

Book: *Philippians*
Series: *Rejoice in the Lord!*
Lesson 9: *The Sanctification Stakes*
Text: Philippians 2:14-18
Date: November 10, 2013

*Colonial Hills
Baptist Church*

Key



= Teacher Information



= Discussion Starter

Book: *Philippians*
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Lesson 9: *The Sanctification Stakes*
Text: Philippians 2:14-18
Date: November 10, 2013
Next Lesson: Philippians 2:19-30



TEACHING TIP

For a supplement as you prepare, consider reviewing Lesson 3 (“Our Productive Faith”) in our study through 2 Peter (www.singlefocusindy.org/2-peter).

INTRODUCTION

What’s at stake when a local church community fails to “work out salvation” with fear and trembling? What’s at stake when they fail to apply “gospel vigilance”—“continuous, sustained, strenuous effort”—in achieving unity through humble ministry as commanded in Philippians 1:27-2:4? What’s at stake when believers neglect their part in sanctification, are lax in their cooperating with God’s internal working, and simply wait for it to happen more “naturally”? What’s at risk when believers and churches deemphasize their need to “make every effort” to add to their faith the sanctified fruits of the spirit (cf. 2 Peter 1:5; cf. vv. 8-11)?

In Philippians 2:14-18, Paul simply underlines our need to “work out our own salvation with fear and trembling,” by showing us, on a very practical level, what is at stake when we fail to do so. We will consider five blessings that are at stake in our sanctification.

HARMONY IN OUR MIDST (v. 14)

Verse 14 continues to address the corporate life of the local church community, adding to what has already been commanded in 1:27-2:4. In those verses, Paul was primarily positive as he called for humble ministry; now he bluntly and negatively commands, “Do all things without grumbling or disputing.” In

essence, Paul is warning against (yes, even prohibiting) dissension within the local church community. In context, this is his immediate, practical application of the injunction to corporately be “working out our own salvation” (v. 12). Therefore, corporate disharmony and mutual sanctification cannot coexist within a congregation. When we tolerate such interpersonal friction and corporate dissension, we put at risk the divine harmony that Christ prayed for His church (cf. John 17:20-21).

The marks of such unsanctified dissension are described as “grumbling” and “disputing.” “Grumbling” is an onomatopoeic word that sounds like the muttering sounds people make when they are disgruntled. It is always used negatively and means “to express one’s discontent.”



Read the following passages—our word or its word family occurs in each one, including the Old Testament verses (i.e., in the Septuagint). What do we learn about the causes or nature of grumbling?

- Exodus 17:2-3 — (1) *We may grumble when we feel our needs aren’t being met (v. 3a).* (2) *Such grumbling often exacerbates the problem and causes us to be irrational (v. 3b).* (3) *Such grumbling is actually against the Lord and is an offense to Him (v. 2).*
- Psalm 106:24-25 — (1) *Grumbling shows a disdain for God’s work (v. 24a).* (2) *Grumbling reveals a lack of faith in God (v. 24b).* (3) *Grumbling is disobedience against God (v. 25).*
- Lamentations 3:39 — *Grumbling reveals that we have misunderstood and taken for granted both the weight of our sin and the kindness of God’s mercy.*
- Matthew 20:10-14 — *We may grumble when we feel that we have been treated unfairly.*
- Luke 5:30 — *We may judgmentally grumble at the decisions of others.*

- John 6:41, 43, 61 (7:12) — *We may grumble at God’s Word (cf. James 1:19).*
- Acts 6:1 — *We may grumble when we feel that our needs aren’t being met, or when we feel that others are being treated (better) differently than us, or when things change and create complications.*
- 1 Peter 4:9 — *We may grumble at having to show self-sacrificial, others-centered hospitality (i.e., being inconvenienced for the sake of others).*

The Bible has well-documented God’s thoughts on grumbling and His decisive punishment on it (cf. Numbers 11:1; 14:27-29; 17:20; 1 Corinthians 10:9-11; Jude 14-16). Paul models the opposite of such discontented grumbling in Philippians 4:11-13, sharing with us the secret of being sanctified in this area (i.e., “I can *do all things* through [Christ] who strengthens me”).

“Disputing” is a term of logic and reasoning (Luke 5:22; Romans 1:21; 1 Corinthians 3:20), but is often used to describe the negative conflict that arises when conflicting viewpoints are argued.



Read the following passages in which our word occurs. What do we learn about the causes or nature of disputing?

- Luke 9:46 (cf. Proverbs 13:10) — *Disputing is often the result of pride and an inflated view of self (cf. 2:3-4).*
- Romans 14:1 — *We may dispute over differing opinions, dogmatically asserting our position to be more important or right than it actually is.*
- 1 Timothy 2:9 — *Disputing is often accompanied with anger and may inhabit even the place and hour of worship.*

Grumbling and disputing, when tolerated in the local church community, rob it of the spirit of unity (and resulting joy) that Paul advocates over and over again in this epistle (cf. 4:1-4) and that God blesses in Psalm 133. And, as we’ll see in the following

verses of our passage, much more is at stake, as well. Therefore, as a local church community let us “work out our salvation” in this important area, battling against the sins of grumbling and disputing, and enjoying wonderful harmony in our midst.



Application: In what ways might we be tempted to sin by grumbling and disputing at Colonial (consider some of the causes that we discovered earlier)? *Open discussion*

Transition: When Christ’s church fails to apply “gospel vigilance” by cooperating with God in sanctification, the harmony that Christ wants us to enjoy is at stake. Secondly, our distinctiveness from society is at stake.

DISTINCTIVENESS FROM OUR SOCIETY (v. 15a)

Jesus prayed for His disciples in John 17:14-19—

I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

Jesus wants His disciples (i.e., “followers”) to walk in His footsteps, to (in a cliché) be “in the world, but not of the world.” It is such distinctiveness that is at stake when His followers fail to walk in that path. Nothing is more undermining to reality of the gospel, defaming to the testimony of Christ, and repulsively obvious to observant onlookers than when professing believers fail to practice the distinctiveness that their profession inherently and necessarily demands.

1. **We are children of God and should be blameless and innocent.**

Believers are the very children of God (John 1:12-13; Galatians 3:26; cf. 2 Peter 1:4) because God has lovingly adopted them (Romans 8:15, 23; Galatians 4:5) upon their new birth (John 3:3-6; 1 Peter 1:23). Therefore, like God (Ephesians 5:1), believers should be “blameless and innocent,” which cannot happen if “envy and rivalry” (1:15), “selfish ambition and conceit” (2:3), or “grumbling and disputing” (2:14) are practiced.

Instead, the believer ought to strive (with “continuous, sustained, strenuous effort,” 2:12) to “prove themselves to be” (NASB) children of God by living “blameless and innocent” lives “without blemish.” “Blameless” simply means “without blame or fault” (cf. Luke 1:6; Philippians 3:6). The word suggests that the individual has overlooked nothing in his pursuit and practice of ethical and spiritual morality and that no one is able to (truthfully) bring an accusation against an individual. Whereas the word “blameless” may connote more of an external perspective, the word “innocent” seems to reflect the true nature of the heart and convey the idea of absolute and simple purity. Jesus speaks of being “innocent as doves” (Matthew 10:16) and Paul commends being “innocent as to what is evil” (Romans 16:19). The Greek word for “without blemish” was literally used to describe appropriate sacrifices (Numbers 6:14; 19:2). Applied metaphorically throughout the New Testament, it parallels “blamelessness” and refers to being without guilt. This is the true state of all believers (Ephesians 1:4; Colossians 1:22) through the “blamelessness” of Christ (1 Peter 1:19; Hebrews 9:14). And should be something we strive for and pray for (1 Thessalonians 3:11-13; Jude 24).

How does 1 Thess. 3:11-13 combine our first point (harmony) with our second point (distinctiveness)? See verses; open discussion

This is who we are in Christ and what we ought to practice through Christ (cf. 2:12-13). Otherwise, we run the dangerous

risk of blending in with our corrupt society and deceiving ourselves into thinking we're wheat, when we are actually tares. God desires us to be His children, not merely in word and profession (because it may not be true), but in work and practice (for such distinctiveness defined His Son, Jesus Christ).


2. ***Our society is the enemy of God and is crooked and perverse.***

In the middle of verse 15, Paul gives us God's "nut shell" evaluation of our society ("generation")—it is "crooked and twisted." Why, having come to the light of the gospel (cf. Hebrews 6:4-5), would we want to blend in with such destructive depravity (cf. Matthew 17:17; Acts 2:40)?

What was Peter's perspective on blending in with our "crooked generation" in Acts 2:40? "Save yourselves!"

"Crooked" (Gk. *skolios*—cf. Eng. "scoliosis") literally describes that which is bent, curved, or twisted (cf. Luke 3:5), but is often used metaphorically of morally and spiritually deviant people (cf. in Sept. Proverbs 2:13-15; 21:8; 28:18). "Twisted" ("perverse," NET and NASB; "depraved," NIV) carries the idea of actively perverting good (Acts 13:10) and leading others in such corruption (Luke 23:2; Acts 20:30).

Dear Christian, if you fail to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," your very distinctiveness as a follower of Jesus is at stake. And when that is given up, who knows whether or not you really are a child of God. Moses, under inspiration from God, spoke these harrowing words about the Israelites—"They have dealt corruptly with Him; they are no longer His children because they are blemished; they are a crooked and twisted generation" (Deuteronomy 32:5).

 **Application:** What are some "crooked and twisted" aspects of society that we must reject as "blameless and innocent children of God without blemish"? *Open discussion*

Transition: What is at stake when God's people fail to apply "continuous, sustained, strenuous effort" in working out their salvation? First, harmony within our midst is at stake. Second, distinctiveness from our society is at stake. Third, our witness to the world is at stake.

WITNESS TO THE WORLD (vv. 15b-16a)

Those who "work out their salvation with fear and trembling" because "God works in them to will and to work for His good pleasure" stick out "as lights in the world." Against the black backdrop of perversion their godliness is "a breath of fresh air in this squalid and polluted society" (TM). Their transformed message and manner of living is a powerful witness for Christ. This is at stake when we fail, individually or corporately, to cooperate with such transformation through sanctification.

1. ***Our witness is likened to light shining.***

Paul first illustrates the quality and power of their witness. Unfortunately, only the NIV really brings this out—"in which you shine like stars in the universe." Stars provide light in darkness, and are not extinguished when the darkness deepens. Rather, they shine brighter still. Just as stars provide light throughout our dark and cold universe, so also believers provide spiritual light in a dark and cold world.

We are simply light-reflectors, as John the Baptist was. John 1:4-9 records his witness:

In [the Word] was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the Light, that all might believe through Him. He was not the Light, but came to bear witness about the Light. The true Light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

What a beautiful illustration to picture the hopelessness of this world, and the hope that the Light (Isaiah 49:6; Luke 1:78-79) and its Light-bearers bring (Daniel 12:3; Matthew 5:14, 16; Ephesians 5:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:5)!

2. *Our witness is lighted by gospel-commitment.*

The first part of verse 15 dealt with Christian character, which is crucial to the local church's witness in their society. We mask the light or at least dim the light (i.e., we give people a reason to ignore the light) when we fail to practice "blamelessness" in our speech (e.g., "grumbling and disputing"), conduct, and attitudes (e.g., "selfish ambition and conceit"). Unbelievers aren't attracted to that kind of life; they are already living it. They are already in darkness; we must show them light.

How does Romans 2:17-24 address this issue of "shining as lights in the world" throughout godly living? *Open discussion*

Verse 16 adds another critical dimension to "light bearing." We must not only be living lives in accordance with the light (v. 15a), but we must also be "holding fast to the word of life." This has to do with our message; we must be proclaimers of the gospel. MacArthur writes, "Just as right doctrine without right character is hypocritical and ineffective, so also is right living ineffective if believers are not proclaiming gospel truth."¹

This phrase speaks of a comprehensive commitment to the gospel (i.e., a "devotion to the proclamation, practice, and passion of the gospel" per Lesson 1). "Holding fast" was used of the crowds when they tried to physically keep Jesus from departing (Luke 4:42). With tenacity, we should cling to the gospel and not let go when it is unpopular, uncomfortable, or unacceptable. The "word of life" specifically refers to the gospel (John 6:63, 68). Since the Life has been manifested, and since we have come to the Light, it is now our responsibility (2 Corinthians 5:20) to "testify...and proclaim...eternal life"(1 John 1:1-2).

Application: Our witness to the world of Light and Life is at stake if we fail to allow God's sanctifying work in our life and lips. This is true both individually and corporately. Peter writes, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15, KJV; cf. v. 16, too).

Transition: Another area that is at stake when we fail to "work out our salvation" is the fruitfulness of our mentors.

FRUITFULNESS FOR OUR MENTORS (v. 16b)

Paul writes in verse 16 that the Philippian believers' harmony, which would enhance their distinctive witness, would cause him to, "in the day of Christ,...be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain." Paul looked forward to that "day of Christ," described as a time of rewarding in 2 Corinthians 5:10 (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:8, 13-14; 4:5), and knew that it would be a day of rejoicing for him as the faithfulness of the Philippian believers was revealed. It would be a day of fruit-picking! And, as his fellowship with them will be eternal, so also will his joy. This was a source of motivation for Jesus Himself according to Hebrews 12:2.

Our sanctification is not only the fruit of the Spirit within us, but is also oftentimes the fruit of some other believer who invested in our lives. True spiritual leaders find their greatest joy in such fruit, in the spiritual transformation of those they serve. Nothing makes them gladder than when Christlikeness increases in the lives of those they are discipling. Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 2:19, "For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at His coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy" (cf. Philippians 4:1). John wrote in 3 John 4, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth."

Illustration: There should be in every believer the spirit of the little child who wants his dad at his Little League game so that he can make him proud; who wants to show his dad that all those

practice hours in the back yard have paid off, and he's put into practice all that his dad taught him.

Application: MacArthur writes concerning this verse—

The best thing believers can do for their pastors is faithfully to live out the truths of God's Word that he has preached and taught, so that he can say with Paul, I did not run in vain nor toil in vain. Every pastor desires that the reward of his efforts will be full, that the people under his care love and obey the Lord without grumbling or complaining and with their lives and words effectively demonstrate the gospel to be true and believable. It is the church's responsibility and privilege to "appreciate those who diligently labor among [them], and have charge over [them] in the Lord and give [them] instruction" (1 Thess. 5:12). "Obey your leaders and submit to them," the writer of Hebrews admonishes, "for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you" (Heb. 13:17).²

Transition: Many things are at stake when we fail to cooperate with God and shadow His sanctifying work in our lives and in our church—harmony in our midst, distinctiveness from our society, witness to our world, fruitfulness for our mentors, and, finally, joy among ministry partners.

JOY AMONG MINISTRY PARTNERS (vv. 17-18)

Paul was a spiritual runner and laborer (v. 16b). In fact, he describes his life as ministry, as service, as being "poured out as a drink offering" (v. 17a; cf. 2 Timothy 4:6), sacrificing himself as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1) for the Lord to use for the benefit of the Philippians (cf. 1:24-25; 2:24). However, Paul recognizes that the Philippians, too, were joining him as living sacrifices. His ministry was being "poured out...upon the sacrificial offering [lit. sacrifice and service] of [their] faith" (v. 17b). He humbly

understood that they were partners in sanctification (cf. 1:25-27), partners in sacrifice (cf. 1:28, 30), partners in service (cf. 4:10-19). And that partnership provided a natural and wonderful reason for him to be "glad and rejoice with [them] all" (v. 17c) and for them to "be glad and rejoice with [him]" (v. 18). Had he or they been idle in their service, indifferent in their growth, or invisible in their witness, this joyful partnership would never have been known.

Homer Kent explains Paul's joy here—

[Paul] rejoiced not only for his own sake, but jointly with the Philippians as he contemplated his relation to their faith. He was its planter and nourisher, and thus their victories were his also. He conveys this idea not only by the words "rejoice with all of you," but also by the figure depicting his life as being poured out as a sacrifice along with the Philippians' own sacrifice. They were priests together, making spiritual sacrifices to God as a result of their faith in Christ. Their sacrifices consisted of themselves, presented by faithful service during life, and if need be, by a martyr's death.³

Application: Partner with fellow believers in your pursuit of Christ and His character. Mutually presenting yourselves as a "living sacrifice" is a wonderful and worshipful foundation for joy.

CONCLUSION

Considering all that is at stake in our sanctification—harmony in our midst, distinctiveness from our society, witness to our world, fruitfulness for our mentors, and joy among ministry partners—let us "work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in [us], both to will and to work for His good pleasure."

ENDNOTES

¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Philippians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 2001), 185.

² *Ibid.*, 188.

³ Homer A. Kent Jr., "Philippians," ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 130.