

INTRODUCTION

Being a teacher or mentor has huge responsibilities. Whether good things or bad ones your students will learn from you. They will become a copy of you. Two Saturdays ago, my younger son was at a basketball game. His team lost. I was not able to watch him play. After I got home my wife told me that my son was crying. He cried not only because his team lost. He wept because a kid on the other team was being too rough. The kid was bigger than most boys. He used his advantage to bump into people. Worse still, the referees did not handle the situation with fairness. Everyone on my son's team was agitated. I was not there and so I could not make any judgment. All I could do was to comfort my son. I could not help but think what I might have done if I were the coach or the father of that player. How would I feel if people knew that kid were my son? To Paul, the Philippian believers were not only his apprentices, they were his spiritual babies. God entrusted those Christians to Paul. Therefore, it is reasonable for Paul to expect the best from them. As we study our passage today we need to ask ourselves some honest questions. What grade will our Lord give us as His followers? Are we actively growing as effective witnesses for Him? Will His heart be glad or sad when we tell others that we are Christians? We should not only look like a Christian. We have to live like one too. It is because the term "Christian" should not only be a pronoun for us. It should also be an adjective and verb.

1. Devoted 習以為常

First of all, Paul encouraged the Philippian believers to devote themselves to serve the Lord. He said in **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 with fear and trembling. Even though Paul was away from them in prison, his heart and his prayer were always with them. Paul urged them to work out their salvation. Was Paul preaching salvation by work? Notice that Paul did not ask them to work toward their salvation, but to work out their salvation. The Greek word that is translated as "work out" here has the meaning of producing results. Many of you have the habit of exercising. You work out regularly hoping to achieve better health, either to shed some weight or to feel more energized. Paul was talking about the results after we are saved. We should be familiar with Ephesians 2:8 and 9 when Paul told us that we are saved by grace through faith. We are not saved by our good work, lest any person may boast about himself/herself. What follows in **verse 10** of the passage reads: For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. We are saved so that God can do His good work through us. Paul added that we have to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. To whom should we be afraid of? It is not people, but God. The Philippian Christians should not be afraid of those who persecuted them. Those enemies of the gospel could only kill their bodies, but they could not destroy their souls. The kind of fear Paul described is not the fear of punishment. It is not like when your car breaks down or you lose your wallet then you think: "Perhaps God is giving me a penalty because I have not been doing my daily devotion or offering money to the church." We have a merciful Heavenly Father who loves us to the degree of sending Jesus to die on the cross for us. He sees us with love, not hatred! An accurate understanding of our fear toward God is "awe." He is holy and righteous.

We should constantly be aware that we are living in His presence. We should be mindful of our thoughts, speech and deeds to make sure that we are reflecting God's glory. We should not be afraid that we will be punished if we fail to live up to God's standard. Rather, we do not want to grieve the heart of our loving Father by sinning. Paul continued to say that the ability to work out our salvation does not come from us. **Verse 13** tells us: For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. When God saves us, He puts His power in us, so that He can work out His plans through us. Therefore, everything we do should be for His glory. Some of you may wonder: are we simply God's puppets manipulated by Him? Of course not! When our hearts are in-line with God's heart, obeying His orders will be a joyful thing, not a burden. When your kids were small they loved to help you. When they saw you sweeping the floor or folding laundry they would be excited to say: "Let me do it!" Why were they so enthusiastic? It was because they saw themselves as part of the family. Their intent of getting the work done was in-line with yours. Unfortunately, as they grow up they gradually realize that they have been used by their parents all along. Therefore, they ask for a pay when you request them to help. Then later, even money cannot push them to work. Do we feel the same in the church? When you accepted Christ, you were zealous in many ministries. You were the first person here when the church doors opened and the last person to leave. You never hesitated to do anything from scrubbing the bathroom to serving on the podium. However, year after year and bit by bit your love for the Lord cools down. Now when people invite you to serve you reply: "Let me think about it." What you meant to say was: "Perhaps you should find someone else." Where is your love for the Lord? It is time for you to go back to your first love. Pray and ask the Lord to change your heart, so that once again you are willing to devote yourself in ministries. Then your service will no longer be out of responsibility, but out of love and joy.

2. Determined 不以為恥

"Christian" should not only be a pronoun for us. It should also be an adjective and verb. We should be devoted to working out our salvation. Paul went on to urge the Philippian believers to be determined to make their faith known. Let us look at **verses 14 and 15**: 14 Do everything without complaining or arguing, 15 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. To whom might the believers be complaining and arguing? God or fellow brothers and sisters in the church? It could be both. If we are determined to live out our faith as a church we should watch out for potential threats to our unity. Paul might be thinking of the Old Testament Israelites. They grumbled against Moses and against God in the wilderness because of the harsh living condition. They worried about food and water, and they missed the convenience and comfort they used to have in Egypt. How quickly did they forget that they used to be slaves, and it was God who set them free! Moses made it clear that by complaining to God, they were in fact testing God. They did not trust that God had His best interest for them and had the power to protect them and provide for their needs. The Philippian believers might be complaining or arguing with one another and to God because of the persecution they faced. Such negative sentiments do not solve problems. They will only intensify the problems. Complaint and argument will dissolve our unity in Christ. They are like explosives that knock down a sports stadium. The technique is called an implosion. People put bombs in strategic spots and those bombs are detonated in a calculated sequence. When the structure of the building is weakened the stadium will tumble. When complaint and argument go out of hand a church will eventually

implode. What would be the solution? It is humility that we studied last week. We are mindful of others' needs, and not merely focus on our own needs. We ask what the best for the whole church would be. When we stand together as one people we can reflect God's glory to the outside world. That is why Paul continued to say in verse 15 that we should be blameless, pure and without fault. All three adjectives carry similar meaning. They can be used to describe animals that were chosen as sacrifices on the altar. They must be without defect. A sheep should have four legs instead of three, two ears rather than three. That is the offering God requires. Those three descriptive words can also be referred to pure precious metals that are without any impurity. As God's children, we must be like offerings and pure gold that are without flaw. We should be different from the secular world. Paul reminded us that we should be a light in this crooked and depraved generation. I do not need to give you example about how wicked our world has become. People harden their hearts toward morality. Our Lord announced His condemnation in **John 3:19-20** – "19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed." Do people understand what they are doing when they commit sins? Of course, they do. But they choose to bury their conscience and insist on their wrongdoings on the guise of freedom. What should we as Christ's followers do? Someone put it this way: instead of cursing the darkness we should kindle a lamp. We can criticize all day how immoral our society has become. But that does not solve the problems. Rather, we should be devoted to living out what we believe. We prove to the secular world that everything the Bible says still works today. The Bible is God's timeless truth. What the Bible teaches us on marriage, parenting, work ethics, etc. are still applicable in any culture and generation. Morality will continue to go down-hill, but God's truth remains forever.

3. Delighted 引以為榮

"Christian" should not only be a pronoun for us. It should also be an adjective and verb. Paul encouraged the Philippian believers to devote themselves to work out their salvation, and they should be determined to make their faith known. Paul told them that in doing so his heart would be delighted. Let us read **the second half of verse 16 and verse 17**: 16 ...I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing. 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. Paul used three analogies to depict his delight for the Philippian Christians. An athlete runs in a track and a farmer labors in a field. An athlete endures the pain of practice and perseveres in the race, hoping to win the championship. A farmer bears the heat and toil in the field and expects a bountiful harvest. Paul invested his sweat, tear and heart in the Philippians like an athlete and a farmer. He would be delighted to see that they stood firm in their faith. The third picture Paul used was a drink offering. In the Old Testament ritual, a priest poured wine on animal sacrifice as it was burning on the altar. That wine is called a drink offering. The purpose is to bring out a pleasant fragrance as the meat is being burned. For the same reason you add wine to marinate meat before putting it on a grill. The wine makes the meat smell and taste better. Paul was delighted to give his all to the Philippian believers to make their ministries to the Lord a more pleasing sacrifice. Paul found his delight when the students he disciplined were actively growing in their faith and faithfully serving the Lord. He gave his praise when he wrote to the believers in **1 Thessalonians 2:19-20** – 19 For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? 20 Indeed,

you are our glory and joy. Paul looked forward to the coming of our Lord when He will present rewards to His faithful followers. Paul shared the joy with his students in their good work. I call it a Biblical pride. Every school cares a lot about its image. I was a teenager when pool and arcade video games became popular. Some young people went to those places to play right after school. School kids in Hong Kong all wear uniforms. While there is nothing wrong about playing games, some people in those stores smoke and curse. Some principals did not want to see their school-kids get into trouble while wearing their uniforms. Therefore, they sent teachers to those venues as patrols. They urged students to go home first and change into plain clothes. The message was clear: I don't care if you do something bad, as long as people cannot recognize that you are from my school. Many parents have the same mentality too. When a child misbehaves, the husband will tell his wife: "Look what your son has done!" But when their daughter gets an award, the mother will say to the dad: "See how well my girl performed!" Just like a school takes pride in its students and a parent takes pride in his/her kids, a church should find delight in its coworkers. Years ago, I made up my mind to be an encourager. There is too much criticism in the church. Why not clean up the pollution with some fresh air? Last Sunday after the service a committee invited me for a ministry meeting. Coworkers shared what they have been doing and they planned for upcoming ministries. When I got home I wrote an email to compliment them for their good work. I said I was deeply encouraged by their contribution and their genuine love to the people they serve. I told them that though they may not see immediate result from their labor, given time and patience they will reap a good harvest. I assured them that I will give my full support for their work. As your pastor, I find my delight when you offer your best to serve the Lord. It is not about performance, but it is about putting your hearts into what the Lord calls you to do. Some people wonder if it may lead to pride if we give praise to a person. If you have that concern, then you may say: "I thank God for the wonderful job you did," or "Your ministry really helps my spiritual growth."

CONCLUSION

We are called to be Christians, and so we should behave like one. The term "Christian" should become our adjective and verb. When people come close to us they should feel that we are different from people who do not know the Lord. Paul described in [2 Corinthians 2:15](#) this way: For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. Whether we are inside or outside of the church building we should be spreading the sweet fragrance of Christ to the people around us. Johnny was coming back from lunch. He met Doug in the elevator. Doug said to Johnny: "Let me guess, you went to Pacific Fusion to eat buffet again?" "How do you know?" Johnny was impressed. "You do not only look like a Chinese," Doug replied, "You smell like one too!" When you go to your classroom or office do you not only look like a Christian, but do you smell like one too because of the fragrance of Christ in you? Are people attracted to Christ because of your good testimony, or do they find your faith offensive because of your bad testimony.