

Contagious Joy

Part 10 – Straight Thinking in a Crooked World

Philippians 2:12-18

May 31, 2009

All around us we see examples of people who are confused about what God really wants from them. On one hand we have legalists that demand perfection and others who take license to such a degree that they have no restraints in their lives. With Jesus as our example, how are we to really live in light of a culture that is far from God's ideals? Our text this morning gives us 5 principles to live like Jesus in a crooked world.

Proposition: How do we shine *like lights in the world*?

I. **Obey** God no matter what (v. 12)

¹²So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence,

A. Obey even when no one else is watching. The church had flourished while he was there, but how about since he had been gone?

1. Illustration: Obeying a speed limit, when the cop is around, but speeding up when he leaves the freeway.

2. Jesus' influence in your life is more than lip service!

B. **Beloved:** term of endearment. Not trying to get on their case. He is assuming the best about them.

1. Application: make sure you are calling people to a higher standard; believe the best, not assume the worst!

2. Illustration: Becoming members of our church.

II. Take **responsibility** for your own spiritual growth seriously (v. 12b)

Work out your salvation with fear and trembling;

- A. **Work out:** This has nothing to do with becoming a Christian or “working for” your salvation. Two reasons: He is addressing people who are already Christians. This doesn't say "work for" your salvation. It says "work out." *Eph. 2:8-9: "It is not of works, lest any man should boast."*
1. This has to do with living it out their faith in spite of his being absent from them. He is saying develop what you already have. Work out the implications. If you're born again, start growing. Work it out.
 - What do you do in a physical workout? You do a workout, not to get a body, but to develop the body you already have.
 - When you work out a puzzle, you already have all the pieces. You've just got to put it together.
 - Working out a math problem. You have to solve it!
 2. Literal definition: To achieve; to affect by labor; to continually work to bring something to completion. There is a sense of perseverance. Same Greek word as used for working a mine or a field. In each case there were benefits for such diligence.
 - The mine yields precious metals; the field would yield crops.
 - You are rewarded eventually for your effort?
 - What is your life yielding spiritually?
- B. **Your salvation:** Not someone else's! Yours! It is personal. Take responsibility for your own growth! God does not want cookie-cutter Christians. He doesn't want a bunch of spiritual clones walking around, everybody copying each other. What does the gospel mean in your life? You are unique and individual. He doesn't want you to be Billy Graham; He wants you to be you.

- C. **"...with fear and trembling..."** Don't be afraid of God. Christians have no need to fear God in terms of being afraid of Him. It is a healthy dose of awe and reverence! Take your salvation seriously; it has eternal implications. It's a life or death issue here. Nothing is more important than your own spiritual growth. Take it seriously.
- D. **Fear of the Lord:**
1. Prov. 1:7; 9:10 "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Knowledge."
 2. Psalm 11:10...beginning of wisdom
 - **Fear:** Phobia
 - **Trembling:** Eng. word tremor
 3. "Not slavish terror, but wholesome, serious caution" (Vincent). "A nervous and trembling anxiety to do right" (Lightfoot)

III. Let God **change** you from the inside out (v. 13)

¹³for it is God (His Person) who is at work (His power) in you (His presence), both to will and to work (His purpose) for His good pleasure (His pleasure).

- A. God is at work in us. He has to do the changing! That's God's part. He is the one who does the changing in us!
- B. **"To will"**: He changes our desires
- C. **"work"**. We get the word "energizer" or "energy" from this Greek word. God is the energizer for change in your life. He says, "I will give you the power to do what you want to do, need to do, and know what is right to do. I will empower you, energize you." God is the energizer to will and to act. He will give you the willpower and the ability. He'll give you the desire and the capability to change.
- D. **"Good Pleasure"**: He wants us to please Him. God is most glorified when we are most satisfied in Him. (Piper)
- E. **Phil. 1:6**: He begins it and completes it.

F. Conclusion: We have to do our part and God has to do His! There are two equal and opposite errors into which Christians may fall concerning the doctrine of sanctification.

1. On the one hand, quietists stress God's role in sanctification, to the virtual exclusion of any human effort.
2. Pietists, in contrast, emphasize self-effort at the expense of reliance on God's power. In Philippians 2:12–13, the apostle Paul avoids both of those unbiblical extremes, and presents the true balanced view of sanctification. ^(MacArthur)

IV. **Behave** in such a way that the world takes notice (v. 14-16)

¹⁴Do all things without grumbling or disputing; Complaining and arguing (Beck); Grumbling and Faultfinding (Amp); Avoid discontent and dissension. (TCNT)

A. Don't let grumbling and arguing characterize your life (v. 14).

1. *Grumbling*: something we do alone. Low toned, discontented muttering; emotional
2. *Disputing*: something we do with others. Vocal, ill-natured argumentation; intellectual; directed negatively at God. English word dialogue. The first often leads to the second!
3. A gracious spirit overcomes arguing and infighting. He may be referring to the 2 ladies in 4:2... Euodia and Syntyche. Choose your attitude. Be positive
4. *Illustration*: Victor Frankel, the famous psychologist, was imprisoned in one of the German concentration camps in World War II. He said one day they had stripped him naked, taken his clothes, shoes, family, and even his wedding ring. He said they had taken away everything physically that they could. But standing there in front of the Nazi soldiers he realized there was one thing that could never be taken from him.

That was his choice to respond to the circumstances he experienced in life. That is ultimate freedom.

5. You cannot choose what is going to happen to you next week, next month, or next year. You don't have that choice. But you can choose how you're going to respond, how you're going to react – whether it's going to make you or break you, whether you're going to be bitter or better, whether it's going to be a stepping stone to maturity or a stumbling block to failure. Your choice is the way you choose to respond to the circumstances that come into your life.
 6. What really matters in life the most is **not what happens to you**. What happens to you is not the most important thing in your life. **What happens in you** is what matters most. That is a choice. We've seen people put in the same bad circumstances. One will come out a winner and the other will come out a whiner. One's complaining and the other is turning it into a gold mine.
- B. Why? **The world sees and evaluates Jesus through our behavior** (v. 15-16)

¹⁵so 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, ¹⁶holding 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.

What is the world looking for? What are they seeing in our lives? Paul gives us 5 specific guidelines for our witness to the world! The world is looking for people who...

1. **Act with integrity:**

- **Blameless:** A life that can't be criticized as sin or evil; without defect or blemish. (Sheep who were to be sacrificed...Jesus, Lamb of God)

- **Innocent:** Harmless; pure; used of metals that were unmixed, not an alloy. Of wine not mixed with water...not diluted.
- **Children of God, above reproach:** Eph. 1:4
- **Crooked:** English word comes from the Greek scoliosis; curvature of the spinal column; deviating from the standard, which we all have do when we sin.
- **Perverse:** seriously twisted and distorted! He is quoting: Deut. 32:5 in describing Israel's rebellion. Peter's sermon was to a perverse generation (Acts. 2:40)

2. Stand out brightly in contrast to a dark culture

- Shine in the light of a dark culture; just like the moon shines in darkness of night.
- Using the term metaphorically, Paul declares that Christians are to be moral and spiritual luminaries who radiate God's truth, **the Word of life**, into an otherwise sinfully dark universe. (MacArthur)
- **Matt. 5:14: you are the light of the world!**
- **Thy word is a Lamp unto my feet and light unto my path!**
- Examples: Prop 8, staying true to your marriage vows; not cheating on your income tax.

3. Offer the world something different

- *Hold forth the word of life:* Offering the world something different; something they can get a hold of ...Jesus! (John14:6... I am the way, the truth and the life!")
- Hold forth (KJV) vs. Hold fast is better translation.

- *Day of Christ:* Not day of the Lord. It is for believers ...when they receive their rewards; not focusing on punishment! **II Cor. 5:10**
4. **Live with intentionality!** “*did not run in vain*”
- Nobody wants to get to the end of their life and wonder if it was all worth it.
 - *II Tim. 4:7: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith!”*
 - Are you living and dying for the right things.
 - “Too many men climb the ladder of success, only to find that it is leaning against the wrong wall” (Dobson)
5. **Make their mentors proud!** “*have reason to glory*”
- This is one more example of Paul’s fond affection for these believers.
 - Illustration: Sending kids off to college. Make me proud.
 - My mentors...pix

V. **Rejoice** in the midst of suffering

A. Remember: Ministry always **costs** us something (v. 17)

¹⁷But even if 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

1. **Poured out as a drink offering.** This refers to the topping off of an ancient animal sacrifice. The priest poured wine either in front of or on top of the burning animal and the wine would be vaporized. That steam symbolized the rising of the offering to God for whom the sacrifice was made
2. **Sacrifice:** Not speaking of martyrdom but rather is sacrifice and service on behalf the Philippians.
3. Remember where he is...in prison. He is still joyful.

B. Realize: Selflessness is seen in our sincere **joy** for other people (v. 18)

¹⁸You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.

1. We need to get the focus off of ourselves. Paul is experiencing joy vicariously through the lives of other believers.
2. He is also alluding to the fact that they may need to suffer; so remember to do it with joy, just as he has. He illustrates this principle with his own life and that of Jesus Christ!

Table Talk:

1. What does “work out your salvation mean? Is this in conflict with Eph. 2:8-9
2. Why is God working in us? (v. 13)
3. Is spiritual growth a priority for you?
4. Why is grumbling so bad? (v. 14-15) What are some things you tend to grumble about?
5. Who are or what are you sacrificing for? (v. 17)
6. Who can you rejoice with today? Who can you encourage?