

"Prove Yourselves to Be Children of God"
(Philippians 2:14-16)

Introduction: The Lord calls us to be witnesses in the world, but how are we to witness of Him? Is it that we all are to take courses on evangelism, go door to door, stop everyone on the street that you see and tell them about Christ? These are ways of witnessing to be sure. But is this what Christ means when He says that you are the light of the world? Is He referring only to those who are actively witnessing or to all of His children? To put it another way, we might ask, do you have to witness to be a witness, or are you a witness whether you realize it or not?

Paul has just given to the Philippians the command to work out their salvation with fear and trembling, knowing that as they are obedient to this command, and as they persevere in the righteous acts of the saints, that it is God who is giving them the ability to do so. But we must never forget, that even though God is the One working these things out in our lives, that the works do flow nevertheless from us. That is, we are the ones who are actually doing the works. Yes we do them by the strength of God, but we are the ones doing them nonetheless. When Paul said that we ought to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, because God is at work in us, he was not pointing to the accomplished work of Christ, but the works which must be in our lives as a part of our sanctification if our profession of faith is a genuine one. We must be doing the works of God, if we are truly saved. And the fact that every Christian will be doing these works in some measure, means that to some degree each of us is bearing witness to the truth of the Gospel by a changed life. You are living epistles known and read by all men. You, by your life, are either showing forth a good witness and bearing fruit from a sincere heart, or putting forth a stumbling block in front of men if they do not see any difference between you who profess godliness, and the rest of the world that doesn't. As a matter of fact, sometimes professing Christians are even more worldly than the worldly. But that is obviously not the will of God.

After telling the Philippians that they must work out their salvation, that they must persevere in good works in the fear of God, lest they should in the end prove not to be in Christ at all, he then gives to them some directions on what to do to advance their sanctification. And what this text is telling us this morning is,

To become a child of God above reproach, it is necessary that you do His will without murmuring and without argument.

I. The Lord Bids You to Become Children Above Reproach in the Midst of this World. (v. 15)

A. He Bids You to Become Blameless and Innocent.

1. The sanctification of life which must accompany any true justification is becoming in this life what you are already in Christ.

a. In Christ, you have given to you as a free gift a perfect, an impeccable record.

(i) The guilt of your sins is entirely washed away, and you are given an absolutely flawless record of holiness by the standard of the Law.

(ii) Because of your sin being taken upon Christ,

and His righteousness given to you, God declares you to be not guilty, and to be as one who has kept the Law perfectly.

- (iii) It would be like a child earning F's in all his classes, only to find all A's on his report card. What he in fact earned was a failing grade in all of his classes, but what was declared of him on his report card was that he fully met the requirements of every class.
- (iv) You have earned all F's by the standard of the Law, but Christ has earned all A's, and in Him, you receive those excellent marks.
- (v) You have merited only the wrath of God by your works, but Christ has merited life by His.
- (vi) And what He has done becomes yours when you embrace Him in faith and repentance.

b. *But God desires not only that you have the perfect righteousness of Christ, but that your actual life be transformed to match it.*

- (i) He not only wants you to have the A's to get through school with honors, but He wants you to have the intellectual ability as well.
- (ii) The perfect righteousness and removal of your guilt gives you a title to heaven, but God also wants you to be fit for heaven.
- (iii) And God does indeed fit all of His children for heaven while in this earth through the process of sanctification.
- (iv) Sanctification is the walk matching the profession. It is actually becoming holy.
- (v) The Roman church believes that God may not declare a man just except on the basis of his actually being just in himself. A man must therefore become entirely sanctified before he can be justified.
- (vi) But the Protestant churches teach that a man may only be just before God by the righteousness of Christ, which is given through faith.
- (vii) But to think that that is all that is important to God is an which we can make.
- (viii) God also desires truth in the inmost being. He desires Christ-likeness, holiness in our lives.
- (ix) And if there is no holiness of life, no purification from sin, then there has been no justification by God either.

2. *Here, Paul sums up the whole idea of personal holiness with the words blameless and innocent.*

a. *The word "blameless" has reference to the way that you appear to others.*

- (i) When others look at your life, they see one who cannot be blamed in anything.
- (ii) It is the word which is used to describe Zacharias and Elizabeth. "IN THE DAYS OF HEROD, KING OF JUDEA, THERE WAS A CERTAIN

PRIEST NAMED ZACHARIAS, OF THE DIVISION OF ABIJAH; AND HE HAD A WIFE FROM THE DAUGHTERS OF AARON, AND HER NAME WAS ELIZABETH. AND THEY WERE BOTH RIGHTEOUS IN THE SIGHT OF GOD, WALKING BLAMELESSLY IN ALL THE COMMANDMENTS AND REQUIREMENTS OF THE LORD" (Luke 1:5-6).

- (iii) It was the word used to describe the life of the apostle Paul in relation to the Law. "AS TO ZEAL, A PERSECUTOR OF THE CHURCH; AS TO THE RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH IS IN THE LAW, FOUND BLAMELESS" (Phil. 3:6).
- (iv) It is the outward conformity to the will of God as it is revealed in the Scriptures.
- (v) Sanctification has first of all to do with a conformity of action to the Word; it has to do with having an established pattern of godly living.

b. *The word "innocent" has reference to what is in your heart.*

- (i) Outward conformity to the Word is not enough.
- (ii) Paul was blameless in his conformity to the Law, and yet, outside of Christ, all of his righteousness was filthy rags, for though he outwardly did some good, yet there was not a heart purified by faith; there were still evil motives.
- (iii) And so the Christian is to become innocent as well, meaning that he is to have a heart which is pure, unmixed with evil.
- (iv) In the heart of the most sincere believer there is yet much unmortified sin. There is much evil and wickedness. "THE HEART IS MORE DECEITFUL THAN ALL ELSE AND IS DESPERATELY SICK; WHO CAN UNDERSTAND IT?" (Jer. 17:9).
- (v) But sanctification is the putting to death the deeds of the flesh, as well as the inward inclinations which cause you to commit them.
- (vi) It is the putting off of the old patterns and the putting on of the new.
- (vii) It is the renewal of the whole man in the image of Christ, in true knowledge, righteousness and holiness.

B. *In Becoming in Reality What You Are Positionally in Christ, You Will Be as Lights-which Appear in the Midst- of Great Darkness.*

1. *To be blameless and innocent is to be children of God who are above reproach.*
 - a. *When you are outwardly blameless in your behavior, as well as inwardly being cleansed in your heart, then you will appear as the children of God in the world.*
 - b. *As a matter of fact, the word here translated "above reproach" has reference to that actual faultlessness with which you will be presented before the Lord on that final day.*

- (i) "NOW TO HIM WHO IS ABLE TO KEEP YOU FROM STUMBLING, AND TO MAKE YOU STAND IN THE PRESENCE OF HIS GLORY BLAMELESS WITH GREAT JOY" (Jude 24).
- (ii) It is that blamelessness which is Christ's, and which is ours in Christ, our positional blamelessness, and not that which is actually ours.
- (iii) To be outwardly conforming to God's will, and inwardly conforming to it in our hearts could not be possible unless we were in Christ.
- (iv) And the fact that these things are present, means that through the new birth we are the children of God in reality, and therefore have all the benefits of Christ, including His perfect righteousness.
- (v) And so we are the children of God in the midst of this world.

2. *And having these characteristics truly implanted in our hearts makes us stand out as lights in the world as the world now exists.*

a. *Paul said that the world then was a crooked and perverse generation.*

- (i) It was a dishonest and depraved society.
- (ii) It is the kingdom of darkness into which the kingdom of heaven is intruded.

b. *And this is no less true today if not more so in our own generation.*

- (i) All around us we see moral and spiritual darkness.
- (ii) Even in times when true religion seems to be flourishing, there is still a great deal of darkness, only it is more carefully hidden.
- (iii) How much more so when the world we live in is full of the acts of wickedness, as well as the churches?

c. *And so if you live as sanctified believers, you will stand out as lights in the darkness.*

- (i) This world has rarely seen many Christians who have sought to live up to all of God's will.
- (ii) There have been a few lights of brilliance in the past: Moses, Joshua, Abraham, David, Paul, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Edwards, Whitefield, and others.
- (iii) There have also been some lesser lights shining in every age.
- (iv) But today especially, there are so few bright lights in the midst of this darkness.
- (v) Most are afraid to let their light shine before men, because of the repercussions from the ungodly.
- (vi) Some are powerless to shine beyond a dimly burning wick, perhaps because of too much love for the world and the things of the world which quench that light.
- (vii) And some, if they gain the courage to stand against the world, purify themselves from it, and begin actually to do what God commands, often have to face the covenant community's

persecution, for many of us don't like it when our neighbor's light exceeds our own.

- (viii) But the command is there; the Lord requires of us that we be sanctified saints, or we will find in the end that we are no saints at all.
- (ix) What then does this text tell us about true sanctification and how to obtain it?

II. *In Order to Be these Shining Stars for Christ's Glory, To Progress in Your Sanctification, You Must Learn to Do all that He Commands, with the Right Inward Motives (v. 14, 16).*

A. *You Must First of All Be One Who Is a Doer of the Word.*

1. *There must be the fruit of obedience to the Lord.*

- a. *Paul says here, "Do!"*
- b. *There must be action; there cannot be true religion without it.*
 - (i) *You cannot expect to sit passively year after year, turning a deaf ear to the commands of God, or becoming indifferent towards them, and become sanctified.*
 - (ii) *If this is what your heart is like, then you must first of all strengthen your commitment to obedience and do what your Lord commands.*
 - (iii) *And of course, if there is no obedience at all in your life to His word, then you are far from the kingdom of God. Jesus said, "HE WHO ABIDES IN ME, AND I IN HIM, HE BEARS MUCH FRUIT" (John 15:5), and "EVERY BRANCH IN ME THAT DOES NOT BEAR FRUIT, HE TAKES AWAY" (v. 2).*
 - (iv) *So first, there must be obedience.*

2. *But this obedience must be universal. (All things).*

- a. *In the context it is obvious that Paul is referring to only the things which are lawful. for unlawful deeds are always condemned by Scripture.*
- b. *But it is also clear in Scripture that obedience must be universal, because one cannot be obedient and disobedient at the same time. There is no true obedience unless there is universal obedience to His commandments.*
 - (i) *One cannot claim to be loving and serving God because he does not lie, while at the same time he indulges in sexual sin.*
 - (ii) *Even so one's profession of faith is worthless if he does some of the things that God commands, and leaves the other commandments undone.*
 - (iii) *Sanctification takes place in the whole of man, or it does not take place at all.*
 - (iv) *And so secondly, you must read the Word of God, praying that the Lord would show you all of your duty to Him, and be willing, truly willing, to do all of it.*

B. *But This Universal Obedience Will Be of No Use to Your Sanctification and It Will Be Unacceptable to God Unless Your Heart Is Also Engaged in It.*

- 1. *If inwardly you really do not want to serve the Lord, your service will not be acceptable to God.*

- a. *How do you know whether or not your heart is in it?*
 - ti) Do you grumble and complain against God's commands, either to yourself or to others? To grumble against them is to be opposed to them in some degree.
 - (ii) Maybe you don't think that you are, but on the other hand, is your heart full of a willingness to do whatever He says?
 - (iii) To the extent that you are not willing to do His will, you are in fact opposed to it.
 - (iv) Furthermore, do you find yourself trying to dispute His Word in your mind, arguing against it, trying to pull down the requirement to match your actual behavior? Do you children try to convince yourselves that you are being obedient to your parents when you do what they ask, but do it grudgingly?
 - (v) The conscience is sometimes soothed by lowering the requirements, so that you look better to yourself than you actually are.
 - (vi) But as long as you are opposed to the will of God in your heart, you cannot render anything in the way of obedience.

- b. *Forced obedience is not true obedience; it is not acceptable to God.*
 - (i) It is like the child who when being disciplined is forced to sit down in a chair, while in his heart he is still standing.
 - (ii) Yes, it is true that even the regenerate will have to fight against these inclinations within their hearts which are contrary to the will of God, so that they both want to do and don't want to do the will of God at the same time.
 - (iii) But the complete absence of any desire to do His will, out of love for Him, is purely forced and is unacceptable to Him.

2. *It is not only not acceptable to Him, but you will also make no progress in your personal sanctification if your heart is not in it.*
 - a. *Sanctification is a change of heart; it is a purifying of the old sinful desires, replacing them with new godly ones.*
 - b. *If the desires of the heart are not changing to conform to the Lord's will, then sanctification is not taking place, and you will grow stagnant.*

3. *But true sanctification may be measured by the willingness of the heart to give itself wholly to the service of God with great joy.*
 - a. *It does not grumble against the commandments, but embraces them with joy, "OH HOW I LOVE THY LAW, IT IS MY MEDITATION ALL THE DAY" (Ps. 119:97).*
 - b. *It also does not seek to lower the standard, but exalts it to its proper place, realizing that its obedience will always fall short. but giving increasing glory to God that that imperfection has*

been cleansed by the blood of Christ.

- c. And so thirdly you must not grumble and dispute with the Word of God, but receive it into a heart prepared by grace as obedient servants.*

C. And Lastly, You Must Hold Fast the Word of Life.

- 1. The Philippians had to hold fast the faithful Word or in the end, Paul says his labors would have been in vain.*

- a. Paul wanted to know that all of his work was not for nothing.*

- (i) All of us want to know that in some way our lives have not been fruitless.*
- (ii) We all want to see something good that will remain. As a matter of fact, to see good is a gift of God, "I KNOW THAT THERE IS NOTHING BETTER FOR THEM THAN TO REJOICE AND TO DO GOOD IN ONE'S LIFETIME; MOREOVER, THAT EVERY MAN WHO EATS AND DRINKS SEES GOOD IN ALL HIS LABOR -- IT IS THE GIFT OF GOD" (Ecc. 3:12-13).*
- (iii) Paul desired that he might have something to boast of in the day of Christ's judgment. Not that he would boast in himself, but in what Christ had accomplished through him (Rom. 15:17-18).*

- b. And the only measurable way that he could know that his life bore fruit in the Philippians was if they continued to cling to Christ and His Word.*

- ti) He says that his running and laboring would not be in vain if they were to "DO ALL THINGS WITHOUT GRUMBLING OR DISPUTING . . . HOLDING FAST THE WORD OF LIFE."*
- (ii) There is only one other place in Scripture where the phrase "Word of life" appears, and that is in 1 John 1:1, "WHAT WAS FROM THE BEGINNING, WHAT WE HAVE HEARD, WHAT WE HAVE SEEN WITH OUR EYES, WHAT WE BEHELD AND OUR HANDS HANDLED, CONCERNING THE WORD OF LIFE."*
- (iii) In this text, the Word of Life is referring to Christ, and this is not strange considering that Christ is the incarnate Word of God.*
- (iv) If the Philippians held fast to Christ, who is life itself, and held fast to His Word, which is the perfect expression of His will, he knows that his cause to boast will be sure. They will progress in sanctification, and they will stand before the Lord in that day.*

- 2. And so it is with you. You must hold fast to Christ and to His Word if you are to persevere in sanctification.*

- a. What is the secret to doing the will of God, both outwardly in your actions, and inwardly in your heart? What did the saints of long ago know that we don't, and knowing it, what is it they did that we are not doing? It is holding fast to the Lord Jesus Christ and to His Word.*

- b. O yes, we like to think that we are clinging with*

all our might to Him, but are we really? Are we really laying claim to the same commitment that seized Paul, Luther, and Whitefield? Are we absorbed in His Word and will the way that they were? If so, why are we not bearing the fruit that they did? Why are we not living the devoted lives that they were? Why are we not saying with the apostle Paul, "To live is Christ and to die is gain!"

- c. People of God, examine your hearts in the light of what Paul has told us this morning. Take a good look at your life and see if it in any way approximates that of your Lord, and if it is continuing to become more and more conformed to His will, both in your actions, and in your heart. And then cling with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength unto Christ and unto His Word, not grumbling against it or arguing with it, but giving whole-hearted obedience to it the rest of your lives. This is pleasing to God; this is an acceptable sacrifice in His sight, and in this way you will grow into the image of Christ. Amen.