

**Philippians: Selfless Living Sacrifice**  
**Sermon 10-14-18**  
**Pastor Curtis Dehmey**

**Philippians 2:12-18**

<sup>12</sup>Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; <sup>13</sup>for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

<sup>14</sup>Do all things without murmuring and arguing, <sup>15</sup>so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world. <sup>16</sup>It is by your holding fast to the word of life that I can boast on the day of Christ that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. <sup>17</sup>But even if I am being poured out as a libation over the sacrifice and the offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you— <sup>18</sup>and in the same way you also must be glad and rejoice with me.

**Message:**

(Play video at [https://store.rightnow.org/Products/Downloadable\\_Video\\_Illustrations/6203/A\\_Light\\_in\\_the\\_Darkness](https://store.rightnow.org/Products/Downloadable_Video_Illustrations/6203/A_Light_in_the_Darkness)) We live in a world that can be very dark at times. Those of us who live in the Christian bubble or in the church though, can be ignorant of the pervasiveness of darkness in the world. People who are hurting. People who are longing for something more. People who are lonely. Maybe some of you are feeling the weight of this darkness this morning. Some of us are easily swayed to such darkness. In a longing to be included and to be part of something bigger than ourselves, we decide to join in on the ways of our contemporaries. We decide to go by old covenant ways, “Eye for an eye. Tooth for a tooth.” We decide to seek revenge for being wronged. We decide to hold grudges. We participate in gossip and slander. We decide to lie. We decide to seek what’s best for me rather than what’s best for we. We decide to prove how right we are at all costs. We make all these poor decisions that participate in darkness because we’re trying to tend to a deeper need or a deeper hurt inside of us all. If we allow it, Jesus meets us in this deep place.

If you recall, Paul is held in prison in Rome during the time of writing this letter. He’s in the middle of the darkness. So as you can imagine, Paul’s contemplating the end of his life because this could, very well, be the end for him. So some of his teaching and instruction sounds more like a farewell address. And

remember that scholars believe that Paul addresses these “issues” to the Philippians not because they are the ones having the issues, but more likely that Paul is experiencing these issues in Rome and doesn’t want the Philippians to experience these same issues. So Paul is reacting to issues in Rome by trying to be proactive for Philippi.

Paul senses that the people have heavily relied on his teaching. So the question becomes, “What happens when I’m gone?” <sup>12</sup>“Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling...” A little explanation here. To “...work out your own salvation...” isn’t to say that these believers don’t already have salvation in Christ. They do. And it’s also not to say that they have to work towards something or earn something to have salvation. What Paul’s talking about here is to rely on your salvation and to use your faith in Christ to discern the issues of the day. In other words, rely on your faith in Christ, the salvation that Christ has placed in you and given you. “...with fear and trembling...” isn’t about a fear mongering or dictatorial God. We would better understand this as “awe.” In other words, discern the heart of God, relying on Him in you, in awe of his glory, His wisdom and His presence in your life. To reiterate this notion, Paul says in the following verse, “...for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” Paul is encouraging us that we have the capacity to discern the heart of God. Because we have salvation in Christ, we can also discern God in our lives. It’s impossible to give instruction for every contemporary issue, but we have Christ in us and the movement of the Spirit to guide us.

How do we know that salvation is in us? How do we know that we are capable of working out our salvation? Well...what does it produce? Have you experienced transformation in your heart? Have you experienced light in the midst of darkness? Have you experienced love over hate because of your salvation in Christ? In these farewell thoughts, Paul echoes Moses farewell thoughts to the Israelites. In Deuteronomy 31:27, Moses says, “For I know well how rebellious and stubborn you are. If you already have been so rebellious toward the Lord while I am still alive among you, how much more after my death!” As well in 32:5, Moses says, “...yet his degenerate children have dealt falsely with him, a perverse and crooked generation.” Similarly Paul says, <sup>14</sup>“Do all things without murmuring and arguing, <sup>15</sup>so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation...” Paul is saying, “Don’t be like those people.” The people who argue and murmur. The people who spread rumors and participate in gossip. Don’t participate in the wicked ways of the world. Biblical Scholar, Morna Hooker says, “The Israelites are accused of being blameworthy, and described as no children of God, a crooked

and perverse generation. Paul now turns this idea inside out: Christians have *become* God's children, and they must therefore live *without* blame in *the midst of* a crooked and perverse generation." You are called to a higher calling. You are called to be better. Not in a self-righteous way. Not to snub your nose at those who choose to participate in wicked ways. What's Paul's reason not to participate in the world in these ways? To "...shine like stars in the world. <sup>16</sup>It is by your holding fast to the word of life that I can boast on the day of Christ that I did not run in vain or labor in vain." You see, the people of this world are longing for a way out of darkness. The people of this world are longing to be called into the light of Christ. The people of this world are longing to serve a larger purpose than themselves. They are longing for a savior from their pain. They are longing for a savior from their demise. Why do you think many people love superhero movies? Or heroes in general? They long for someone to admire and to look up to. People want to aspire to be something greater than what they are. The best version of themselves. And we can't be the best version of ourselves without Jesus in our lives. Some of you who are teachers, or who have taught, you can relate to Paul's words here. Nothing would make Paul prouder than to go before the throne of God and be able to brag about his pupils and how they have labored in the name of Christ. How they have sought Jesus in every opportunity. How they did not choose the ways of the world, but they sought to bring the light, life, love and hope of Jesus Christ. It would be Paul's greatest honor to brag about the Philippians in this way.

What's beautiful about this last sentence of our passage is that by Paul's words and actions, he models for us the very thing he's teaching. What it looks like to BE the children of God. "<sup>17</sup>But even if I am being poured out as a libation over the sacrifice and the offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you— <sup>18</sup>and in the same way you also must be glad and rejoice with me." Morna Hooker notes, "Libations of wine were the regular accompaniment to both Jewish burnt offerings and pagan sacrifices." If sacrificing his life means that it will inspire and bless another's faith, Paul is willing to make that sacrifice. Again, Paul embodies both Jesus' life and His DEATH. It's not just about living like Christ, but it's also about dying like Christ. If Paul's death means greater faithfulness for the Philippian people, then praise the Lord. The threat of martyrdom and death will not diminish Paul's witness and his joy. In this way, Paul is embracing the selfless nature of the cross. Paul is embracing his life as a living sacrifice for greatness of the Kingdom of God.

If we proclaim Christ as our Lord and Savior, that He has saved us from our sins, the ethical demand is to live and to die like Christ. This is a high demand. This is a high price to pay. Our obedience though is not from a mere set of rules or of guilt. Our obedience comes from a place of never-ending and deep gratitude for

what Christ has done for us. To “work out our salvation” is to become the best versions that we can be in Christ. To “...shine like stars in the world.” Because here’s the thing, to not make any effort to live more like Christ, to be more like Christ, is to deny the salvific power that Christ has in our lives. To simply stagnate or to coast is to deny the fervent and passionate nature of the gospel. If Jesus has actually transformed our lives and has freed us to be better than we could ever be, then it demands us to shine our light. Christ is in you. Christ is in me. It’s not for selfish gain. We don’t believe in Christ just for our personal advancement. We have a greater calling than that. We have a greater calling to the Kingdom of God.

Providence, first, let me commend you. You are being a living sacrifice. You are allowing yourself, just as Paul, to be poured out. With bringing Abundant Life into this church you are being sacrificial. You’re sharing a space that many of you have paid for and built with your own hands. You’re sharing space that you have put your blood, sweat and tears into. You are blessing another community for the Kingdom of God. You are thinking beyond yourself. You are shining your light with your generosity. That speaks very highly of the maturity in your faith and your character. And I hope that now that you have a taste, once again, of what a blessing it is to bless others. Now that you have a taste of what it means to sacrifice for the greatness of the Kingdom. It’s a sweet taste. I hope that this action of bringing Abundant Life into this building will inspire you onto more sacrificial actions. I’d hate for us to stand before the Lord after our death and regret what could have been. That we would wonder how we could have embodied more sacrificial living. How we could have done more to bless the Kingdom of God. How we could have expressed our gratitude for Christ’s sacrifice on the cross for our sins even more. I believe we have more opportunities to be poured out as a living sacrifice. I don’t know what that is, but you do. As you discern what the Spirit of God is saying to you, how can you be more sacrificial in your living? How can you sacrifice for your next door neighbor? How can you sacrifice for your co-worker? How can you sacrifice for your family? And this is all intended to be a blessing to them and to the Kingdom of God. This isn’t for personal advancement, but to be the witness in which we are called in the name of Christ.

In the big “C” Church, we have injured our witness for too long. We argue and we murmur. Even in the Church of the Brethren we are a mirror image right now of what happens on capital hill. How can we be a light if we’re acting the same as our contemporaries? There is nothing that makes us different or unique in that example. For too long we have argued over theological differences that I would categorize as secondary and tertiary issues while there plenty of people who are hurting in this world. People who we have ignored because of our internal issues. People who need hope. People who need love. People who need purpose.

People who need a new identity. The cost is so great people. And the more we argue among ourselves over insider issues, the more we injure our witness. I'm calling and Christ is calling you to be better than this. See beyond the differences and proclaim the light of Christ.

To close, I want show you a music video by Kari Jobe titled, "We Are." The lyrics to the song are printed in your bulletin. Follow along and meditate on these words. (Play video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B07iK9uh9qY>) If you're living in the darkness, I want to invite you out of that darkness into the light of Christ today. Better yet, I pray that one of us who live in the light of Christ, would bring that light into your darkness. Because Christ is in us, we are called to be the light of the world. We are called to, "...shine like the stars." Let's not be like our contemporaries. Let's heal where there is pain. Let's be gracious where there is shame. Let's share faithfulness where there is fear. For Christ conquered all these things on the cross for you and for me. Let's be the selfless living sacrifice. Let's hold fast to the word of life. Let's pour out our lives in the name of Jesus Christ. Will you let your light shine? Amen.