

*Doing Good with What You've Got (Phil. 2:12-18)*

I am often amazed by the talents that I find in our congregation. Woodworking, songwriting, cardmaking, flower arranging, bathroom remodeling, spreadsheet designing, relationship building – the list goes on and on. It is delightful to see people putting their passions and gifts to work in the life of the body of Christ. From sewing dresses for African schoolchildren to putting together a casserole for a funeral lunch, folks in this congregation have made a commitment to do good with what they've got. Again and again, I see you put your resources to work. It is, of course, true that you cannot do good with something that you don't have. I once knew a church that desperately desired to start a contemporary worship service for young people in the congregation. Unfortunately, no one played guitar or drums. They used pre-recorded tapes or hired a band in from another local church. It didn't work very well. The issue was not sincerity or conviction. The issue was simply gifting. You can't do what you don't have the ability to do. As Paul continues to exhort the Philippians to live a life which is worthy of the gospel (1:27), he instructs them to do good and obey God by putting to work what they've got. **And the good news of the gospel for them and for us is that what we've got is the power of God working inside of us.**

Let us briefly remember the context of these remarks. Paul and his co-workers started the church in Philippi. He is now in prison, and he is not certain if he will be able to see them again on this side of eternity. He may die and go to be with the Lord (1:23). He may live and continue to minister to them (1:25-26). Either way, he desires that they remain **faithful citizens of heaven living on earth** (1:27; 3:20). He wants them to live a life which reflects the goodness of the gospel. He wants them to be like-minded, living in a community which has the power to bring joy (2:2). In our passage, he tells them to get rid of the grumbling and arguing, to pursue purity, to shine like stars, and to hold on to the word of life. He has been working for this outcome. He is willing to be completely poured out upon the sacrifice and service of their faith. He wants to boast of them on the final day. These words of Paul found in vv. 16-17 are both inspiration and challenge to pastors and missionaries. It forces us to ask,

“Am I willing to be poured out as an offering for the sake of your faith?” According to v. 18, Paul even wants them to rejoice in the reality that Paul is being poured out, and he is also reminding them that they should be willing to be poured out as drink offerings as well. Indeed, their faith leads to sacrifice and service. His sacrifice is for the sake of their sacrifice, and **everyone should rejoice in being able to give their lives to the Lord.**

This is the good that Paul wishes for them to do. But I should also say something of the situation. Paul quotes Deuteronomy 32:5 to indicate that **their vocation to be God’s children will take place during a warped and crooked generation.** The context in Deuteronomy is Moses’s parting song to the Israelites. In this song, he warns of their coming idolatry, predicts their future punishment, and announces the hope that one day God will rescue Israel from all her enemies. The crooked and perverse generation is disobedient Israel. By quoting Deuteronomy, Paul makes clear that living as a child of God does not simply happen. It must be consciously pursued, even in times when God’s people have capitulated and compromised. For us, these words “warped and crooked generation” remind us of the moral chaos of our own day. The call to faithfulness is challenging in the contemporary West. But they also remind us of **the chaos and confusion which can be found throughout the body of Christ.** In the church, we find false teaching and aberrant practice. We live in a time in which many Christians speak against the authority of the Bible and basic Christian ethics. We live in a day in which many Christians subordinate their faith to their political commitments. We live in an era in which Christians would rather fill their minds up with the latest Netflix offering than soak up God’s truth. And in this context, we must do good with what we’ve got.

The **grace-saturated heart** of this passage can be found in vv. 12-13. Paul tells them to work out their salvation with fear and trembling. We might translate these words as awe and reverence. We have a job to do. We are called to live holy lives. God has given us energy, talents, mental powers, desires, moral commitments, physical presence and so much else, and he wants us to use all these things to serve him. But don’t miss the crucial message of v. 13. We must work, but the power which makes our work possible is that **God is the one who works among his people to will and to work to bring about his pleasure.** Our work is only made possible by his work. So, I reiterate, you are called to do good with what you’ve got. But what you’ve got is God

working on you and in you to bring about his purposes. You are called to work out the power of God working in you. This is basic biblical theology. Grace before law. Indicative before imperative. What is true before what to do.

So, with our remaining time, **I want to show you exactly what you've got.** Again and again, Paul makes statements in this passage concerning the quality of our lives. But these statements are not simple commands. They are also reminders of what we already have in Jesus. We have been given the Holy Spirit. We have eternal life working in us even now. We are to work out our own salvation, knowing that God is working in us.

**Blameless and pure.** In v. 14, Paul says that they need to get rid of grumbling and arguing. The reason comes in v. 15 – that they may be blameless and pure. Christians should be people of contrast with the compromised and corrupt world. But watch out! The point here is not simply “Go be blameless and pure.” The point is also remembering that **in Christ you are already righteous.** When Peter requested that Jesus wash not merely his feet but also his hands and head, Jesus responded, “He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean but not all of you” (John 13:10). Except for Judas, the disciples were already clean by means of their faith in Jesus. Paul also writes, “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). Again, Paul writes of “the righteousness that comes through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all those who believe” (Rom. 3:22). You are righteous in Christ, so therefore go be blameless and innocent. Do good with what you've got.

**Children of God.** The call of v. 15 is also to be children of God in a crooked generation. To live properly as a child is to uphold the honor of the family name. But watch out! The point here is not simply “Go and live as God's children.” The point is also to remember that **in Christ you are already children of God.** John writes, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12-13). Paul writes, “The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom. 8:16). You are children of God in Christ, so go and live as God's children. Do good with what you've got.

**Shining like stars.** The call of v. 15 is also to shine like stars. To shine like stars is to walk in the light and carry the light of God to the world. But watch out! The point here is not simply, “Go and shine your light.” The point is also to remember that **in Christ you already have the light of God.** Jesus says, “I am the light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). The declaration of the Sermon on the Mount to the disciples is, “You are the light of the world” (Matt. 5:14). According to Paul, God has shone in our hearts that we might have the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). You have light in Christ, so go and shine that light. Do good with what you’ve got.

**Word of life.** The call of v. 16 is that we shine by holding fast the word of Life. To hold onto the word of life is to study Scripture, memorize Scripture, meditate on Scripture, and share Scripture with others. But watch out! The point here is not simply, “Go and cling to the word.” The point is also to remember that **in Christ you have already received the Word in your hearts.** Peter writes, “For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God” (1 Peter 1:23). To be a Christian is to be someone who has already been pierced in the heart by the word of God. You have the word of God in your heart, so go and cling to the word. Do good with what you’ve got.

“Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.” Recently, I read a quote from evangelical leader, evangelist, and minister to the poor John Perkins. In a speech to some visitors to his ministry, he said, “The central truth to Christianity then is that we have a leader. He’s alive. He comes back to live in us with the Holy Spirit. He comes back to live among us when we gather together. And where two or three are gathered together in his name he is there and there is the possibility of goodness...Man, that makes me want to cry. That we can do good!” Notice in Perkins’s words that **the ability to do good hinges on receiving the power that comes because Jesus is alive and the Spirit comes to indwell the people of God.** Perkins is speaking of doing good with what you’ve got. Brothers and sisters, there is work to do as we follow Jesus. But never forget that our work flows out of the grace which we have already received.