

The True Christian Life

By Bob Vincent

Bible Text: Philippians 2

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Philippians chapter three starting at verse one—page 1828—Philippians three, verse one, in the pew Bibles, page 1828.

Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness [or the righteousness that comes from the law], faultless. But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them σκυβαλον, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.

All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained.¹

¹ Philippians 3:1-16 (All Scripture references are taken from the New International Version of the Bible unless indicated otherwise).

Let's pray.

Father, we thank you that we can call on you through Jesus Christ and discover that that great white throne from which Heaven and earth flee away is for us the chair on which our Father sits, a mercy seat from which we may receive grace to help in our time of need. We pray for Tot Ratliff, that you would bless her. We pray that you would heal her, that you would lay your hands on her, that you would bless her, that you would grant her peace and comfort and security that you are her God and her eternal refuge and that underneath that bed, holding her up, are the everlasting arms.

Lord, we pray for all of us that we may find rest and comfort in Jesus, that you would speak to us today from Holy Scripture. Lord, we pray that you would release your Word to go forth in life changing power. "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ." Lord, we pray that you would give the gift of faith to people who are here today who do not believe, who have never come to trust in Christ, who struggle with agnosticism and atheism and unbelief. We pray, Lord, that through the ministry of the Word of God, quickened by the power of the Holy Spirit by the anointing of your Spirit, that your Word would penetrate hearts to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit.

Lord, we beg you to come and bless us with that ministry of the Word for Jesus' sake who taught us when we pray to say:

Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.²

I want you to notice with me here in the Scripture what Saint Paul tells us in terms of how we're right with God—page 1829. He looks over his own life and his good works, and I want you to notice: when he speaks here in verse six: "...as for zeal, persecuting the church."³ Remember that sincerity is not enough. The world is full of sincere people who sincerely do great damage.

Think of this. Where, in modern times, would you find nineteen people more sincere than the people who commandeered those aircraft and flew them into the World Trade Center and into the Pentagon? Total sincerity, total dedication, totally wrong, totally barbaric, totally evil, but total sincerity.

And Saint Paul is a good example of that. He says, "Concerning zeal," concerning his sincerity, concerning the purity of his motives he was a man who was devoted to self-sacrifice to such a point that he persecuted the Church of God. He tried to get Christians arrested, put in jail, tortured and even put to death. He was a completely sincere man.

² Matthew 6:9-13 (KJV)

³ Philippians 3:6

But he says something else, something that very few people could ever say: “Concerning the righteousness which is of the law,” or, as it is put here in the New International Version, “as for legalistic righteousness, [blameless].”⁴

I want you to understand something about the essence of the Christian life. It’s not morality. Now, morality is good. Morality is noble. Morality should be there as a part of evidence that we know the Lord, not perfectly, but a real Christian does not live his life oblivious to God’s commandments. We break God’s commandments. We sin against God. We experience moral failure in our lives. Sometimes we don’t tell the truth completely. We color the truth a little bit. Sometimes we exaggerate. Sometimes we give in to bad feelings and resentments and what not. But I’m saying that the essence of the Christian life is not morality.

Saint Paul could look at his life, measured by the Ten Commandments and say he was a blameless man. Was he joking? Was he speaking hyperbolically? No. He was being honest that he, as a man who did not know God in a saving way; he, as a man who had never been born again; he, as a man who had never experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit; he, who had never come to Jesus for cleansing, had been able in an external way to observe the Ten Commandments. He had never physically committed adultery. He had never physically committed murder. You know, when you carry out a mission on behalf of government, it isn’t murder. Taking human life in war is not necessarily murder. A policeman shooting in the line of duty is not murder. So Saint Paul could look at his life measured externally and say, “[Concerning] the righteousness which is [of] the law, blameless.”⁵ And not only in terms of the moral precepts of the law, but Saint Paul was zealous to conform himself to the external requirements of the law of God as given in the first five books of Moses, the Torah.

But he didn’t know God, and all of his good works fell miserably short. In fact, his view of them, he uses a cuss word to describe it—and that’s not an exaggeration. He says here in verse eight—page 1829: “What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them *skybalon*, σκυβαλον.”⁶ It’s a crude, gross, nasty word for human fecal matter. And it corresponds very exactly to several four letter words. And it’s so bad a word that this is the only place it’s found in the entirety of the Greek New Testament. And it’s not found in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible at all. But there is a reference in an apocryphal book called *The Wisdom of Jesus Ben-Sirach* that says that man’s vain thoughts are *skybalon*, σκυβαλον—kind of like we refer to people just spouting off nonsense as B.S.

And that’s the word that Paul uses here. Why would Paul cuss? Why would Paul cuss? He doesn’t curse, he cusses. Why would he cuss here? Why would he use a vulgar—the equivalent of a four letter word for human feces—why would he use that word to

⁴ Philippians 3:9

⁵ Philippians 3:9 (KJV)

⁶ Philippians 3:8

describe this? Because he wants to shock us as we look at our own efforts to justify ourselves; as we look at our own efforts to feel good about ourselves based on our own performance; as we look at our religious duties that we carried out and admire ourselves as, somehow or another, being superior to other people based on those performances. Saint Paul says it is just a crock of you know what. That's what he says.

Now, that's the Word of God. And, you know, I'm not the one that put a four letter word in Scripture—the equivalent of a four letter word in Scripture. But Paul did it. He uses a strong, offensive, vulgar word for human excrement in order for us to be shocked and stop and think about what he's saying. And when we look at ourselves, our own performance, our tithing, our teaching, our praying, our study of Scripture, all of our religious devotion; and we try to look to that as somehow or other meriting God's favor, winning God's favor, getting his approval, Paul says it's just a crock. It's just a crock.

Why is that important? I submit to you, it's important even for people who believe the gospel because constantly when we come to God in prayer we're tempted to base our right to be heard by God on our own performance.

Have you ever thought about the Pharisee and the publican, the Pharisee and the tax collector, when they went up to the temple to pray? One of the reasons why the Pharisee prays thus about himself—you know, "I thank thee God I'm not like other men, not like this publican over here, this tax collector. I pay a tithing of everything I get. I fast twice a week, blah, blah, blah, me, me, me."⁷ Why is he doing that? Well, real Christians can do that. Real Christians can do that. It doesn't mean that you're trusting in something other than Christ in an eternal sense, but it means that when we're coming to God to pray often times we try to review in our own minds why God ought to hear us.

I want you to understand something. You have a right to be heard by God as much as Billy Graham, as much as Pope John Paul II, as much as Mother Theresa, as much as Saint Paul because Saint Paul understands that his right to be heard by God is not based on that crock of his own deeds done by himself. And he looks at it all and he repudiates it and he rejects it and he uses a cuss word in Greek.

And then he goes on and he says he wants to be found in Christ—verse nine, "not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith."⁸ You see, we understand, then, what Saint Paul is saying. He's saying, "The gospel is not about God changing me and then declaring what he's done. The gospel is about the fact that while I was still a sinner, Christ died for me. And it's not what I've done. It's not even what God has done in me that's the gospel. It's what God has done for me in Jesus Christ." And that's going to be our focus this morning, in part. It's what God has done for me in Christ that makes me right with God: "not having a righteousness of my own [which is of] the law, but...the righteousness [of] God."⁹

⁷ Paraphrase of Luke 18:11

⁸ Philippians 3:9

⁹ Ibid.

What does that mean? Do you remember the vision in Isaiah six? “In the year that king Uzziah died I saw...the Lord...high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. [Around] it stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with [one set] he covered his face, and with [one set] he covered his feet, and with [one set] he flew. And they did not cease crying *qadosh, qadosh, qadosh*, קדוש קדוש קדוש”¹⁰ Why is it in a three? Because God is three and yet one. *Qadosh, qadosh, qadosh*, קדוש קדוש קדוש in Hebrew, “Holy, holy, holy”¹¹

You see, God—the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit—is infinitely holy, is infinitely holy. God’s own righteousness...if you’ve put your trust in Christ, God’s own righteousness has been put to your account. That’s an amazing thing. That means that when I come to God and pray and I come in Jesus’ name, I come trusting in Christ and his finished work, I have the same right to be heard by God as Christ himself, for I come in his stead, I come in his place. I come through him. I come in his name. I come with his authority. I come with his own righteousness. When God looks at me, in spite of the failures of my life, God sees Christ, and God hears me as if I were Christ because put to my account is Christ’s own righteousness, and it’s been put to my account through faith, as he says here.

Now, look back at how this is possible. In Philippians chapter two. It’s possible because of what Jesus did for us. Philippians chapter two, turning back there—page 1827. He speaks about an attitude that we should have in verse five that should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. What’s Christ’s mindset? What is his mentality?

Verse six: “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, [or held on to].”¹² I want you to see what he’s saying in verse six. He’s saying that Jesus is God. Jesus Christ is God, “who being in very nature God,”¹³ who being in the *morphe*, μορφη, in the form of God. It doesn’t mean that he’s like God in certain ways. It means that he is God. The *morphe*, μορφη, being in the *morphe*, μορφη of God. Every thing that makes God, God, all of the divine attributes that make God, God, his “Godness,” if you will, that’s true of Christ. He’s in the form of God.

And there’s an immediate allusion here to Adam. Adam was not God. Adam was simply created in the image of God, as you and I have been created in the image of God. Adam, however, is tempted through his wife to try to reach out and make himself equal with God. That’s what the first sin is all about. It’s not about eating the fruit. The fruit is like baptism and the Lord’s Supper. It’s a symbol of something. It’s a means to an end. There’s a connectedness there.

Adam, reaching out and taking the forbidden fruit, is reaching out almost in a sacramental sense to make himself equal with God. That’s what original sin is. And that’s what

¹⁰ Isaiah 6:1-3 (KJV)

¹¹ Isaiah 6:3

¹² Philippians 2:6

¹³ Ibid.

Satan tempts Eve with. “You will be as God: knowing, experiencing and determining for yourselves good and evil.”¹⁴ You will be boss. You will be in charge.

And, you see, the antithesis of that in the second Adam, Christ. Christ, who is God—fully equal with the Father in every single way—doesn’t reach out to hold onto that equality with God, but surrenders the manifestation of it—even as Adam—who was most unequal with God, being merely a creature—reaches out to try to make himself equal with God. See, it’s the exact opposite. Jesus is God. Adam is a mere creature. Jesus does not hold on to and cling to his rights and privileges and prerogatives, but lets go of them. Adam grasps for more than he is. He scratches and claws his way like a cat that’s falling into a tub of water is going to scratch and claw at anything he can get a hold of because cats don’t like water—as I learned years ago trying to bathe one.

So here is Adam scratching and clawing his way, trying to be more than he was meant to be. And here is Christ who is superior to everything in the entire universe; for Christ himself is God, being in the *morphe*, μορφή of God: every attribute. Is God omnipotent? Christ is omnipotent. Is God omniscient? Christ is omniscient. Is God eternal? Christ is eternal. He could say, “Before Abraham was, I am.”¹⁵

And the people who heard him talk understood what he was saying and that’s why they tried to kill Jesus. They tried to kill Jesus because he, being a man, made himself to be God. But, unlike Adam, Christ was both God and man. And we see this in what follows next in verse seven. “[He] made himself nothing.”¹⁶ He made himself to be of no account. The Greek word there means empty. He made himself to be of no significance. And how did he do it? Not by taking away what he was, but by adding to what he was something else. He didn’t cease to be God in any sense. He did not empty himself of his deity. But he added to his deity, humanity.

What did he empty himself of? He emptied himself of self. He made himself to be of no account, of no significance. What did he do here? He says, “[He] made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, [and] being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!”¹⁷ Do you see here? What is Christ’s mentality? Christ’s mentality is not to let go of being God, but to let go of the manifestation of that, to surrender the recognition of it, to surrender the privileges and prerogatives of it. He makes himself to be of no account. He becomes a slave.

What were slaves like in those days? They weren’t like servants today in the twenty-first century where there are all kinds of rights and a labor union to back you up and civil service if this goes bad or what not. There were no rights. To be a slave in the first century was to have zero rights, no rights whatsoever. If you were owned by a master,

¹⁴ Paraphrase of Genesis 3:6

¹⁵ John 8:58 (KJV)

¹⁶ Philippians 2:7

¹⁷ Philippians 2:7-8

and he decided to use you in some obscene way, you had no one to whom you could appeal and say, “Make this person stop it.” You had no rights.

Jesus, who has all of the rights and all of the prerogatives and all the authority in the entire universe surrenders it all and makes himself to be a slave.

Turn with me, if you will, back to Ephesians chapter five for a moment because it says it so well. Ephesians 5:25—page 1823. Ephesians 5:25—page 1823. Look at what he says here. “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”¹⁸ Think of that. What does that mean? “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up.”¹⁹ What did Christ give up? Did he give up hunting? No. Did he give up fishing? No. Did he give up Golf? No. Did he give up buying that new sports car? No. Did he give up shopping in the mall as over against at Sam’s? No.

Or, at Goodwill, great bargains at Goodwill. Lot’s of dead people who invested in good clothes—like this \$2000 suit that I’m wearing this morning. And you know, one day I went in there. It’s tailor-made. And it was tailor-made for me. And as I was looking in there, I discovered that the guy it was tailor-made for, his first name was Bob. Wow, it was tailor-made for Bob. Now the fact that the first Bob is dead and that I’m alive doesn’t bother me. It’s been to the dry cleaners. I don’t think he died in it. It’s okay. I like it. I like it.

A little humor to break the tension.

What did Christ give up for the Church according to Ephesians five? What did he give up? He didn’t give up golf. He didn’t give up tennis. He didn’t give up football. He didn’t give up Monday Night Football or Sunday afternoon football or Friday night football or Saturday at Tiger Stadium. He didn’t give up any of that. He didn’t give up trips to the mall. What did he give up?

He gave himself up. See, because when you’ve given yourself up, you’ve given up everything else. That doesn’t mean there’s anything wrong with buying your clothes in the mall. I’m not against shopping in the mall. It doesn’t mean there’s anything wrong with golf. I’m not against golf. I used to be on the golf team in high school. I don’t know what happened. Sometime after high school and through eight years of higher education, playing out in Kansas with a group of preachers, and I followed their counsel. I made a promise when I was ordained to be a preacher to submit to my brothers in the Lord. And those other preachers, when I was playing on this golf course in Kansas, said, “Bob, please don’t ever play golf again.”

Now, I don’t know how I was on the golf team in high school—and that was Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, which has more golf courses, I believe, than any place in the world—and played at the Dunes’ Club which was the swankiest, most exclusive golf club

¹⁸ Ephesians 5:25

¹⁹ Ibid.

in Myrtle Beach. How did I go from that to a group of preachers in Kansas telling me, “Bob, no.”

I don’t know. It’s no big deal to give up golf, okay?

The point I’m making is: What did Christ give up? He didn’t give up anything specifically as such. He gave everything up. He gave himself up. Why did he give himself up, according to Ephesians 5:25? “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.”²⁰

We begin to get an insight when we turn back to Philippians, then, about the sacrifice of Christ. Christ died as the substitute of the Church. He takes the Church’s place. He goes and suffers the shame and humiliation that the Church deserves. He suffers the torment and judgment that the Church deserves. Christ goes to Hell on the cross for the Church. When Jesus cries out in the words of the twenty-second Psalm, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”²¹ In crying out those words based on Psalm 22, he’s saying, in effect, that he feels the distance between him and the Father. There’s a distance. Why is there a distance? Because 2 Corinthians chapter five—turn with me if you will—2 Corinthians chapter five tells us very plainly what it is. 2 Corinthians chapter five, verse 21—page 1799: “God made him who had no sin [that’s the Lord Jesus], God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”²²

Christ became sin for us. Christ became sin for us. Christ became defiled and dirty and guilty and meriting judgment and damnation. That’s what the gospel’s all about. When Jesus agreed to the terms of the eternal covenant, he agreed to take your guilt and become guilty himself. He agreed to take your shame and to become shameful himself. Christ never became a sinner. He never sinned, not in thought, not in word, not in deed. But Christ became sin. He became sin. He took your sin, and sin so permeated Christ that when he died on the cross, he died as the wages of sin. “The wages of sin is death.”²³ Death, not just a heart attack, not just what Bob did for me so I could have his nice \$2000 tailor-made suit; no, not just a moment of time, but an eternity of death.

What is death? Death is not ceasing to exist. Death is division. Death is a schizophrenia. Death is a separation. It’s a separation from God. It’s a separation from ourselves. It’s a kind of an insanity that we all inherit from the sin of our first parents, that sense of alienation and the angst that flows from it. That’s death.

²⁰ Ephesians 5:25-26

²¹ Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34

²² 2 Corinthians 5:21

²³ Romans 6:23

And “the wages of sin is death.”²⁴ Christ became sin for you and me. This is an amazing thought. He gave himself up. He abandoned the appearance, not only of his deity, he abandoned the appearance of his holiness. He became shameful. He was stripped naked on the cross, you know. We don’t see pictures of Christ that way because they’re immodest. But if you really want to know what the cross is about, it’s a naked man who’s been beaten within an inch of his life, who is nailed to a cross and who is being spat upon by religious people, being despised and rejected by the good people, by the pillars of the moral community. That’s shame. Christ became shameful in his death. He gave himself up. He didn’t give up this thing or that thing. He gave himself up. He became a doormat, didn’t he?

You know, as we look at *The Passion*, those of us that have seen *The Passion*, we’re moved to tears at the suffering of Christ. When the whip comes down, when they move from a whip onto a rod and then finally to the cat-o-nine-tails that rips pieces of flesh, each lash of the whip brings, as it were, a jarring of our own bodies as we feel it and identify with the victim, looking at the victim through the eyes of the chief witness in Gibson’s drama—Mary, the mother of Jesus. We see all of this through her eyes. We see and experience her suffering and the suffering of her son.

What suffering, what shame, what humiliation, what degradation? Christ becomes a doormat. He becomes a doormat. What does it mean to be a doormat? It doesn’t mean that you don’t tell people the truth. It doesn’t mean that you play along with their games. It means that with nobility and steadfastness of heart, with moral courage and rectitude, you tell people the truth, but you do so with humility and grace. And you’re willing to suffer the consequences of telling people the truth.

It’s not keeping silence in the face of injustice. It’s telling the truth in the face of injustice and being willing to bear the consequences of that. That’s Christ as doormat. Christ became a doormat for you and me.

And I tell you this: Unless you’re willing to wipe your feet on Christ, you can’t go to Heaven. You can’t go to Heaven with dirty shoes. You can’t go to Heaven defiled. You’ve got to wipe your feet before you enter into the throne room. You’ve got to wipe your feet on the doormat of the universe—the Lord Jesus, who loved you and gave himself up for you, who loved the Church and gave himself up for it.

So we turn back to Philippians, and we see then the suffering of Christ, this mindset, going back to verse six, Philippians 2:6—page 1827. “[Christ Jesus] who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, [and held on to].²⁵ It wasn’t robbery. It wasn’t something that he could lose because it was his by native right. Nevertheless he, “made himself [to be] nothing.”²⁶ He emptied himself of self. What became Christ’s focus? Christ’s focus was you. It wasn’t his suffering. He

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Philippians 2:6

²⁶ Philippians 2:7

didn't focus on his suffering. Scripture says that he looked ahead with joy to "the joy that was set before him."²⁷

And what was that joy? You're part of the joy. You're part of the reason that Christ suffered; not only the reason that he suffered as a substitute, but it was anticipation of fellowship with you and enjoyment of a relationship with you that would be the fruit of this suffering that he was willing to do it. That's why Hebrews chapter 12 tells us: "Therefore, beloved, seeing that we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and that sin which so easily encumbers us."²⁸ And he said, "let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking to Christ the author and finisher of our faith who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame for the joy."²⁹

There was a purpose to his sufferings, and it was to enjoy life with you. He looked forward to that.

You know, you think of yourselves—I mean, honestly we do if we we're honest—you think of yourselves as really worthless. I mean the best of people do it. George Bush struggles with it. John Kerry struggles with it. Bill Clinton struggles with it. The movie stars struggle with it. I know that doesn't seem like it's possible, but trust me, it really is true. Everybody struggles with that; the sense of insignificance and inferiority. It is. It's what drove Bill and the satyriasis.

And so that's the human condition. But I want you to understand how valuable you are to God. It's the value that God places on you that drives him to be willing to endure the cross and despise the shame and ignominy and all of that because of the joy that's laid up for him with you.

So we see here he made himself, verse seven, "[to be] nothing, taking the very nature of a [slave], being made in human likeness."³⁰ Verse eight: "being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!"³¹ Verse nine: "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."³²

See, the cross is always the way to the crown. What did Christ gain? I mean, he's God almighty. He sat on the throne of the universe already. What he gained is you. That's what he gained. Why did he die? He didn't die in order to earn this place of honor. He had that place of honor. But he now sits in that place of honor not only as God, but as

²⁷ Hebrews 12:2

²⁸ Paraphrase of Hebrews 12:1

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Philippians 2:7

³¹ Philippians 2:8

³² Philippians 2:9-11

man, and you united with him, for we are already seated with Christ in heavenly places now. That's an amazing truth. Christ, who is God, gives himself up by becoming a man and by being an obedient servant even unto death as a slave. He dies a shameful, degraded, painful, agonizing, ignominious, humiliating death. He died that way for the joy he anticipates of having you reign with him, live with him and enjoying life with him. And, you know, he enters into it. Christ has been crowned. He is now King of Kings. He is now Lord of Lords, as man, as the son of David, he sits on his Father's throne at the right hand of God.

Now he has a conclusion for you and me. Philippians 2:12: "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."³³ What is this salvation that we're called to work out? He's talking about the experience of Christ in s changed life. We have our position with God which is by grace alone, received through faith alone. We have a standing that is absolutely perfect with God. But he's talking about how we live. And he says we are to work it out with fear and trembling. That is, we're to throw ourselves into the pursuit of holiness.

Well, what's holiness? Is it not smoking? Is it not drinking? Is it not going to ball games, not going to movies? Is it, as our Muslim friends have it, that women should always cover everything but their hands and their faces? Is that it?

Is that holiness?

Is holiness keeping the Ten Commandments? Saint Paul kept the Ten Commandments. Saint Paul kept the Ten Commandments and could say, "Concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless."³⁴ Is that holiness?

What's holiness? You know what holiness is?

Romans chapter eight. Turn with me. What's holiness? Romans chapter eight. What's holiness? What's the purpose of your life? Page 1757—Romans 8:28: "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him."³⁵ What's good? Is it a new car? Is it a new house? Is it getting your debts paid? Is it having your kids all able to get scholarships in college? Is it never having trouble, never having trouble in your marriage, never having trouble at work, never having trouble with your children, never having health problems? Is that what the good life is? What's the good life?

He tells us what it is. "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."³⁶

³³ Philippians 2:12

³⁴ Philippians 3:6

³⁵ Romans 8:28

³⁶ Ibid.

Verse 29: “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be [here it is] conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”³⁷ To be conformed to the image of his Son. What’s God trying to do in your life? Why did God allow Satan to give you cancer? Why did God allow you to be scared of having AIDS? Why did God cause you to have great fear over this or that? Why did God engineer the financial mess you’re in right now—allowing Satan to do it? See, Satan is the one that does all this stuff. But he can’t operate apart from God’s sovereignty. What is the good to which all things are working in the life of the believer?

Verse 29: “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son.”³⁸ It’s the likeness of his Son.

Turn back to Philippians, and you see that’s the very essence, that’s the quintessence of the Christian life.

Verse 12: “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.”³⁹ Let that salvation that you experienced when you first came to Jesus permeate all of your thinking and all of your speaking and all of your acting. And how is it? What is that?

Well, let’s see how it is in context. Look here at verse one, Philippians 2:1—page 1827: “If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.”⁴⁰

Look at verse three. Here’s the essence to the Christian life. You can smoke and do this. You can drink and do this. You can wear shorts and do this. You can wear open toed shoes and do this. You can go to Tiger Stadium and do this. You can watch Monday Night Football. I don’t know about Sunday football ‘cause that’s the Lord’s Day. But you can do all those things and do this. And you can abstain from all those things and not do this. Here’s the essence of the Christian life. What’s the essence of the Christian life? It’s being like Christ. Wow!

You see, we don’t have a law based walk. We have a Christ based walk. The law is there as a measurement. What does it mean to love? Well, obviously if you’re loving somebody, you’re not murdering him. Obviously if you’re loving somebody, you’re not stealing from him. Obviously if you’re loving somebody, you’re not bearing false witness against him. Obviously if you’re loving someone, you’re not committing adultery with them. So there is the law. But that’s not the focus. The focus is looking at Christ. The focus is modeling your life on Christ. The focus is worshipping Jesus and

³⁷ Romans 8:29

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Philippians 2:12

⁴⁰ Philippians 2:1-2

loving Jesus because as we love Jesus, as we enter into worship, we find the Spirit of Christ rising up within us in praise, and we find melting away self.

Here it is. Here's the very essence of it. You want a list of dos and don'ts? Here's the essence of the dos and don'ts. "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves."⁴¹ There it is: "Consider others better than yourselves."⁴²

I don't like doing that. You see, I'm not much of a Christian. I have to tell you. I mean, really, honest to God, that's the truth; honest to you, that's truth. I mean, I still have trouble thinking of Sandy as better than me. I mean, there are times when I've just finished my Quiet Time when I can feel that way. When I've prayed through some issue in my life and have fully laid it all on the altar I can—for a few minutes—feel that way.

But the minute that she does anything or the minute that she doesn't do anything and is just there and not exactly what I want her to be—one of those "Stepford Wives," you know.

I always like to imagine my dogs talking. You know, Balaam's ass talked, and so I figure my dogs have the capacity if God would just loosen their tongues. So I give them different voices. Ralphie who's 16 and probably in the end of his life, he has a [low sound] growl, growl, dog like voice that way, but Hamilton has a [high pitched sound] yip, yip, yip. And looking at Hamilton and his jealousy...he's never jealous of humans, as such, unless one of the grandchildren sits in Momsie's lap, and he wants to be sitting there, too. But he's jealous.

And this is what I have Hamilton say all the time. "It's all about me. It's all about me. What about me?" And that's Hamilton's little voice, you know, "What about me? What about me?"

Anyhow, I think that Hamilton is, in some ways, a personification. Maybe a canine caricature of his master because deep down inside there's a little voice that's always saying, "What about me? What about me? It's all about me."

I'm saying that narcissism is in all of us. It really is if we're honest with ourselves and honest with our God. It's all about me. And that's why the thing with what? The thing with the Christian life is: it's all about you. It's not all about me. It's all about the glory of God, and it's all about what?

But you see the essence of the Christian life is all about others. What is he saying? Does he mean it literally? Tell me what the very essence of our relationship with other people is as a mindset according to Philippians 2:3. What is he saying? Philippians 2:3; what is he saying? What is he saying?

⁴¹ Philippians 2:3

⁴² Philippians 2:3

Read it for me, all of you. What did he say, Philippians 2:3?

[off mic voices: “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.”]

See, that’s the essence of it. Not, not committing adultery; not, not stealing; not, not lying; not, not drinking; not, not smoking; not, not going to movies; not about tithing; not about witnessing; not about reading your Bible; not about praying. What’s the essence of the Christian life? Fundamentally it’s what? Consider what? Others more important than yourself.

Now, I want to ask you the question. What’s the mindset of Christ? Besides to leave the glory of Heaven and to become a man, and not just any man, but a man that’s born in dire poverty and is going to be subjected to a life of humiliation, of abuse and of shame; what’s his mindset?

His mindset is all about you. It’s all about you. “[For] Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her. Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her.”⁴³ (Ephesians 5:25). It’s all about you.

And that’s why he says here, as he goes on—verse four: “Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”⁴⁴ The NIV translators thought it was nice to add some words to it. But here is a more literal reading: “Each of you should look not to your own interests, but”—and some manuscripts have *kai*, καὶ after that, which means “also” or “even” or “and”—“to the interests of others.”⁴⁵ But not all manuscripts have that. Because the focus is what?

I’ll tell you this about human beings ‘cause I is one. Give me an inch, I’ll take a mile. Tell me that I need to focus on other people’s welfare but I can also focus on my own. I guarantee you I will begin to focus on my own in utter oblivion to the welfare of others. Our focus is what? Live for others. Serve others. Why?

Well, let’s look further in Philippians two. Philippians chapter two, turning down at page 1828, and he says, verse 17...well, let’s get it in context, verse 14, which will take us back to 13 in a moment: “Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing.”⁴⁶

What makes you shine as a star? The fact that you’ve never committed adultery? Nobody cares about that. The fact that you’ve never struggled with homosexuality?

⁴³ Ephesians 5:25

⁴⁴ Philippians 2:4

⁴⁵ Paraphrase of Philippians 2:4

⁴⁶ Philippians 4:14-16

Nobody cares about that. The fact that you've never stolen? Nobody cares about that. Never told a lie? Nobody cares about that.

What makes you different than the world? Do you know what makes you different than the world? It's to be a person who maintains a cheerful spirit, no matter what's going on; a cheerful spirit, no matter what's going on. That's what makes you shine as a light. Some self-righteous Pharisee that's been sexually moral and straight all of his or her life, that doesn't attract anybody to you. Somebody that's been scrupulously honest and goes to the boss and says, "You're asking me to fudge on my expense account here. I can't do that." Is that what attracts people to you? Is that what makes you shine as a light?

I'll tell you what makes you shine as a light in a wicked and perverse generation. It's living for other people and being cheerful when you're abused and things aren't going your way. Then people say, "Gosh, what is that about that person?"

And you'll draw people to yourself.

Moral people don't draw other people to themselves. Good people don't draw other people to themselves. Most people are bothered by "really good people" because deep down they're looking for the hole in the armor. Now, I'm not commending immorality. I said that earlier. If we've known the Lord Jesus Christ, we're not going to live our lives in complete oblivion to the Ten Commandments. We should be moral people. And the person who can live on and on in immorality, there's something questionable about his faith.

But I'm telling you: That's not the essence of the faith. The essence of the faith, the thing that makes you attractive, that makes you stand out in the world, is that in the midst of a life of disappointments, of suffering and trial, you have a center and that center is your relationship with Christ that causes you to have a peace and a joy and a cheerfulness. And that draws people.

Parents, why do your kids run from your faith sometimes? Because you're immoral? No. It's because the way you deal with your children is harsh, judgmental and pharisaical and they can see through your hypocrisy, and they want to regurgitate at it. But when you demonstrate humility, peace, a gentleness of spirit, a kindness in dealing with your kids, a willingness to sacrifice, not only material things, but even your own self for them, and to do it without begrudging, to do it with cheerfulness, to do it with a basic latent happiness, they're drawn to your faith, and even if they wander away from it in years to come they're going to be drawn inexplicably back to it because when the storms of life begin to come crashing over the bow of the boat of their lives, they're going to remember what kept their parents afloat and kept their parents even when the billows were foaming, from being swamped utterly. And it was that relationship with Jesus that is the wellspring of joy and it comes through worship.

Now, look at what Paul says, verse 17. This isn't some kind of stoical resignation or suffering for suffering's sake. This isn't some kind of spiritual masochism. It is a gospel

focused willingness to abandon my rights. Verse 17—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. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.”⁴⁷ How can you express emptying yourself anymore than that? Paul emptied himself, being poured out as a drink offering, being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and offering of your faith. As Paul is being used by others, he can only think of one thing: Is Christ being magnified?

Turn with me back to chapter one—Philippians chapter one, verse 12—page 1826: “Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.”⁴⁸ It’s about the gospel. It’s that men and women would know about Jesus. It’s that men and women would know that Jesus is God and that he became a man, a sinless man and that he died on the cross for our sins and rose again and that God invites all people everywhere to come to him and experience that grace and forgiveness. He’s saying, “Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard, the Praetorian, and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.”⁴⁹

Was it pleasant being in a dark, dank, damp dungeon? Was it pleasant having chains?

You know, I get restless. I guess, I don’t know what’s wrong with me. But when we’re in a long car trip and trying to rest and I’m not driving and I stretch out, I get that nervous leg syndrome. I want to kick my legs around. It’s hard to relax. Can you imagine not being able to stretch out? Can you imagine having a chain around you all the time? Was this pleasant?

But look at Paul. Paul’s happy with the chain. Why is he happy with a chain? Because his suffering is Christ focused. His suffering is that men and women would know the Lord Jesus Christ.

“Because of my chains,”⁵⁰ he says—verse 14. Then he says in verse 15 he realizes that some people are taking advantage of it. Verse 15: “It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill,”⁵¹ and so on.

Verse 18: “But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is [being proclaimed]. And because of this [what?] I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have

⁴⁷ Philippians 2:17-18

⁴⁸ Philippians 1:12

⁴⁹ Philippians 1:12-14

⁵⁰ Philippians 1:14

⁵¹ Philippians 1:15

sufficient courage so that now as always...⁵² Look. Here's the course of it, the course of the whole thing, the basis for living a life for others rather than yourself is right here. "So...now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death."⁵³

Verse 21: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."⁵⁴ That's the essence of the life. The Christian life is not being a doormat for other people. The Christian life is serving Christ and allowing every circumstance—including people's contrariness, their orneriness, their meanness, their taking advantage of you—to bring glory to God in the face of Jesus Christ. That's why he said, "I can rejoice being poured out."⁵⁵ To be poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and altar of your faith is allowing yourself to be used by other people.

That's an amazing thing. How can he do that? The reason is: It's all Christ centered, not Paul centered. It's not centered in other people. His sacrifice and service for other people, his emptying himself on behalf of other people, isn't centered in those people. It's centered in Christ. It's a sacrifice for Christ. It's Andre Crouch's song. "How Can I Say Thanks?"

You see, because the whole of the Christian life—inasmuch as it's based on grace alone, received through faith alone—our obedience to the gospel is one of gratitude, not of earning points with God. How can I say thanks? By being willing to put up with people's nonsense for the glory of God, for the sake of Christ. And that's the essence of the Christian life.

Go be as moral as you want to be and go to Hell. There are atheists who, I say, externally live moral lives. But nobody lives this way without the Holy Ghost. Nobody lives this way without having been born again. Nobody lives this way without being Spirit filled. But you know what? You can't live a life of sacrifice for other people and be cheerful about it without being full of the Spirit of God.

So you can be moral. You can be sexually pure. You can be scrupulously honest. You can never allow a drop of liquor to touch your lips and go to Hell. But if you want to know clear, compelling evidence that you've been to Jesus for the cleansing power and have been washed in the blood, here's the compelling evidence: Do people see Jesus in you? Well, I have to say, not very often. Sadly, I am still so full of self. Self gets in the way of it. But it's my goal. And I'm more like Jesus than I used to be.

See how it affects the whole of life? Verse 21: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."⁵⁶ He even looks forward to death because death is gain according to verse 23.

⁵² Philippians 1:18-20

⁵³ Philippians 1:20

⁵⁴ Philippians 1:21

⁵⁵ Philippians 2:17

⁵⁶ Philippians 1:21

So where does it end up? Are you discouraged—Philippians 2:12-13? Well, I hope you're discouraged this morning in the most serious kind of way from thinking that your performance can ever win God's favor. If I have accomplished only that, then I have accomplished a great deal. I should say, if the Spirit of God has accomplished that through my inadequate teaching, then he has accomplished a great deal. For when we understand the essence of the true Christian life, that it is a life of cheerful self-denial for the glory of God in the interest of the salvation of others, then we understand the very essence of the life that we're called to in Christ. And we also understand that even after we've known the Lord for years, we still come short. That's why—as I read Philippians three and in verse 12 and 13 he says—page 1829: “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect.”⁵⁷ See, Saint Paul is aware of it. When he realizes that it's not about morality and law keeping, it's about total conformity to the very mind of Christ in a self-emptying life of service to others, with cheerfulness, he can truly say verse 12: “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.”⁵⁸

Verse 13: “Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.”⁵⁹

Close with verse 13 of chapter two, starting at verse 12: “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.”⁶⁰ What is that? It's being just like Jesus. Peace and joy and love in your heart even when you're being used and poured out as a drink offering on behalf of others.

“Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.”⁶¹ What hope do we have? Here it is, verse 13, what we saved to the last: “for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”⁶²

Do you know why I'm confident that I'm going fully to be like Jesus? Because God's doing it. It's a process. In this life, it will never be complete. I'll never fully get there. And that's why I still need the blood of Jesus today, when I come to God. But I'm going to get there. Do you know why? When I see Jesus, I'll be like him, and Heaven is the place where the spirits of just people have become perfect.⁶³ How do I know I'm going to get there? Philippians 1:6: “Being confident of this very thing, that he who has begun a good work in you will see it through to the day of Jesus Christ.”⁶⁴

⁵⁷ Philippians 3:12

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Philippians 3:13-14

⁶⁰ Philippians 2:12

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Philippians 2:13

⁶³ Hebrews 12:23

⁶⁴ Paraphrase of Philippians 1:6

And that's why this prison epistle that's so full about suffering—somebody read Philippians 1:29.

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