

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Paul Gunn, Pastor

WHAT NOT TO DO; WHAT TO DO

Philippians 2:12-17

February 2, 2020

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Here are my two points to today's sermon:

- Don't grumble or argue.
- Do empty yourselves for the cause of Christ.

INTRODUCTION: In our study of Philippians, we've learned that Paul wrote this letter while he was in jail. We learned the church at Philippi was a good church and was not caught up in a bunch of problems. Paul was proud of them and wrote to encourage them.

In last week's message, I shared with you that unity and the mindset of Christ are essential for church health. Verse 12 and 13 could have gone into last week's message, or they could easily be developed into a complete message themselves. For sake of continuity and transition from last week's message, I'll read them first today.

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 2:12-13

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, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

These two verse are often quoted. If we were to isolate the line *work out your salvation with fear and trembling*, we could come up with false theology. When it is spoken alongside other verses about salvation, we can see Paul is not saying that people save themselves. Nor is he saying salvation has to come through an emotional experience.

When we come to faith in Christ, we repent of sin, we trust in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, you already know this. This phrase *work out your salvation with fear and trembling* is a reference to the sincerity, the genuine state of repentance you must be in. It's your personal salvation. You cannot be saved because of someone else other than Jesus.

DON'T GRUMBLE OR ARGUE

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 2:14-16

Do everything without grumbling or arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may become blameless and pure, "children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation." Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky ¹⁶ as you hold firmly to the word of life.

When we get to this scripture, this section in my Bible is titled "do everything without grumbling". I chuckle and wondered why I would even preach this message, because it's great to stand here and say that grumbling is not a problem here, as far as I am aware.

ILLUSTRATION: This past week, I spoke with an older pastor friend who's known me since I was a very young boy. He and I talked about what's going on in our churches. He's been pastor of the same church for many years, and he said they are the smallest they've ever been but the spirit in the church is good. My response was that this church is smaller than it once was, but that everyone is unified. We talked about how it is great not having to deal with any serious conflicts. **THAT IS GREAT!**

ILLUSTRATION: Another friend in another state has called me several times recently. He told me about some unpleasant concerns he's dealing with. He asked me what was going on here, and I told him about all the different things going on – I did not have anything unpleasant to share with him. We were rather short-staffed this week due to things going on in our staff members' lives. By Friday, I was really tired, but reflecting back on the week, my tiredness did not have anything to do with dealing with anything negative.

EXPLANATION: When Paul says “do everything without grumbling or arguing... your translation might say murmurings and disputings. The curious side of me wonders why he inserted that statement because the Philippian church was a good church. I think it’s because he knew human nature. He knew that if there was anything that could stifle the spread of the Gospel, it was grumbling and arguing. Do you know the difference between grumbling and arguing, at least from my perspective? Grumbling is a one-sided argument. The grumbler just grumbles. The Greek word Paul used is γογγυσμὸς “gong-goos-mos” which means secret displeasure, not openly avowed.

APPLICATION: Grumbling can expand to other grumblers, like an avalanche, if you feed it. The best thing to do is cut it off. Don’t join the grumbler in his grumbling. We had one grumbler here who grumbled about everything. If you know who I am talking about, just keep it to yourself, because we don’t want to make him famous. It didn’t matter what happened, he had some kind of grumbling, negative comment. Finally, because no one was joining his little mealy mouth grumbling campaigns, he left.

Grumblers get caught off guard when people around him or her go silent.

When we are reminded that the whole reason we are together is to worship God and further the work of Jesus Christ, then how does grumbling and arguing fit into those goals? I mean, really, why would anyone want to come to worship God and be involved spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ, only to be met in the lobby with someone who is constantly grumbling about something?

Is your time limited like mine is? I am sure it is. Why would anyone want to spend their limited time with an organization full of people who sit around and complain?

You’ve done a good job about not feeding grumblers. I spoke with a man in our church about an idea I had and asked if he thought the idea would upset some people. His response: I think we are all past that. How wonderful!

EXPLANATION: Next, we have arguing or disputing. If we take this at face value without looking into the meaning of this verse, we could easily conclude that it is always wrong to disagree.

Paul used the Greek word διαλογισμός (dee-al-og-is-mos) which means “reasoning that is self-based and therefore confused – especially as it contributes to reinforcing others in discussion to remain in their initial prejudice.” Words fascinate me and once I get started... it’s down the rabbit hole I go!

This unique word has a parent word – that’s the easiest way to explain it, which properly means - listen closely - “to go back-and-forth when evaluating, in a way that typically leads to a *confused conclusion*. The term implies one confused mind interacting with other confused minds, each further reinforcing the original confusion.” This is the best description I’ve ever heard for our U. S. Congress!

I Corinthians 14 says, “God is not the author of confusion but of peace...” If God is not the author of confusion, then who is? That’s a clear answer: Satan... or people who argue with confused minds who argue with others with confused minds, which reinforces the confusion. Have you ever left a meeting and asked yourself “What was that all about?”

When people walk in these doors, I hope they sense the presence of peace. When people talk with you and me, I hope they sense the presence of peace.

Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky ¹⁶ as you hold firmly to the word of life. Your translation may say “like lights in this world”. Either way, I don’t have time to tell you about the translation differences between sky and world, but I want to focus on the word “stars” or “lights”. The word here means luminary, or light-producing source.

ILLUSTRATION: Charles Ellicott, an Anglican minister in the 1800s noted this word luminary. Since Christians are the lesser lights of heaven, dim in comparison with the Sun (S-U-N) of Righteousness, we are the luminaries reflecting his light to the world. Isn’t that a beautiful picture?

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 2:16

Paul goes on: *And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain.*

DO EMPTY YOURSELVES FOR THE CAUSE OF CHRIST

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 2:17

But 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. ¹⁸ So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

There were a few occurrences of the drink offering in the Old Testament. When we think of an offering, we think of it as being an animal or some type of grain. The Old Testament said that smoke made a “soothing aroma to the Lord”. The offerings and sacrifices accomplished several things: they were an open demonstration of repentance, and they were also praise offerings to the Lord. There are a few instances of drink offerings, that is offerings that were poured out. Some believe that these offerings were metaphors of giving God food.

In the New Testament, Jesus was very clear about the drink offering as a metaphor for his blood being shed while on the cross. In Luke 22:20 he said, *“This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant of My blood.”*

Paul used this metaphor twice, comparing the end of his ministry and life with wine being poured onto an altar. Think about it, when something is poured out onto a rock altar or onto the ground, it cannot be reconstituted into the cup from which it was poured. Paul completely poured his life into his ministry in much the same way. His strongest desire was that in the end, he would know that all his efforts for the new church were worth the effort he had put into them.

I am sure Paul knew that his labor for the Lord was worth all the effort, but he couldn't see the future. He didn't know that 2,000 years later, I'd be standing here talking about him. He did know human nature and the power of Satan, and he knew this strong church at Philippi could die in one generation. Summing up these scriptures about grumbling, arguing, and self-sacrifice, Paul was saying, “Check your attitude and don't be distracted from the task of pouring out yourselves for the cause of Christ.”

APPLICATION: As I prepared the message this morning, this old saying came to my mind: As a church, we must keep the main thing the main thing. We must

remind ourselves that the church is not a business, although it has business-like elements. We must remind ourselves that the church is not a social club, although there are many opportunities for socializing. The church has specific purposes as we see in the book of Acts – to worship God, to reach people for Christ, to minister to one another and others, and to equip believers. That’s a plateful. There is no need to add to it.

APPLICATION: As I’ve noted before in this study in Philippians, there is application for both the individual and the larger church body. As individuals, do we bring out attitudes into check? Are we pouring out ourselves for the furtherance of the Gospel?

How we do it individually translates to how we do it as a body of believers.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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