

I'm Jeffrey Anderson, Pastor for Preaching and Teaching here at Northlake. Over the past few weeks we have been working our way through the book of Philippians. This morning as we continue our study of the book.

Philippians 2: 12-15—¹²“Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed-- not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence-- continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. ¹⁴Do everything without complaining or arguing, ¹⁵so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe ¹⁶as you hold out the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing. ¹⁷But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.”

- In light of Christ's obedience to the Father (even death on a cross) God exalted him to the highest of all possible places. The Philippians for their part are to see that just as the Father vindicated the Son, so he will also vindicate them for their obedience. As such, they are to take all necessary steps to implement the salvation they have partaken of into every facet of their lives. This means a blood-earnest pursuit of “working out” the salvation that they have already received into all areas of their lives: their attitudes; their thoughts; their speech; their business practices. They were to take the salvation they'd been given, and, like a bit of yeast placed into a batch of dough, work it out into every part of the dough—no area was exempt. Understand, neither they nor you are saved by this “working out”, but it is the natural out-growth of the salvation we have received.
- Paul moves from the section on working out your salvation to a remarkably practical action to be taken:
 - The first step in working out their salvation is the cessation of complaining and arguing.
- Before digging too far into the text, first let's step back and get a bigger picture of what was happening in Philippi so that we don't misinterpret and, as a result, misapply the text.
- Paul has already touched on the subject of unity several times so far in the book
 - “Let your love abound more and more...” (1:9).
 - “Stand firm [united] in one spirit, contending as one man” (1:27).
 - “...be of the same mind...” (2:2).
 - “...look to the interests of others... (2:4).
- The Philippian community was broken by dissension. The origin of the trouble probably lay in the dispute between Euodia and Syntyche, whom (Paul wrote) should agree in the Lord (4:2).
- We do not know what their dispute was, but
- The dispute was apparently no minor affair, for it posed a threat to the church serious enough that Paul not only call the primary combatants by name but asked an unnamed friend in the church to “help these women,” presumably in the task of reconciliation.
- **Philippians 4:2-3**: “I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.”
- The “loyal yokefellow” is an unnamed member of the Philippian Church—possibility Luke.

- Their dispute and the church's disunity also posed a serious threat to Paul's ministry.
- If they do not overcome their internal discord, their witness to the "crooked and depraved generation" surrounding them will be hindered, and they will fail to fulfill their calling to be "light to the Gentiles."
- Their internal disunity would tarnish the external proclamation of the gospel.
- Holding on to the word of life is more than simply standing firm against persecution opponents. It is also demonstrating the validity of the gospel to people outside the faith by the way we live.
- Working against disunity is a crucial element in working out salvation before a watching world, and the struggle to work out salvation, since it is a sacrifice to God, should be a cause for rejoicing.
 - On a more personal level, Christian contentment stands out in a selfish, whining, self-pitying world. As Christians "hold out the word of life", there must be no trace of self-pity, but a life characterized by sincere gratitude and godly praise.
- **Motyer:** "Nowhere does the self-centered heart of man more quickly take control than through the machinery of criticism and the prompting of self-interest."¹

¹⁴ **Do all things without grumbling or disputing,**

- (*goggusmos*) muttering or murmuring or
- (*dialogismos*) arguing/disputing.
 - It's the idea of when there is something you know you need to do (tell your spouse that you lied about something, confess to someone that you wronged them and how, etc.), but you really don't want to. You begin to run the situation over and over in your mind in an attempt to find some other way of dealing with it than the one way in which you should.
 - It is an inner dialogue that attempts to argue for its own way.
- The token of our submission is to be an attitude of life that does things without complaining or arguing.
- This work "arguing" refers to the inward reasoning of the mind and is based on the Greek word from which we get our English word "dialogue."
 - We get our word "dialogue" from the Greek *dialogismos*.
 - Dialogue has become a popular word in our day, and we think well of it, but it is not such a virtue in the Bible, at least no between people and God. God does not want us to argue with him; he wants us to listen to him and to do what he says.
 - In this context the word points to that reasoning that goes on in the human heart in rebellion against God's will.
- When such reasoning begins to express itself externally, it becomes complaining.
 - A direct allusion to Exodus 16, Numbers 14:27, et al.
 - **Exodus 16:1-7**—"The whole Israelite community set out ...²In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron.³The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death." ...So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites... in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?"

¹ J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Philippians* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 131.

- **Numbers 11:1-33**—“Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the LORD...The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, "If only we had meat to eat! ⁵We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. ⁶But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!"... Moses heard the people of every family wailing, each at the entrance to his tent. The LORD became exceedingly angry, and Moses was troubled... ‘Tell the people: ‘Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow, when you will eat meat. The LORD heard you when you wailed, ‘If only we had meat to eat! We were better off in Egypt!’ Now the LORD will give you meat, and you will eat it. ¹⁹You will not eat it for just one day, or two days, or five, ten or twenty days, ²⁰but for a whole month—until it comes out of your nostrils and you loathe it—because you have rejected the LORD, who is among you, and have wailed before him, saying, ‘Why did we ever leave Egypt?’’ ... ³¹Now a wind went out from the LORD and drove **quail** in from the sea. It brought them down all around the camp... All that day and night and all the next day the people went out and gathered **quail**... ³³But while the meat was still between their teeth and before it could be consumed, the anger of the LORD burned against the people, and he struck them with a severe plague.”
- **Numbers 14:1**—“That night all the people of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. ²All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, "If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this desert!... ⁸If the LORD is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. ⁹Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them." ¹⁰But the whole assembly talked about stoning them. Then the glory of the LORD appeared at the Tent of Meeting to all the Israelites. ¹¹The LORD said to Moses, "How long will these people treat me with contempt?... ¹²I will strike them down with a plague and destroy them, but I will make you into a nation greater and stronger than they." ¹³Moses said to the LORD, "Then the Egyptians will hear about it! By your power you brought these people up from among them. ¹⁴And they will tell the inhabitants of this land about it. They have already heard that you, O LORD, are with these people and that you, O LORD, have been seen face to face, that your cloud stays over them, and that you go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. ¹⁵If you put these people to death all at one time, the nations who have heard this report about you will say, ¹⁶The LORD was not able to bring these people into the land he promised them on oath... ¹⁷Now may the Lord's strength be displayed... ¹⁹In accordance with your great love, forgive the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now." ²⁰The LORD replied, "I have forgiven them, as you asked. ²¹Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the LORD fills the whole earth, ²²not one of the men who saw my glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times--²³not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it... ²⁶The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: ²⁷"How long will this wicked community grumble against me?"

- Many of us are like that. God blesses us, but there is always something we do not like about it. He blesses us more, but there is something we do not like about that.
- We must get out of the habit of arguing or complaining when God tells us to do things. God says, “I want you to do this,” and we are silent because a dialogue is going on inside us.
 - Two words taken together cover all our actions towards others and our thoughts about them.
- **Augustine**: “A man possesses the Holy Spirit to the extent of his love for Christ’s Church.”²
- **Bonhoeffer**: “In confession the break-through to community takes place. Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him, and the more deeply he becomes involved in it, the more disastrous is his isolation.”³
- **Richard Hays**: “‘Make disciples of all nations...teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.’ Matthew is not interested merely in soliciting converts; the gospel, according to Matthew, summons people to join a disciplined community of Jesus’ followers who put his teachings into practice. There can be no question here of a purely individualized spiritual formation. Matthew is strongly ecclesially oriented. One cannot follow Jesus, according to Matthew, except by becoming part of the community that he trained to carry out his mission in the world.”⁴

¹⁵**that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish**

- The word translated “pure” means without mixture. It was used in the vocabulary of primitive metallurgy to talk about pure gold, pure copper.
- In the same sense our lives are to be without mixture before others. We are to be aboveboard in our business dealings.
- We are not to say one thing and do another. The inward arguing has an outward expression in complaining that is bad, so this good inward characteristic of being pure has an outward expression in being blameless. There is to be nothing that gives occasion for scandal.
- **Thielman**: “The visible unity of the church does not only need to be maintained at the large, institutional level. But at the level of individual congregations of believers as well. Here unity is often broken by precisely the verbal kinds of activity that Paul attempts to curb at Philippi.”⁵
- Unity in the church must be more than simply a feeling of friendliness or a recognition of common beliefs, there must be a premeditated commitment to unity.
 - If/when I’m frustrated with Trish (and she with me), if I find that when I’m around people my inclination is to begin to give people a, perhaps, more “well-rounded picture of what she’s like” (i.e., speak negatively of her), then I know that something is seriously wrong—with me!
- Intertextuality: an allusion to Abraham
 - **Genesis 17:1**—“When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless...”

² Augustine, *Optatam totius*, no. 9, *Fire Within*, 32, <http://www.rebuildjournal.org/quotes.html#Love>.

³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper and Row, 1954), 78.

⁴ Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 97.

⁵ Frank Thielman, *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

- Paul's assumption throughout this passage that the Philippians stand in continuity with biblical Israel should not go unnoticed.
- Paul believes that the Philippians stand in continuity with the ancient people of God. Unlike their spiritual ancestors they will prove not to be a crooked, depraved, and blemished generation, but a beacon of light for the truth of the gospel amid a faithless world.
 - Remember: few or none of the Philippians were Jews.
 - On the Sabbath, instead of following his usual custom of going to the local synagogue, Paul had to go outside the city gate to a place of prayer. (Acts 16:13)
 - A technical term for a Gentile who is interested in the Jewish God.
 - Paul's allusions to the Old Testament in this passage and elsewhere in the letter show that he instructed his new converts in the Jewish Scriptures; the implication is that he considered them as the inheritors of the promises God had made to his people. Christians are, thus, comparable to the desert generation of Israelites.
- What is required of a Christian is impossible.
- Although God's standards are high, and thus seem impossible, God provides supernatural resources to meet them. God helps the Christian to put the highest of these principles into practice.

in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation,

- Paul does not specify anything which we are in fact to do! He does not offer a specific action-item, rather he calls for a **kind** of action: *without grumbling or questioning*; a **sort of person**: *blameless . . . innocent . . . without blemish*.
- In other words, Paul calls the Philippians (and those of Northlake) to act in accordance with who they actually are. 'That you may show/prove yourselves to be' children of God. The great glory of Christian ethics is that it calls us to be what we are.
- Just as , on the one hand, the Christian is not to entertain a carping criticism of others, so by the way we live we are to remove all cause of just criticism against ourselves.
- **Deuteronomy 32:5**—"They have sinned, not pleasing him; spotted children, a crooked and twisted generation."
- Daniel lived in the midst of ungodly Babylon. He did not live off in a corner somewhere; he lived in the king's palace, and he worked for the king. Moreover, when his enemies tried to do away with him, the only thing they could find fault with was his worship of Jehovah.

in which you shine like stars in the universe

- **Daniel 12:3**—"And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever."

⁶holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

- The boast the Paul wants to make is that his work in preaching the gospel to the Philippians produced genuine results in their lives.

¹⁷Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.

- Notice the language in this verse is all from the sacrificial arena.
- It's the imagery of sacrifice was familiar to ancient people. When we talk about sacrifice today, we don't know what that means.

- The very idea of watching an animal like a lamb or goat having its throat slit so that blood comes pouring out causes us to wince almost immediately.
- The process went like this. The person making the offering came forward, the animal was killed in front of the altar, then the body was placed on top of the altar, and finally burned.
- At some point during the burning (typically toward the end) the drink offering was poured out as the final sacrificial act—depending on the specific sacrifice it was either poured out in front of the altar or on top of the altar as the last step in the sacrifice.
 - If poured out on top of the sacrifice it would create an immediate puff of steam/smoke that
- And that is precisely what Paul has in mind. He sees the Philippian church as the sacrifice on the altar, but what he sees as his sacrifice is the drink offering, the final touch to another sacrifice.
- Notice how verse 17 progresses. He begins, "But even if I am being poured..." and so forth. Now let me just mention "But even if," if I might. "**Even if**" is a first-class conditional in the Greek which means that it indicates something that is so. So it should be translated "since." But since I am being poured out.
- "I am being poured out" is in the present tense, so whatever it is he's referring to it is going on right now.
- Some people have tried to make this verse refer to his martyrdom, to his future death in the event that he would be executed while imprisoned here, or whenever his martyrdom came that he had that in mind.
- No, this is not a future, this is a present tense. There is no reason to push this into a future interpretation, he is talking about something that is going on right now. So he is saying, I am presently being poured out as a drink offering.
- **John MacArthur**: "He saw then not his death as a sacrifice, but his life as a sacrifice in which his death was only the culmination. His whole life was a drink offering. His whole life had been poured out."⁶
- Now follow the thought in verse 17. "Since I am being poured out as a drink offering, upon the sacrifice of your faith... ***I rejoice!***"
- Did you notice there is a greater sacrifice than the drink offering? The drink offering is Paul's sacrifice, the greater sacrifice he indicates is that of the Philippian church. I'm poured out as a drink offering on top of or upon the real sacrifice which is your sacrifice. You are making the great sacrifice, I am just the topping off of it.
- They were in a hostile environment. They were in an ungodly environment. They were in a pagan culture. And it was bringing on them that persecution which is indicated there in those verses. So Paul says yours is the great sacrifice. You are the one suffering as you proclaim Christ in Philippi. Mine is just the pouring out a libation on top of your great sacrifice.
- Now does this tell you something about Paul's character?

"upon the sacrifice and service of your faith."

⁶ John MacArthur, "Heaven's Heroes—Part 1," Grace to You (1997), <http://www.biblebb.com/files/mac/50-24.htm>.

- The sacrifice they were making was really the giving of their lives the cause of Christ...preaching, teaching, proclaiming, living for Christ. And he calls it "the service of your faith...the service of your faith."
 - The word "service" is *leitourgia* from which we get liturgy.
 - It means sacred service, religious service, priestly service.⁷
- Paul says, in effect, "If I suffer, or even lose my life, in a sacrifice poured out on top of your principled self-denial, I am delighted. What I do not want is to die a martyr's death without any corresponding fruit in your life."

Application:

- A) **"Do all things without grumbling or disputing."**
- **Michael Bronson:** "*Littleboy* was released by the bomber *Enola Gay* and plummeted toward Earth. When *Littleboy* dropped to the predetermined height of 2,000 feet, the altimeter clicked, setting off a chain reaction. The atoms from a few pounds of Uranium-235 split and produced an explosion equal to 26 million pounds of TNT (13 kilotons). Instantly, Hiroshima, Japan was destroyed. Three days later *Fatman* was dropped over Nagasaki. Within days, the bloody fighting of WWII was over...When atoms split (fission), they release a tremendous amount of energy that is capable of great destruction. Church splits are very similar. When a church splits, it can be very destructive to its members and the surrounding community. Splits have left many church members bitter and disillusioned and have caused many non-Christians to think that Christianity is a farce."⁸
- We are told **"Do all things without grumbling or disputing."** As I mentioned earlier, this has primarily to do with the church community. It is similar to Paul's injunction in Ephesians 4: 3 when he says, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." What this means practically is that you have no business—absolutely none—speaking evil of those within the covenant community. A couple of weeks ago someone came up to me and began to tell me about some "concerns" they had regarding another person in the church. I stopped them and asked: "Have you talked to them about this yet?" Their answer was, "Well, no. I honestly don't think they're in a place to hear this, so I think it would only be falling on deaf ears." I told them that they had no business telling me about their concerns until they had talked to the people involved about their concerns. "Do everything without complaining or arguing" (NIV). Stop speaking negatively about people in your home-group, or those on the worship team with you, or wherever else you may interact with other Christians. The purpose is to live out the legacy of the Gospel and to shine like stars in the heavens. We simply do not have the right to "pray" someone in the back.
- There must be a predetermined commitment to unity.
- Have you ever had the experience where you met a couple and later talked with either the husband or wife alone about their spouse, only to hear them just run the other down? The husband can hardly say anything civil about his wife. The wife visibly rolls her eyes when you mention her husband. You know that such a marriage is not in a good place. This is precisely what the world sees and experiences when they hear you and I speak negatively about those with whom God has placed us in His Church. They know they don't want to get in-

⁷ John MacArthur, "Heaven's Heroes—Part 1." The background on the sacrificial process for verse 17 came from MacArthur's work cited herein.

⁸ Michael Bronson, "Why can't we be Friends?" (1997), <http://www.biblehelp.org/splits.htm>.

volved in that. And Paul's allusion to Daniel about shinning like stars is a direct reference to evangelism. In other words, you petty back-biting about someone in the church undermines our mission of evangelism. *Colossians 4:5* says, "Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity." Rather you are to "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone" (*Colossians 4:6*).

- The unpleasant fact is that the history of Northlake is not exempt from violations of this. Neither are some of the churches I've been involved in. I'm thinking now of the following Church experience:
 - "100 years of Christian fellowship, spiritual love, Godly unity, and community growth ended last Tuesday in a fit of congregational discord not to be rivaled in this century. Holy Creek Baptist Church was split down the middle like the tabernacle cloth that tore at the point of our Lord's crucifixion. It is said that one could hear that rip a hundred miles away. Holy Creek Baptist was severed from the once stalwart cord of unity that bound them together. The fist of discord has pounded an army of Christian soldiers into two disheveled, unorganized factions of estranged members...At present, Holy Creek Congregation will be having four services a day. There has been an unspoken agreement mediated by Pastor Deacon Fred of the Landover Baptist Church. Each faction will have it's own separate service with it's own separate pastor. Since the head pastor is not speaking to the associate pastor, each will have their own service, which will be attended by factioned members."⁹
- **Eric Wallace:** "Through relationships the church can restore spiritual vision and a sense of goal. Not only do we need to value their importance; it is very obvious that we need to rediscover how to have godly relationships. Deep caring relationships [is] one of the sacrifices that our society, and the church, has made in its sprint toward self-gratification and self-fulfillment. Godly relationships involving spiritual growth are not easy. All around us friendships, marriages, and households, are falling apart because people don't want to do the hard work of building right and strong relationships."¹⁰

"Grumble And Argue"

"Grumble and argue," speaks of me in control;
 not being willing, to surrender my soul.
 (Won't) surrender the right, to choose my own way,
 to make my own choices, and live day to day.
 The example we set, for a world that is lost
 only appears, as we embrace the cross.
 The children of God, should be blameless and clean;
 Don't grumble or argue, your light will be seen.
 Above reproach in, a world that's gone bad,
 it will happen as, we rejoice and be glad.
 It's God who is working, within and without

⁹ "Church Splits Down the Middle Over Issues Regarding Piano Bench," <http://www.landoverbaptist.org/news0899/piano.html>.

¹⁰ Eric Wallace, *Uniting Church and Home* (Round Hill: Hazard Communications, 1999), 156.

to bring His own will, and good purpose about.
 So how can we grumble, and argue with God
 And at the same time be, thankful children of God?
 When God is the author, of all that we see,
 our heart should trust God, not depending on "me."¹¹
 ~ Hugh More

B) Become what you already are.

- In reflecting on this passage (and much of what has come before), one may be forgiven if they begin to feel that this material is a little heavy, a little morose—so much talk about sacrifice, giving up of things and rights, opposition from within and without, a call to forego one’s rights, etc. But as I’ve indicated before, Paul is calling the Philippians to nothing more than becoming what they, in fact, already are: “blameless and pure, children of God...[who] shine like stars in the universe.”
- **Neil Anderson** recounts the following story:
 - A pastor visited me a few years ago, and he was in real turmoil. “I’ve been struggling to live a victorious Christian life for 20 years. I know what my problem is. Colossians 3:3 says, ‘For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.’ I’ve been struggling all these years because I haven’t died like this verse says. How do I die, Neil?” “Dying *is not* your problem,” I said. “Read the verse again, just a little slower.” “‘For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.’ I know, Neil. That’s my problem. I haven’t died.” “Read it once again,” I pressed, “Just a little bit slower.” “‘For you have died—.’” And suddenly a light switched on in his understanding. “Hey, that’s past tense, isn’t it?” “Absolutely. You’re problem isn’t dying; you’re already dead. You died at salvation. No wonder you’ve been struggling as a Christian. You’ve been trying to do something that’s already been done, and that’s impossible. The death Paul talks about in Colossians 3:3 isn’t something God expects you to do; it’s something He expects you to know, accept and believe. You can’t do anything to become what you already are.”¹²
- **John Piper** puts it like this: “One of the greatest sources of joy and endurance for the Christian is knowing that in the imperfection of our progress we have already been perfected—and that this is owing to the suffering and death of Christ...The joyful encouragement here is that the evidence of our perfection before God is not our experienced perfection, but our experienced progress. The good news is that being on the way is proof that we have arrived...In other words, we should become what we are.”¹³
- Even as we reflect on how to implement this passage, remember: You are only doing what you already are. The sacrifice you make is done because it is in perfect harmony with who you already are by declaration.

¹¹ Hugh More, used by permission.

¹² Neil Anderson, *Victory Over the Darkness* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1990), 77-78.

¹³ John Piper, *The Passion of Jesus Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 49.

