

[let there be light]

:: philippians 2.14-16 ::

Genesis 1.1-4 - In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness.

John 8.12 - Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

John 9.5 - As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

Matthew 5.14a - *YOU* are the light of the world.

You can't read Philippians without seeing the indisputable fact that the Christian life is meant to be full, not empty. It's meant to be growing, not stagnant. It's meant to be advancing, not stopping or declining. You discover the plan of God and the power of God made manifest in the life of the Believer, who is called upon to bring glory to our King and Savior, Jesus Christ.

But you read this text and also discover that there are many pitfalls which can hinder the growth of a Christian. There are adversaries that seek to rob our joy, rob our witness, rob our unity, rob our peace, rob the fullness that God truly wants for us today.

Our verses this morning are going to once again remind us of our position as light bearers here on the earth and how we progress in a world that is full of potential stumbling stones and entanglements.

Philippians 2.14-16 - Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.

So, we see, there's a directive we've received, a goal we're pressing toward and a warning of danger. Paul doesn't want us to waste our potential while we're on this side of eternity. God doesn't want us to get to the Reward Seat of Christ having lived our lives as simply hearers but not doers of His word. He doesn't want us to be people that wait to follow Him until it's convenient or easy. He doesn't want us to live our lives split between Godliness and worldliness. He doesn't want us to hide our light under a bushel, because that kind of life doesn't reap reward. It doesn't reap fullness and satisfaction in Jesus.

Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, reminds us this morning that we carry on the work of God bringing *light* into the world. At conversion, we were ignited, brought from darkness into the light and now we are to shine to those around us.

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Our relationship with God is a progression. Paul writes here that we ‘become’ blameless and harmless. Throughout the Scriptures we see that walking with God is a refining process as He purifies and conforms and shapes us day by day, till, finally, we are presented as the faultless Bride of Christ. God develops us and fills us, cutting away those diseased portions and those limbs which are fruitless. And, because of that work, along the way, those who are in darkness see a great light. They see this strange transformation happening. They see difference and purpose in a life where there once was none. At least, that’s the plan. Paul is over and over again reminding us of the situation that God has established for His people. But, we *have* to engage, otherwise we dim and become less filled with God, less energized by His power and less effective for His glory.

A Christian is to become **blameless** and **harmless**, without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.

We become blameless before God by taking on the mind of Christ. We’ve talked about that back in verse 5 of this chapter.

Harmless has to do with our relationship with others. Because a Christian’s life is not only about his relationship with the Lord, but also how he interacts with the people God has placed in his life. Our words and behavior should never harm another person’s spirituality. Have we stumbled? Have we discouraged? Have we deceived? Have we coerced? These sorts of actions harm people and cause them to trip or even fall as the Lord seeks to draw them to Himself.

The goal is that our lives would become blameless and harmless. *That* is the life that causes heaven to rejoice, because it brings glory to God and draws men nearer to Jesus.

So how do we do it? How do we partner with God in His desire to transform us in this way?

There are a number of really great, practical lessons in this one long sentence from Paul.

First, we need to stop complaining and stop disputing.

God’s word speaks in no uncertain terms here. We are to do **ALL THINGS** without complaining and disputing. All of them.

This is very, very difficult for me. I'm a complainer. But the fact of the matter is that the simple act of not complaining will dramatically brighten our spiritual lamps and increase the wattage of our witness.

Remember, God's work in us is progressive. It's like the breaking of day. First there is darkness, then a few shimmers of light, followed by an ever-increasing amount of sunlight breaking forth across the landscape.

God completes His work in us. He's made *every* believer to shine. And as we allow Him in to control our lives, He purifies us. As He purifies us, He brings forth fruit. And as He brings forth fruit, the brightness of our light within increases as we mature and yield to Him.

According to the Bible, complaining shuts that process down. Because complaining leads to all sorts of incredible problems.

Scholars point out that the word Paul used there is somewhat unusual. It's a reference to the grumbling and murmuring that the Israelites so often did during the wilderness wandering.

Complaining, at it's core, is discontent with God. It's making demands of God. And it's absolutely toxic. Truly, it's one of the most damaging sins, not only in the life of the individual, but also in the Church at large. Because this kind of complaining, this murmuring, pushes out the Holy Spirit and replaces it with human effort. Look at the example of the Israelites in the wilderness. Look at the example of Jonah. Murmuring leads, ultimately, to a very sad state of being, because murmuring leads to disputing with God and with others.

Disputing here means arguing. Division within the Church. Division means resentment and hatred, pride and disunity. And, as we've seen in previous weeks, Christians are called to unity and humility, not always demanding our way or our opinion, but serving and esteeming others better than ourselves.

If we're called to be living sacrifices, as Jesus was a sacrifice, then we must see His example as selfless, guileless, even silent when He was before Pontius Pilate. Legally speaking, there was no cause for Him to die. He had every right not only to defend Himself and walk away free, but more importantly, He had the right to annihilate mankind in an instant. Yet, He was a selfless, silent sacrifice on our behalf, and now He has called us to take up a cross ourselves and go about this world as living sacrifices in *all things*, without complaining or disputing.

The next way we partner with God in becoming Christians who are blameless and harmless is to see the world for what it is: Crooked and perverse.

It's very important that we understand the need for purity and separation from the world. Again, in plain and definite terms, God has commanded us to be apart from the darkness and carnality of this world.

James 4.4b - Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Cut and dry.

The world we live in is crooked and perverse. We hear about corruption everyday on the news. We see perversion all around us in advertisements and just about everywhere else.

What we cannot do is allow the spoilage of the world to latch onto our lives. We can't espouse ourselves to Jesus and continue dabbling in the perversion all around us. Most importantly, we need to create barriers and defenses within our hearts that will keep the sinfulness of the world out of our hearts and our minds.

In the Old Testament, sacrificial lambs were to be without spot or blemish. We, now, are to present ourselves as sacrifices to God. Luckily, we are able to have our blemishes cleaned by God, through the forgiveness of sins. But, we must recognize that the world is filthy and it's seeking to influence and sabotage us.

If we ever find ourselves not believing that the world is out to destroy us and our witness, we need only think of Solomon, think of Gideon, think of Eli and think about the fact that so much of Paul's message is the encouragement to press on and finish well. If we yield to the perversion and corruption of the world, we will bring horror and failure into our lives. See perversion for what it is and choose the light instead of the darkness.

1 John 1.7 - But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

Paul reminds us in verse 16 that we're holding fast to the word of life. And this gives us the proper perspective that we have received life and others have not. That is not a boast, but a mission. Those persons who are still trapped on the crooked path will end in destruction.

There should be a heart for the lost growing and developing within our lives. As God conforms us, we should notice mercy and compassion expanding. Because, if we understand that we're dealing with life and death, then it will dramatically change our relationship with the people in our community.

So, as usual, Paul is demonstrating to us what it means to be a Christian. It's not just about doctrine. It's not just about something that happened at one point in your life. It is a full on calling and position as disciples and light bearers. And we cannot enjoy God's satisfaction without taking on His commission. And He is absolutely offering satisfaction. There is an incredible fullness that we're privileged to receive as co-heirs with Christ Jesus. But the cost is submission to His will. Submission to His transformation. We must become blameless, harmless light bearers by the power of God. And the simplest way to start is to evaluate our lives for those disqualifiers: complaining, disputing, unconcern for the lost, friendship with perversion.

Ephesians 5.8 - For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.

That's what God wants, that's what we want.