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A Servant's Heart **Philippians 2:14-30**

Intro: Paul has been stressing to the Philippian believers the need to work together in unity since **1:27**. He has giving several exhortations and the premier example of humility of Jesus in setting aside His heavenly glory for the eternal benefit of lost sinners. Now, Paul moves on to present the Philippians with some practical applications of all that he's said before. This is a common format for the Pauline Epistles. He will lay out wonderful doctrines at the start and then he will say, in effect, this is what this truth should look like in your life. That's exactly what he's doing right here.

14-16 – Here is where the rubber meets the road. Paul exhorts the Philippians to make the truth he's disseminated to them a reality in their everyday lives and he does so because that's really the only place it counts. You can pick up a book out of the library on any sport in the world and you can learn all the rules and discover all the winning strategies but none of that will make you a good athlete in that sport. You only become proficient at the sport by playing it - by getting out there and doing the work: following the rules, executing the strategies, building the muscle memory.

That's where the real Christian life is learned – not in the church, not in a seminary but out in the world. Christians aren't to be of this world but we are called to be in this world. We're called to live for Jesus in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. This was Paul's desire for the Philippians and its God's desire for us today. We're not to retreat from the world; we're to live for God in the world.

How do we do this? 1st, we must recognize that the world truly is crooked and perverse. Now, you might look around and say that the world definitely has its problems but it's not all that bad; but you would be wrong. The only reason there's any good in the world today is because the light of Jesus provided by Christians is being refracted in the atmosphere to the point that some Christian virtues are scattered around and the world doesn't look so bad in that light. But strip away the presence and influence of Christianity and the blackness of sin is all that remains. Christians today must constantly be aware of the darkness and must determine to be a contrast to it.

The world has its goals: pleasure, success, sex, money, esteem. But these shouldn't be the goals of Christians. God does indeed grant us a measure of success, money, sex, esteem and pleasure in this life according to His will and we are to be thankful for it, but these are not to be our goals. In our text, Paul lists 3 specific Christian goals. The life that's to be lived by Christians in the world is one of submission to God (14); blameless before other people and blameless in the sight of God as well. We are to be without rebuke as His children.

Submission to God – Anyone can claim to be submitted to God but how can you tell? Paul says that the token of our submission is an attitude of life that does things without complaining or disputing. Disputing refers to the inward reasoning of the mind and is derived from the Greek word from which we get dialogue. Dialogue is not a virtue in the Bible, at least not between people and God. God doesn't want us to dispute with Him; He wants us to listen and to do what He says. The word points to the reasoning that goes on in the human heart in rebellion against God's will.

In the OT, grumbling (complaining) often describes the rebellion of the Israelites during their years in the wilderness. When they were in Egypt they grumbled because they were in Egypt. When they left Egypt, they grumbled because they were out of Egypt. They complained when they had nothing to eat, and when God provided manna to eat they complained that they didn't have meat. They grumbled for 40 years, and when they got into the Promised Land they were still grumbling. Many of us are like that. God blesses us, but there's always something we don't like about it. He blesses us more, but it's still not satisfactory.

We've got to get out of the habit of disputing or complaining when God asks us to do things. This is most evident in modern Christians in the area of holy living and giving. God's Word is fairly clear on both counts but still, a lot of Christians put a lot of effort into discovering teachings that will provide loopholes in order to keep up appearances. "Does God really mean that I have to do it just like that, or can I do it some other way?" This is what Paul means by arguing. We're to live as Christians without complaining or arguing. When God says we're to do something, we're to do it because we trust Him and want to obey the One who knows what is really best for His children. Through the display of a non-complaining spirit, we show

ourselves to be true followers of God.

Blameless in the sight of others – Paul also adds harmless or pure: without mixture. This word was used to describe pure gold, pure copper or any metal free of impurities. Similarly, our lives are to be without mixture before others. We're to be aboveboard in all our dealings. We're not to say one thing and do another. We're not to hold back part of the truth or misrepresent it. We're also to be blameless. Just as the inward arguing has an outward expression in complaining, this good inward characteristic of purity has an outward expression in being blameless. There's to be nothing to give occasion for scandal. We're not just to avoid impropriety but avoid even the appearance of it.

Blameless or without fault before God - The word for without fault is also used in [Eph 1:4](#), translated blameless. It refers to a Christian's relationship to God. Paul says God chose us in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before Him... This doesn't mean that there'll ever be a time in our lives when we'll be without sin. It simply means our lives will be lived in the sight of God in such a way that they will be open before Him. There'll be no barriers between us and God.

Holding fast can also be translated as holding forth. In this context, both meanings are accurate and Paul may have meant it in this dual sense. We hold fast or hold strong to the word of life because it's God's truth and it has power and authority. But, we are also to hold forth the word of life: both to declare it and to live it. Words must be backed up with lifestyle, but lifestyle must also be explained with words. This is how we are to be lights in the world. Lights are used to make things evident, to guide, to warn, to bring cheer, to make things safe. Do any of these uses of light describe your Christian life? Paul is not telling us to be lights – he's just stating a fact: we are lights in the world. The only question is: how brightly do we shine?

Paul's giving us quite a tall order! He's telling us to set aside selfish ambition and humbly consider others over ourselves. Then he has the audacity to bring up the example of Jesus and tells us to copy it. That's impossible! You might think that but you would be wrong. True, we'll never be completely like Jesus in this life. In fact, much of our sanctification will consist in realizing how much unlike Him we still are. But we are to become like Him and although God's standards are high, He provides supernatural resources to

meet them. God helps the Christian to put the highest of these principles into practice.

Some may still object, “That might be fine in theory, but difficult to practice. How can we meet such standards?” Paul never implies that it is easy but he does show us that it’s not impossible. To prove it’s possible in practice, Paul offers 3 human examples: himself, an apostle; Timothy, a young minister; and Epaphroditus, a layman. Paul uses these human examples to show that the things he’s written about are possible for those who surrender their life to God.

17-18 – Paul only uses 1 verse to describe his own attitude and conduct but in it he offers a very potent image. The Greek verb translated poured out describes a certain part of a pagan sacrificial offering. A pagan performing this offering would first kill an animal and then burn it on an altar. After this sacrifice the worshiper would make another offering called a libation. He’d take a cup of wine and pour it on the altar, pouring it on the sacrifice that’s already burning. Because the altar was hot, the liquid would immediately disappear in a puff of steam.

The Philippians are worried about Paul’s imprisonment in Rome and the fact that his life may soon be taken. Paul’s telling them that his life isn’t the important thing; their faith is. It’s a substantial and valuable offering. Paul’s sees his death as merely a drink offering poured out on the greater offering of their faith. He’s placing his own achievements, even his martyrdom, at a very low point on the scale of Christian service. He’s holding up the faith and achievements of the Philippians for admiration. This is an example of the humility and obedience to Jesus that Paul is describing.

Paul’s attitude wasn’t something that came about in an instant. His humility was the result of a long relationship with Jesus. If we want to emulate Paul in this, we must be prepared to start at the beginning. We must learn small lessons in humility before there can be large ones. Do you show such humility as you meet with other Christians? If not, you need to apply Paul’s self-evaluation to yourself and not reckon your own achievements too highly.

19-24 – The 2nd examples Paul gives is Timothy, Paul’s young protégé, a companion in travel and ministry. Paul says 4 things about Timothy. 1) Paul

had no one like-minded. This phrase could mean different things but in this context is probably means that Timothy was like Paul. Paul's been writing about the attitude of mind that thinks humbly of itself and much of others, and he's mentioned himself as an example. Now there's Timothy too. Paul has found that he was also modest and unassuming in his conduct.

2) Timothy was concerned for others. He cared for them naturally. In fact, he served them with the disposition of a true shepherd who was faithful in the care and protection of his flock. An OT example of just such a shepherd would be Jacob. In most areas of his life, Jacob was less than a model citizen but in this 1 aspect he was praiseworthy: he was a shepherd who was faithful in his care of the flocks and gentle in his treatment of them. Timothy was like that. He had a great concern for God's people, and he led them gently. Do you guide those that God has placed in your care gently? Or do you drive them on regardless of their individual condition and their ability to learn and grow? To lead them gently is the task of a good shepherd.

3) Timothy put Jesus first. In this he stood head and shoulders above those who were around him. It is easy to put other things first. You can give first place to your plans, your family, success, or anything else. But if you do, even these things will be distorted, and you will miss life's greatest blessings. Timothy put Jesus first and he put the interests of Jesus first and all the other things fell into place naturally.

4) Timothy learned to work with others (22). How often we want to be independent! We want to serve God, but the work must be our work, and it must be run according to our conception of things. A real mark of Christian maturity is the ability to work with others cooperatively under the banner and for the cause of Jesus Christ.

This says as much about Paul and his ability to work with others as it does Timothy's. He refers to Timothy's service as the service of a son with his father. This isn't the expression you'd expect in antiquity. The normal duty of a son was to obey his father and to serve him. Paul's readers would've expected that. But, Paul includes the small word with, indicating that the service of himself and Timothy was a joint service in the Lord. Paul and Timothy served together as partners in the spread of the gospel, each taking his standard and instructions from the Lord.

25-30 – Of all the men honored by Paul in his letter to the Philippians, it's this layman named Epaphroditus who gets the most attention. Here's a man almost unknown to us; yet Paul singles him out as deserving high honors because of his self-effacing service to another Christian. Paul spells it out clearly in v25. The phrases are arranged almost as if a nominating speech were being given at a political convention. Epaphroditus is said to have been 4 things: a brother, a fellow worker, a fellow soldier, and a messenger who ministered to Paul's needs. Together they are an important summary of what the Christian life should be.

1) A brother. Striking, because the ideal of brotherhood was a new thing in Paul's day, ancient society knew nothing of it. It was polarized into various groups that were constantly at odd with each other. Into this mess came the gospel of Jesus Christ and with it Christian brotherhood. Christians knew that they had all been under the curse of God because of sin and now were brought into a new relationship to God through their relationship to Christ. They also knew that this affected the way they were to look at one another. All the divisions of the Roman world were still within the church because of the social, national or religious backgrounds of the Christians, but the church just overlooked them. There was nothing exclusive about the early Christians.

2) A fellow worker. Epaphroditus was a dedicated worker who refused to quit even when facing death (27). Jesus praised the church at Ephesus for this same dedication (**Rev 2:3**).

3) A fellow soldier. Epaphroditus didn't just work with Paul; he fought side by side with him too. Paul uses this term to show that the work they were doing was more like a battle than the normal labor of peacetime. He tells us in Ephesians that, we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against the spiritual host of wickedness in the heavenly places" (**6:12**). This warfare requires the shoulder-to-shoulder, aggressive forward motion of all Christians.

4) A messenger. The climactic phrase in Paul's tribute to Epaphroditus says he was the messenger of the church at Philippi and he took care of Paul's needs. The word translated ministered in **25** is the same one translated

service in 30. Paul's saying that Epaphroditus nearly died in fulfilling this ministry. Now, some people teach that health is a birthright of Christians and that sickness is the result of sin or a lack of strong faith. Others believe sickness is always a sign of God's chastening. These ideas are not accurate and the case of Epaphroditus refutes them.

Here's a man Paul held in the highest honor. Yet he grew sick in the midst of the most unselfish Christian service. And, he was sick for some time. Philippi was about 800 miles from Rome, a traveling distance of six weeks. He was sick long enough for news of his illness to get to Philippi and the message that they had heard about it to get back to Epaphroditus. Meaning, he was sick for at least 3 months. Still, even though he was with Paul, the apostle had no indications from the Lord to heal him. Obviously, Paul didn't feel he had any right to demand physical healing even for so faithful a laborer as Epaphroditus. Paul recognized his eventual recovery as simply the mercy of God, not as a right to be demanded from God. If the case of Epaphroditus is to teach us anything, it must teach us that sickness is often a badge of honor for God's children.

This was the high point of Paul's praise for his friend Epaphroditus—praise for the kind of life that sacrifices its own interests for others. But remember, Paul's not praising a type of life that he didn't practice himself. Paul's in prison and most of his friends had deserted him. Only Timothy and Epaphroditus were left. These men were in Rome to help Paul. Yet Paul writes that he's going to send Timothy back to the Philippians because he thinks it's necessary for their well-being. He's willing to give him up. He is sending Epaphroditus back also, even though he thinks most highly of him. With all the negative circumstances Paul was in, he wasn't thinking about himself or his future. He's thinking about the needs of his fellow Christians, and he's willing to sacrifice his own interests for theirs.

After all these examples, you may still be telling yourself that this kind of life is impossible and, if you're trying to do it in your own strength, it is impossible. But, the God we serve is the God of the impossible and He does things for us and in us that we can't do for ourselves. The Bible is full of examples of this: [Gal 2:20](#); [Rom 8:3-4](#); [Rom 12:2](#); [Phil 2:12-13](#). These verses teach that a person is incapable of living out the kind of life that God requires of him, but that God is capable of living out that life in a person who yields to His Spirit, allowing Him to make you a light in the darkness of this world. You're

to be blameless and harmless (pure) both before others and before God. You're to hold forth the word of life to others. Jesus lived for others, and He will teach you to live for others also, just as He taught Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus! 😊