govern the way we interpret and imply the word of God. So it's not like just everybody just applies it in whatever helter-skelter fashion they want. No, there are principles of hermeneutics that guide us. That's why Paul told Timothy, "Be diligent to present yourselves approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed." How and why? Well, "accurately handling the word of truth." Literally, cutting it straight. Cutting it straight.

Well, there would be few other doctrines about which it would be more important for us to cut it straight than the issue of salvation, right? The issue of theological soteriology, how a person establishes a relationship with God and what that person's lifestyle looks like after that decision is made. So these verses we just read, they are very important but it's also like a potential minefield. A minefield, so let's be sure to proceed with caution.

Well, it starts here: salvation begins by making a decision to trust Christ as Savior and Lord. You see, one of our primary principles of Bible study is the matter of who is being addressed in a particular passage of Scripture. When Paul says to them in chapter 2, verse 12, "work out your own salvation," we have to ask, "Well, who is this being written to?" And we know because of what we've already seen in this book, the Apostle Paul is writing to a group of people whom he believes are already Christians. That is very, very important. He's addressed them all along the way in that fashion. For example, you may remember at the very beginning of the book he called them what? Saints. Saints, saved ones. So he believes that the people he is writing to have already placed their faith and trust in Christ. Also, repeatedly he has addressed them as his brethren. So what we're

reading about in chapter 2, verse 12, is not how a person becomes a Christian, it's how a person lives because he or she is a Christian.

That brings us to another important principle of Bible study, it's the unity principle. In other words, whatever I make a particular verse of Scripture mean, it has to be able to bear the weight of the rest of the Bible and we believe that the Bible interprets itself. The Bible interprets the Bible so we're comparing one passage of Scripture. What that means is, whatever we're going to decide Philippians 2:12 means, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." It has to be able to be consistent with, to bear the weight of other passages on this topic that make it clear that salvation is not something you earn. It's something you receive like Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves," there it is. Regardless of what Paul meant "work out your own salvation." "And not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." Or Titus 3:5, "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit." Or the verse I alluded to a moment ago, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life."

So whatever we're going to say about what Paul means, "work out your own salvation," that's not how you become a Christian because that interpretation would contradict everything that we have just read from other places in the Bible. It's also consistent with what we know about the conversion of one of the first members of what would eventually become the Philippian church, to whom this book is being written, a man we refer to as the Philippian jailer. Do you remember what he said to Paul and Silas because of their powerful testimony in his jail? "And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, and after he brought them out, he said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' They said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.'" You see, not work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, Philippians 2:12, no, no, here's where it starts: believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household, assuming they were ready to repent and believe as well.

So what that means, just to be sure we're absolutely clear is that salvation begins at a point in time where that individual admits his need. Something hard for Americans to do. And then makes a decision to place his faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross. Without that, without that everything else that is being discussed in this text is not possible which, of course, would lead me to ask you: has there been a definite time in your life where you've come to that point of decision? Has there? Do you know that you know that you know that you're on your way to heaven?

One of the great things about this year, there's a lot of marvelous things happening around here but one of the great things is the significant number of men and women who have chosen to follow Christ this year. We're about the proclamation of the Gospel, huh? And when we see men and women, boys and girls, choose to make that decision, we absolutely are thrilled. In fact, the Scriptures say the angels rejoice every time that has happened. Well, the angels have been doing a lot of rejoicing and so have we. And if you

would say, "Well, I don't really know for sure that I'm on my way to heaven but I don't want to be an imposition so I'll kind of hang around here but not really know for sure." Oh my, my, my, my, my. And don't think for a second, "Well, Pastor Viars will be too busy to talk to me." No, he wouldn't. I'd cancel all sorts of stuff to talk to you, like a staff meeting. I'd cancel all sorts of. Well, I don't know where that came from. And if you say, "Well, could I talk to someone nice?" We've got all kinds of ladies who are trained to do this. They'd be happy to. And it's not like we're going to bring the Faith Church book. We're not doing that. We'll bring the Bible, our sole source of authority for faith and practice and we'll try to answer your questions and show you from the word of God how you can come to know that you know that you know that you have a relationship with Christ.

Well, with that being said, if it's a decision that occurs at a point in time, that is once and for all and the moment you make it you're sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise until the day of eternity, you are then in the hand of Christ and the hand of the Father held securely until the day of eternity. Well, then how does Philippians 2:12 fit into this? Here's the answer: salvation is also a process of changing and growing and serving Christ that is lifelong. We love of Ephesians 2:8-9 and we should but sometimes we fail to include verse 10 which goes on to say that after we have trusted Christ, "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works." Do you notice that word "work" keeps coming up in these texts? "Which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."

That's the point of the verse before us. Once you come to Christ, you're now on a journey of working out your own salvation. The word there "work out" literally means "to accomplish; to continually work to bring something to completion or fulfillment." You see, the reason that many churches and Christians are not having the impact on their culture that God desires is because they're spending so much energy criticizing everybody else but they're not expending the right amount of effort into their own salvation. Can I get an uh-huh on that? It's almost like, "Well, I've trusted Christ, now I'm done. That frees me up to talk about how bad everybody else is." No, no, no, no. Now you've started. You've started. It's time to work out the practical implications of your salvation to let the beauty of your position affect all aspects of your practice and that is so crucial, it out to be, that Paul said at the end of verse 12, "We ought to do that with fear and trembling." There is way too much of a lackadaisical spirit among the people of God when it comes to this matter of their own salvation in terms of the sanctification aspect that is to occur after you come to Christ. No, in the right way there ought to be a level of fear and trembling. In other words, we ought to be sure as individuals and as a church that we get this right. That we get this right.

That's why, by the way, another principle of Bible study is: keep reading. Here's the good news: the other side of the coin is both aspects of salvation are grounded in the power and enablement of God. Paul says, "for it is God who is at work in you." There is some good news, huh? Because if I've got to do this on my own, I am in big trouble, how about you? "For it is God who is at work in you both to will and to work of his good pleasure." Now, you might say, "Wait a minute. Who is doing the work, me or the Lord?" What's the

answer to that? Both. Both. You have to play a part and God has to play a part. It's like Paul would later say, "I can do all things." I. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

"Well, what's the point? What do I do with that?" Well, here it is: the best thing you can do for our country and our culture and the best thing that we can do for our country and our culture isn't to be critical of others and cynical and self-righteous. It's to focus first and foremost on all the ways that we need to change. To be more authentic in our walk with Christ. To be giving attention to the kind of personal lives we are cultivating and the kind of work ethic we're developing in the marketplace. And the kind of friend that we're trying to be to others. And the kind of marriages and families we're trying to build. You see, work out your salvation in all of those areas. Your salvation, the Gospel impacts all of that and more. And Paul says, "You need to be working at that."

Well, every one of us could ask of that, that's an evaluative question screaming out at that one, right? How much attention and focus have you been giving even this past week at working out your own salvation? You see, some of us are professional critics about everybody and everything. We just don't have a whole lot of time left for us. Jesus talked about that when he said, "You know, before you get all wound up about talking about getting the speck out of everybody else's eye, you might want to think about giving some attention to getting the log out of your own." Does that come natural? Does that come automatic? No, we tend to gravitate to the other side of that equation, now don't we? Yeah, we do. Which is why Peter said in 1 Peter 4:17, "Judgment begins where? It begins in the household of God." Yeah, that's what he said, "It begins right here in the household of God." Here's a song, "It's me, it's me, it's me, O Lord." Right? Not, "It's my honey, it's my honey, it's my honey, O Lord, standing in need of prayer. It's my deacon, it's my deacon, it's my deacon, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer." I mean, "It's the mayor, it's the mayor, it's the mayor." We could have all kinds of things going here.

Let me get back to the pulpit before I start some sort of a little dance thing. Now, you might say, "Okay, do you know what would be great? Do you know what would be absolutely great is if the text would help make it even more specific. Man, would that be great because what I need, I get the overall principle but I wonder if there are any ways where I tend to violate this principle and I need to get working at that. I mean, if that was in the Bible, I'd want it, wouldn't you?" That would have been a time for a yes, because A. it's in the Bible and B. you're about to get it.

Here you go: avoid two sins which will easily mar your impact for Christ. Here's something that will let your light go out like really quickly. You saw it in the verse, didn't you? The two sins in verse 14? "Do all things without," what? "Without grumbling or disputing." Don't you love the practicality of the word of God? I do, don't you? Yeah, absolutely. Love your Bible. Give it a hug right now.

"Do all things." Think about your house. Think about your job. Think about your neighborhood. Think about your function in this church. There it is, do how many things? 75% of the time? Yeah, I'm going to tell you something else now: some of you are in

workplaces or universities, they're just all about complaining. They are gos-mos factories. I'll explain that in a minute. And the question is: are you going to let the context in which you work conform you to that mold and snuff out your light? Or are you going to let the power of the Gospel help you be entirely different as you're working out your own salvation in these ways?

"Do all things without grumbling and disputing." You say, "What does that mean?" Well, grumbling. Let's talk about grumbling, shall we? What a cool Greek word this is, goggysmos. Some Greek words even sound like what they're talking about. Doesn't that just sound like grumbling? Just sounds like complaining. And some people have established themselves as professional critics. Did you know that? They don't do much but they can certainly complain about what others do. And the Scripture could not be any clearer that kind of behavior is not of God. Now, by the way, right now because I'm your pastor, right, I'm going to love on you a little bit right now: do not, if you want to grow and you want your life to be really bright, don't start saying, "Well, here's all the ways I don't do that." That's not going to help you. Or, "Here are all the things that are okay about me." No, no, no, no. You need to ask yourself right now, "Now, what are the ways that I am violating this text and more importantly than that, what are the issues of the heart that produce that kind of sinful grumbling?" I'll tell you, if you're going to be honest with that, you're going to find things like this: pride, stubbornness, rebellion, ungratefulness and here's what, you need to confess that to God as fast as you can and you need to confess that to other people in your life as fast as you can and then you need to be honest about it and you need to work at stomping it out of your heart and life or it will ruin the light that God wants you to have. No question about that at all.

Over the years I have been willing to meet with anybody about anything. I've rarely, rarely refused to meet with anybody from this community but I've also made it clear that at some point in that conversation I'm probably going to ask you a few questions. 1. I'm probably going to ask you: when was the last time you talked to someone about coming to Christ as Savior and Lord? Do you have an evangelistic heart and life? Then I'm going to ask you to list all the positive ways that you're serving Christ here and the reason for that is that helps establish your credibility in the body. You see, people who don't have their hands on the plow ought not to be fussing about the straightness of the rows.

It's interesting that one of the first uses of this word goggysmos in church history, it actually occurred not long after the church was born. The church was born if you know your Bible, in Acts 2. Guess where we start reading about some goggysmos? In the church house in Acts 6. Yeah, here it is, "Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint," goggysmos, "arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews," so there was some ethnicity going on here, "because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food." Well, what happened? What happened in that text? It wasn't that they stomped off in sinful anger. They didn't threaten to take their ball and go home. No, they communicated together and they found a workable solution to the problem. Don't you love that? That's not goggysmos, that's raising an issue, finding a workable solution to the problem and in that case, it was the institution of a new office in the church, the office of deacon.

So there is, I want to be sure, is this true in your house? True in your job? It's true anywhere and certainly in the church. There's a difference between sinful grumbling and biblical problem solving, isn't there? So let's try to navigate that just a little bit. We had a good example of that this past week. I mentioned at our church family night last Sunday night that we had been advised because of some of what's occurring in our culture that this would be a good time for us to just review our church constitution and our articles of faith and our church covenant and all of our employment policies and all of our facility use policies because of the increased likelihood of lawsuits. It's simply a matter of stewardship. You might say, "Well, I don't care about that." You ought to. You ought to. God has entrusted a lot to this church family and we have a responsibility to protect it all that we possibly can and sadly we're a big target in the minds of some. Some people view us as having deep pockets. That's what they think.

So a group of attorneys, Christian attorneys, Christian leaders, assembled a booklet of guidelines to help churches around our country and we then established a committee of pastors and deacons including two of them who are attorneys just to review all of our documents this past summer and make suggestions. It's onerous work. Who wants to do that? But we've been working on that all summer long along with our business and development plan for these eight new ministry initiatives that we've launched which we're far more excited about than policy discussions. And the great thing from our perspective was as we reviewed those recommendations, what they were suggesting didn't require us to change what we believe or how we practice but to codify it in writing.

So, as you know, we sent those proposals out about a week or so ago and then last Sunday evening I presented them. Well, I had eight person contact me about that presentation: three who had suggestions about grammar or wording and we want to be careful about all that, huh? I understand when I speak publicly grammarians just cringe. I apologize for that. Pray for my sanctification. But anyway, those are just benign grammar suggestions that were very, very helpful. A couple of people, two of them, just asked for clarifications and obviously we always want to do that. But there were three persons who disagreed with some aspect of what we were suggesting pretty strongly. Well, I suppose you could say, "Well, there were over 900 people here last Sunday night for church family night. I mean, three is not a very high percentage." Well, that's not the way we would think about that. We think every person around here matters because we're part of a body.

We're part of a family and as we listened to those persons, they made some very valid points. Very valid points. Let me mention several. The biggest concern was a statement at the end of the articles of faith that designates the senior pastor as the Bible's final interpretive authority and the reason that was...you say, "Why did those attorneys suggest that that be put in our articles of faith?" Here's why: it's because if I'm sued for something that I say in counseling or regarding a facility use request that I'm constantly having to process or some other employment matter, a sharp lawyer could say, "Well, that interpretation of the Bible that you used as the senior pastor of the church to make that particular decision that injured my client is not specifically articulated in your

articles of faith therefore you don't have the constitutional authority to make that decision." Boom. Sue me. So, it was in that context and that intent of the document that we sought to codify what we believe that our pastor has to make decisions like that and certainly is the one who is to be applying the word of God to employment decisions, to facility use questions, certainly in our counseling ministry. But a few people misread that to imply something entirely different as if the senior pastor was going to go around interpreting every last point of Scripture and insisting that every person agree. Other persons felt like the process was just rushed. Well, we never want people to feel like that around here, right? What's the rush? There isn't. So someone is going to sue us. Well, we already have one that we're facing and I can't remember the last time we didn't, okay? So that's life in this day and age.

So in the providence of God we had our regular pastor and deacon's meeting this past Thursday night and we decided a couple of things as we discussed all of that. 1. We believe we ought to drop that last sentence at the end of the articles of faith, not because it's not true or biblical in the context in which it was intended or the way that we've always practiced and will continue but because it is so easily misunderstood by good people. So in other words, the protection that it affords is not worth the confusion that it could generate so we just believe we ought to just drop that.

Then secondly, we would like to slow the process down. What's the rush? So instead of voting next week, we're going to offer a discussion time next Sunday evening at 5 o'clock for anybody who would like to ask any questions or make any comments or suggestions. You could feel free to email me if you would prefer to do that or even ask for a private meeting. I'm more than happy to do that. You know the questions I'm going to ask you as well but I'm more than happy to have meetings.

Then after we have carefully listened to the body, there is no rush, then we'll present that on a subsequent church family night and then vote by ballot two weeks later. But what I'm saying is there is an example of solving problems biblically without resorting to grumbling or complaining, at least as far as I know. If you say, "Do you know what? I think I might have been doing some grumbling you didn't know." That's between you and God and who you're grumbling to and you'd better repent of that really fast. Aren't you glad God forgives right away? Absolutely.

The passage goes on to explain what happens when people choose to...you say, "Do you know what? I'm a grumbler at work." Are you? "Everybody else does." Are you? "I'm a grumbler in my family. I'm the one who could tell you everything." Oh my, because here's where that will lead to: disputing. Disputing. That's where unbridled grumbling leads: to fights and to dissensions. Some Christians are known to be this way in their own homes. Grumblers. Disputers. They're always wound up about something. That's the way they are in their families. That's the way they are in their offices. That's the way they are in their neighborhoods. Do you realize many churches, that verse summarizes their identity. That verse summarizes their history. The grumbling and the disputing.

When we extrapolate that out to our culture, many churches are known for this in their community. "That's the church that's mad about something. That's the church that's complaining about something." One of the ways you work out your own salvation is by ridding your heart of the pride and the stubbornness and the ungratefulness that produces grumbling and disputing.

Now, where does the text take us next? Seek to be a light in the world in which we live. When we think about what are our next steps as a church family is and we can receive a ton of guidance from these verses. "So that you will prove yourselves." If you are working out your own salvation and you're avoiding these twin sins of grumbling and complaining, "so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life." Break that down for a minute. Admittedly our culture is crooked and perverse, that's what sin does, right? It's crooked. It's perverse. Think about some of the words in the Bible for sin. There is the word "ava." That's one of the words. There are many of them in the Bible for sin. Bent, twisted, like a key that no longer fits in a lock. Or ra'a, broken up or ruined. That's what sin does. Or peshah, rebellion against a rightful authority. Or resha, confusion, tossing. Aven, vanity. Unprofitable. All of these are words for sin in the Bible. Amal, sorrow. Missing the mark. Parabasis, crossing the boundary line.

You see, we are living in a dark, fallen world but remember this: if we're any different it's first and foremost because of God's grace, huh? You're saying, "I'm not like that." Well, to whatever degree we're not, it's only because of the grace of God. Paul said, "The law came in so that the transgression would increase but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more." Thank the Lord for that. That's why Paul ended this book with these simple words, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit." You see, that's why it's always better for Christians, that's always better as a church to light a candle than to simply shout at the darkness, especially the candle of the word of God. That's what we're called to be, friends. That's what we're trying to be, to use the freedoms God has given us to become children of God, above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation among whom you appear as lights in this world.

You know, I'm so glad for the many in our church family, they're just on it. They're working out their salvation with fear and trembling. They're not going to waste a bunch of time with goggysmos, with grumbling and complaining. They're on ways to be a light. Our youth pastor, Johnny C., I hope you know him and love him. You ought to find him today and hug the fire out of him. Kiss him on the cheek if you don't think he would take it wrong and here's why. They were having a youth meeting recently, a youth group leader's meeting about wanting to do more effective ministry in the urban areas of our town. At our lower Lincoln area around where our Cooler Keg project is and around the Vinton School neighborhood and Point West. Some of the highest concentrations of poverty in this town and just talking about how can we encourage children from those areas to come to vacation Bible school next summer? Here's what they said, "Well, how about if we change the paradigm? How about if we take vacation Bible school to them? How about if we get our youth groups together and our youth leaders together and pack

vacation Bible school up in a trailer and some buses and take it to those three areas and take vacation Bible school right there?" I love people like that. That's why I'm saying: hug the fire out of him. Smooch him on the cheek. Why? Because he understands the notion of it's our job. We're not going to sit around and goggysmos. We're going to get after looking for ways to shine the light and maybe a year from now we'll be able to rejoice in the number of children and families who came to know Christ in those areas because somebody was working out their salvation with fear and trembling, not wasting any time with goggysmos, complaining and disputing and instead, how can we be a bright light?

By the way, joined at Johnny's hip for the last couple of years is Matt H., one of our seminary students who is right in the middle of that. That's why we're sending Matt H. and his wife to Albania. You see, you want people like that who are just after it. After it. After it. You want people like that on the mission field as well.

You know, I am so out of time. I can't believe that. But I do want to ask you to look for opportunities at work, at school, in your sphere of influence to just ask the Lord to give you passion and wisdom to live missionally. We saw a great example of this, this was on Facebook this week from a young girl in our church, a teenager, who attends McCutcheon and she was talking about a literature assignment her teacher had given this week that caught my eye. That's on her iPad and I realize you can't see it from where you are but that's actually an editorial I wrote several years ago when our daughter graduated from Purdue and he gave them a writing assignment to evaluate that particular editorial. The reason that's so significant is because that editorial was about abortion.

Let me read just a little bit of what this public school teacher had as the assignment. That editorial.

"Recently our second daughter Karis walked across a platform at Purdue University and received her Bachelor's Degree in Chemical Engineering. My wife Kris and I could not help but think of all the joy Karis has brought to our lives and family. We also contemplated how tragic it would have been had abortion ended this story before it had barely started.

"Twenty-two years ago an unmarried young birth-mother and birth-father entered a community hospital. By then they had made two heroic decisions. First, they wanted their baby to have the gift of life regardless of the pain, sacrifice, and inconvenience it caused them. Second they believed that it would be best in their case to place their baby for adoption because they were convinced they could not provide a stable home environment at that point in their lives.

"A few days later our family received a call asking if we would adopt their little baby girl. Our five year old daughter Bethany had been praying for a sister as my wife and I struggled with infertility after her birth. It is impossible to describe the celebration this new gift of life created in our

home. We named our baby girl Karis, the Greek word for grace. Psalm 127:3 took on an entirely new and fresh meaning — 'Children are a gift from the Lord.'"

I'm going to skip some of this for sake of time but I went on to say,

"In some ways this article is a plea to birth mothers contemplating abortion."

Now, think about that being read in public school this week.

"Yes, I am a man which disqualifies me from speaking on this topic in the minds of some. And yes, this decision is intensely personal with a myriad of extenuating circumstances to consider. But I would gently suggest that our experience demonstrates that the decision is personal for two individuals, not one. Had Karis' birth parents ended her life in abortion, they would have stopped her beating heart."

I went on at the end and said,

"Karis is exceptionally bright. Who knows what contributions she might make to our culture in the days ahead?"

"It is true that in our culture, once a child is conceived the biological parents have a choice to make. Our family would urge you to let your baby live. After all, you may be carrying the next Karis."

Now, for one thing, I'm really glad for local media that would print something like that and we ought to be very, very thankful for our local media. I'm also thankful for a local public school teacher. Of all the articles he could have selected to allow his public school students to evaluate, he chose that one, looking for an opportunity to be a bright light.

Well, lastly, be prepared to rejoice in whatever sacrifice might be involved. I understand what we're talking about in order to be a bright light, it's sacrifice, I know, but it's sacrifice that's worth it, huh? Have you ever said, "You know, I wish I would have spent more time grumbling in that period of my life. I wish I would have spent more time being lazy." No, you'd say, "I want to work out my salvation. I want to avoid that goofy grumbling thing so I can be a bright light with whatever sacrifice is required."

Let's stand for prayer, shall we?

Father, thank you for such a great text. Thank you for the practicality of your word. Thank you that you stand ready with forgiving arms when we need it and, if so, I pray that we would run to you and run to others and do business with the heart so we can genuinely change. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.