

LIGHT UP THE WORLD

Philippians 2:12-30

The Book of Genesis starts out telling us that God brought into being (created) the spiritual realm (heaven) and the physical realm (earth). What was the condition of this physical realm? In Genesis 1:2 we see that it was chaos - it was formless or without structure or order. What else do we know about it? It was empty, not in the sense of a vacuum, but in the sense of being a waste land. The next description is that it was dark or without light. So in the sequence of bringing order out of chaos and substance out of emptiness, the first step was to bring light to the situation.

Let's now move ahead from the old creation to the new creation which should raise the question of why a new creation would be needed. The first creation became contaminated or infected with death and deterioration. In other words, it would (if left to itself) return to chaos. This same "death" also infected mankind. So how did the new creation start? If we look at John chapter one, we see that the two events (the old and the new creations) are described in similar terms. The agent of the first creation is the same as the agent in the new creation. John told us, "In Him was life and that life was the light of men." The importance of light shows up in the new creation just as it did in the old creation. John emphasized that the Messiah was the true light that enlightens all mankind with a moral conscience. For those who "receive the light" rather than reject it, these are enlightened with the presence of the light within themselves so that they become light bearers. Since Christians are bearers of the light, how do we light up the world and be instrumental in bringing order out of chaos and light into darkness? Paul gives us a number of practical things to do so that we can be effective. The first thing is to let the light that is in us come out in our daily lives. The second thing to remember is to not obscure the brightness of the light by letting the practices and character of the "old creation" block the light that comes from us. One of the simplest ways to do this is to be focused on the welfare of others rather than allowing ourselves to be dominated with concerns about "self." The final point is that we must let the light shine in all the circumstances we encounter.

Work Out 2:12-13

¹² 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; ¹³ for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure. Philippians 2:12-13 (NASB95)

From a practical point of view, how do we let the "light that is within us" light up the world around us? The most obvious answer to that question is that we are to be obedient to the Word of God. This is what Paul encouraged the believers at Philippi to do whether he was there or not. Why is it that people are more careful to do the right thing when an authority figure is around than if such a figure is not present? If the pastor of your church were visiting in your home, would your conversation be about different subjects than if a work colleague were visiting? Would you tell the same funny stories or use the same expressions or "expletives?" What are we saying about ourselves if we change the baseline of our behavior depending on whom we are around?

There is another consideration of what being obedient is accomplishing beyond letting the light come out. We see this implied in the first word or words of verse twelve. The word or words may be "wherefore" or "therefore" or "so then" depending on the translation you are using. Glancing up just two verses prior to this, we see that obedience is a practical outcome of submitting ourselves (bowing the knee) to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

We have made the argument in the past that our behavior is a true indication of what we really believe or who we are at the very core of our being. So, who **are** we deep down inside? The answer to that question is that we are a “work in progress.” For each Christian, the essence of who we are is ever changing. Paul wrote that God is at work in us to transform our wills and our actions into that which is pleasing to Himself or to put in different terms to “transform us into the image of Christ” (see Roman 8:29). The message or encouragement from Paul is that we are to “walk out” what is being “worked in” us.

Paul also had something to say about our internal attitude about what is going on in our lives with the “working in” and the “working out” processes. We should experience and view this with “fear and trembling.” When you think about the reality of what is going on in the life of a person who has experienced the new birth, it is truly an awesome and exciting thing that is happening. It is not something to take lightly and ignore the responsibility of what this blessing or privilege is all about. If the God of all creation is living in you, then it is incumbent upon us to be responsive to the call that He has on our lives.

Shine Brightly 2:14-18

¹⁴ Do all things without grumbling or disputing; ¹⁵ 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, ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ But 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. ¹⁸ You too, *I urge you*, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me. Philippians 2:14-18 (NASB95)

It is important that we (as Christians) practice what we believe. What are some of the good and appropriate things we might do as a result of our salvation? It might be sharing our faith with a lost person. It could be contributing to work of the kingdom of God with financial help. It might be helping a person who is struggling with addiction issues. It could be just being a good neighbor wherever you live.

Does it matter “how” we do what we do? We see Paul’s advice on this matter is that we are to go about whatever we are doing without “grumbling or disputing.” If “fear and trembling” are the appropriate internal attitudes of what is going on in our lives, then we could make the case that “not grumbling and not disputing” are the appropriate external attitudes of what’s happening. I think it is safe to assume that we all know and recognize what Paul means by grumbling and disputing. We have seen and may have even participated in it.

Why does it matter that we go about “whatever we are doing” without “grumbling and disputing” as we are (in essence) working out (or walking out) what God is working in us? Another way to ask this question is “does our witness matter?” It is possible for a Christian to be seen as a shining light in a dark world if we are acting like the world around us? The wording used in the various translations of verse 15 is that we are to “be” or “become” or “prove” that we are children of God. We are already the children of God by virtue of what God did for us in Christ. You would think that would be a “big deal” or very important and **it is** the most significant thing that can happen to a human being. If we have the light in us, then it cannot have any effect on the world around us if we hide it by grumbling and disputing.

On the positive side, we shine by relying on and giving evidence of the “word of life” that is in us. Some translations tell that we are to hold fast to the word of life and others render verse 16 as “holding forth” the word of life. We can start with holding onto the word (being faithful to it) so we can hold forth the word (share with others). Some commentators see the “word of life” as the gospel message and other emphasize that what we are to hold onto and hold

forth is Christ Himself Who is the Word of Life. There is really no disagreement in these two points of view. We should do both.

Paul included a personal appeal to them to be faithful in these matters, since it would be reason for him to be encouraged and he could rejoice in knowing that what had been accomplished through his ministry was not in vain. I think that all of us would like to think that our lives have made a positive difference on the people with whom we have interacted. What kind of satisfaction is there in thinking that it really did not matter (or that we made things worse) for having gone through life?

Paul was ready to deal the possibility that his having been obedient to God's call on his life even if there were no visible evidence that it positively influenced others. For example, how should you view your life if you were called to be a missionary in a remote part of the world and you worked for many years and no one was converted by embracing God's salvation through Christ's work on the cross? Would the world not view this and pass judgment that you wasted your life? Do you remember the story of the alabaster box of ointment that a woman poured on the head of Jesus? People commented that it was a waste of an expensive ointment. Jesus had a different viewpoint about it. He saw it as an act of worship that was preparing His body for burial. In the same way, Paul could find some satisfaction (cause for rejoicing) in knowing that his obedience to God's call on his life was like a drink offering that was poured out upon a more significant sacrificial offering as an act of worship offered to God. Of course, the more significant sacrificial offering in the case of the woman with the alabaster box of ointment and also with Paul's life was none other than the offering of the Messiah on the cross for our sins.

Paul also encouraged the saints at Philippi to find reason to rejoice and be joyful in knowing that their obedience was ultimately pleasing to God. It is not good for us to view our lives and evaluate how successful we are and think that it doesn't matter if we are faithful or not just based what we can observe.

Show Concern 2:19-24

¹⁹ But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. ²⁰ For I have no one *else* of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. ²¹ For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. ²² But you know of his proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child *serv*ing his father. ²³ Therefore I hope to send him immediately, as soon as I see how things *go* with me; ²⁴ and I trust in the Lord that I myself also will be coming shortly. Philippians 2:19-24 (NASB95)

Even when we take the "eternal" or long range view on life, it still helps to have a reason to be encouraged in the present time. Paul intended to send Timothy to Phillip and get a first hand report from him on how the church was doing. He was confident that Timothy's report would be an encouragement to himself. Paul went on from there to express his confidence in Timothy and his ministry. Timothy had a proven track record of doing what he did for the right reasons. Many times we will discover that people are in the ministry for what they can get out of it or they go into the ministry for the right reasons and find themselves being distracted from their original motives by fame or fortune or ego driven considerations. Paul had apparently encountered many people who were in "the ministry" for the wrong reasons. Sometimes it is difficult to know what is motivating a person who is a "professional" or a paid religious worker (so-called clergy) or even a "volunteer" religious worker. If a lot of what they say is about themselves, even if it is self-deprecating humor, or reference to their appearance or what school they attended or their involvement in civic activities, that has nothing to do with the message of the moment, then we might be suspicious about their motives. The message should not be about

the messenger but should focus on God's plan of salvation.

Finally, we see Paul still had confidence that he would be released from prison and would be able to visit with them in Philippi. So much of life is filled with uncertainty. We can appreciate that in our own lack of information about what tomorrow will bring. If Paul did not know, then we probably aren't going to do a lot better than he did in knowing the details about what's going to happen. Notice that Paul couched these possibilities of sending Timothy and his own visit in terms of it being in the Lord's will as we see in verses 19 and 24. He was hoping and trusting in the Lord that these things would happen. Neither of these outcomes had any basis of prophecy nor promises from God. These outcomes were based on Paul's desires. There is nothing wrong with having such desires and even sharing them with others. However, we must be careful to make a distinction between this kind of "hope and trust" and the "hope and trust" that are based on the sure promises of the Word of God. The correct response to disappointments related to failure to see fulfillment of our desires is to realize that God's will is what is best for us.

Serve Regardless 2:25-30

²⁵ But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need; ²⁶ because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. ²⁷ For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow. ²⁸ Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly so that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned *about you*. ²⁹ Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard; ³⁰ because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me. Philippians 2:25-30 (NASB95)

Paul was very complimentary of Epaphroditus who had been sent by the church at Philippi to help with Paul's need while he was in prison. Paul called him his brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier as well as being their messenger (apostle) and their minister to Paul's needs. We don't know how long Epaphroditus had intended to stay in Rome, but it was likely that the time of his stay needed to be shortened because of the unexpected illness that almost cost him his life. It is thought that Paul wanted to reassure the church at Philippi that it was not for any lack of dedication or capability that Epaphroditus was returning to Philippi. Paul certainly held him in high regard and want to make sure that those in Philippi continue to hold him in such esteem.

Epaphroditus is likely an example of a person who was totally dedicated to his mission. Some commentators have thought that he simply pushed himself without regard for his illness since he did not want to appear to fail in his assigned mission. There are times when we may sense the pressure to get a job done and we might fail to take proper care of our own health needs because of such pressure. This behavior is in stark contrast to those who use the slightest discomfort as an excuse to not be involved in any aspect of the work of the kingdom.

How will we light up the world in which we live using the light that we have received from the life of Christ within us? First, we are to let the light shine through whatever we do. The second principle is don't obscure the light by letting old habits and practice blur that is happening. The third thing we can do is to find practical ways to show concern for others and, finally, we press on in a responsible manner in spite of the difficulties we encounter.