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Sermon Notes

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## **Holding Out the Word of Life**

### **Philippians 2:14-18**

#### I. Introduction: The “Burden of Bearing the Light”

##### A. The Magnificent Gift of Language

Our God is a God who speaks!!

By word His created the universe

By word His commanded Adam in the Garden

By word He called Abraham

By word He gave the Law to Moses at Sinai

By word He spoke through the Prophets

The final word of God: Jesus Christ and the word of life... the gospel

So also, our loving creator has endowed us with the gift of speech

The soaring poetry of John Milton, a gift of speech

The brilliant philosophical musings of Pascal, a gift of speech

The powerful writing of Harriet Beecher Stowe, who’s “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” moved a nation against the injustice of chattel slavery

Abraham Lincoln, upon meeting her said: “So you are the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war.”

Her prose was evidence of this gift of speech

So also was Winston Churchill’s soaring and passionate rhetoric, words that gave the British nation hope in their darkest hour

These are the most impressive forms of secular speech, and all of them evidence of the gift of God

So also the common goodness of speech: of a warm greeting when you walk into church

the compliment from a husband to his wife for the meal she labored over

the gentle words of a new mother to her infant... those words paving the way for that child to speak his own thoughts within three years!! The amazing gift of speech

words of sincere thanks for a gift given, words of graciousness, like “No, you go first, please...”

Then there’s speech at its highest:

The magnificent prophecies of Isaiah, the pithy wisdom of Proverbs, the deep philosophy of Job, AND the greatest words ever spoken, those of Jesus Christ; AND the gospel message so clearly articulated by the Apostle Paul in Romans

The Scripture is human language at its highest

So also are words spoken to God in prayer... a simple prayer is speech used properly; words of praise and thanksgiving, speech used properly; words sung to God in a hymn: speech used properly

Perhaps the highest form of speech we can utter is the gospel message to a lost and dying world, and our text holds that out for us in verse 16:

***vs. 16 as you hold out the word of life***

BUT the gift of speech can also turn BAD:

Words can be used to cut and wound, to kill and poison; to maim and cripple

Words can be harsh, unkind, vicious

Words can destroy a friendship or a marriage

Words can ruin a church

This is speech gone bad... and we also see it in our text:

***“Do everything without complaining or arguing.”***

This is essential to our lives as those called to carry an immeasurable burden... the burden of bearing the light in a dark and dying world

Light has no weight at all... it has no mass,

But the call of God in this passage is a great burden, the greatest burden we will ever bear

The burden is to stand in this dark generation and shine like stars in the universe... the more we grow in Christlike maturity, the more perfectly we will shine and radiate the light of life

Philippians calls us to two immeasurable journeys, or to two Pilgrimages:

The internal journey of personal holiness in the image of Christ

The external journey of worldwide discipling for the Kingdom of Christ

The two come together in this section of Philippians... as we work out our salvation with fear and trembling, we will get rid of complaining and arguing, and thus we will shine and hold out the light of life

## II. The Internal Journey: Working Hard by God's Power

### A. Our Lesser Work

#### 1. Consistent obedience to Christ

***vs. 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***

***Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for***

Thus the gospel is something not just to be believed but also something to be OBEYED:

i) immediate ii) faith-filled iii) consistent

#### 2. Hard work and determination

***vs. 12 ...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling***

What does it mean to “WORK OUT YOUR SALVATION...”???

Salvation is made up of three parts... in two of them, our works have NO PLACE AT ALL

**Justification:** declaration by God the Judge that we are not guilty for our sins because Christ’s righteousness is on us by faith... we get a gift of righteousness by simple faith and we are declared **RIGHTEOUS** in Christ... in this our works have **NO PLACE WHATSOEVER**

***Philippians 3:9 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.***

**Sanctification:** gradual step by step growth in Christlikeness by a cooperation between the Holy Spirit and our own labors... God works in us, and we work as a result

**Glorification:** instantaneous transformation by the power of God at death and at the resurrection by which we are made perfect in body and soul... immediately and forever... in this our works have **NO PLACE AT ALL**

***Philippians 3:21 Christ by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.***

Therefore, here Paul is speaking of sanctification... of working out this part of our salvation on a daily basis

3. Fear and trembling = fear of the Lord, trembling in weakness

B. God’s Greater Work

***vs. 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.***

1. Remember always: God’s work comes first

***John 15:5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.***

2. God’s energy in us

3. God gives us the will and the working

4. God makes the plan that we follow

C. The Relationship Between Our Work and God’s Work in Us

**We work BECAUSE He works first in us**

III. The External Journey: Holding Out the Word of Life to a Lost World

A. Internal Work Results in Tangible, Visible Progress

**vs. 14 “Do everything without complaining or arguing so that you may become blameless and pure...”**

1. Moral progress in contentedness... no more complaining

Complaining is a great sin... God created us to take pleasure in Him and in His provisions for us

God created us to worship Him and give Him thanks constantly

Complaining is a great sin of discontent... it is the exact opposite of worship

God created us with the gift of speech so that we could worship Him

Complaining is ANTI-WORSHIP...

We complain so easily:

- About the weather: too hot, too cold, too foggy, too muggy, too icy
- About our finances: taxes too high, groceries cost too much, I don't make enough
- About our jobs: my boss works me like a slave and I never get the promotions I deserve
- About our spouses: my husband never works enough around the house; my wife never appreciates me
- About our families: my parents don't understand me; my children don't obey me
- About our church: my pastor is a terrible preacher, my Sunday school teacher has never once visited me
- About our political leaders, about current events, about the media bias, about our cars and how often they break down and how much they cost to fix

Illus. Israel complained in the desert about eating manna

***Numbers 21:5 they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!"***

God responded by sending poisonous snakes in their camps, and many died as a result

However, working out our salvation with fear and trembling will mean getting rid of complaining and we will learn the secret of consistent contentment

Two reasons for complaining

1) Forgetting what we truly deserve

Illus. One pastor I know, whenever he is asked “How are you doing?” answers “Better than I deserve!”  
When we realize that we deserve hell for our sins, and instead are on our way to heaven, how could we ever complain again?

2) Forgetting who decided what we get: God is sovereign and decides our providence for us

## 2. Moral progress in unity

### ***“Do everything without arguing”***

Arguing is caused by forgetting who God is, and, if we are arguing with a Christian, forgetting who they will be someday

C.S. Lewis, “Weight of Glory”: someday this person I am arguing with will be radiant with God’s glory

- a. the main point of Philippians 2:1-11
- b. Euodia and Syntyche (4:1) were arguing with each other
- c. BUT to work out your salvation with fear and trembling means to GROW out of these bad habits

### B. Result: MORAL PURITY PUT ON DISPLAY

***Philippians 2:15 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***

1. Internal journey of sanctification makes the external journey of worldwide evangelism possible
  - a. “blameless and pure” = internal goals of sanctification

already seen in Paul’s prayer life for them

***Philippians 1:10 so that you may be ... pure and blameless until the day of Christ***

“Blameless” = meeting God’s standards... obviously not in perfection, since that is not possible in this life

***Luke 1:6 [Zechariah and Elizabeth] were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly.***

“Pure” = unmixed, as in wines or alloyed metals... this is the pure thing, no mixture of wickedness or ungodliness; also can mean “harmless” or even naïve about wickedness

- b. “children of God” = sharing His character, His nature... putting Him on display by how you act
- c. “without fault” = no mixture of ungodliness

This is God’s eternal goal for us in Christ anyway:

***Ephesians 1:4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.***

***Ephesians 5:27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.***

***Colossians 1:22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation***

***Jude 24 To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy***

Paul is merely calling on us to live up to this calling... to live up to the Gospel we preach

***Philippians 1:27 Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.***

2. We must seal with our lives the testimonies of our lips

Illus. When Jan Hus was burned at the stake for preaching Christ, he was offered the opportunity to recant his doctrine and receive absolution. Jan Hus said “What I taught with my lips, I now seal with my blood.”

Most of us will never be called upon to die a martyr’s death... but we can amend Hus’s statement:

**“What I teach with my lips I must seal with my life.”**

3. Unbelievers can sniff out hypocrisy...

- i) we preach a God of holiness; how can we be unholy???
- ii) we preach a God of love; how can we argue with each other??
- iii) we preach a God who rules all things; how can we complain about our circumstances??

4. Our lives MUST match our message, or we will make no progress in evangelism at all

C. Understand Your Generation

YES, unbelievers can SNIFF OUT our hypocrisy, but we have to live surrounded daily by the stench of their rebellion against God

1. Every generation of sinners is crooked and depraved in God's sight

“Crooked” = warped, twisted, exactly the opposite of the straightness of God's righteousness

“Perverse” = distorted from God's original intent

2. This one is no different... filled with immorality

***Romans 1:28-30 They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; 31 they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless.***

3. You are called to be noticeably different

***Matthew 5:14-16 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.***

D. Shine Like the Stars: “Practice What You Preach”

The stars were created to give light to the earth

Illus. Mariners use the North Star to navigate by on the ocean; by looking at Polaris, the North Star using a quadrant or an astrolabe, they could determine their latitude; Polaris was especially important because as the pole star, it never changed position

In the same manner, God is calling on Christians to be fixed point of reference, shining brightly in a dark place while we hold out the word of truth

Illus. #2 The slaves used to sing a song of freedom while they worked in the fields:

*When the sun comes back and the first quail calls,  
Follow the Drinking Gourd.  
For the old man is waiting for to carry you to freedom,  
If you follow the Drinking Gourd.*

The song described the way to escape... to “Follow the Drinking Gourd” was the Big Dipper... the lights of the stars pointed the way north and to freedom along the “Underground Railroad.”

The stars are beautiful and numerous, each one a twinkling and brilliant testimony to the power of God

That's what you should be... as you work out your salvation with fear and trembling, you will grow more and more pure, and your light will shine more and more brilliantly... you will be able to lead people who are slaves to sin along the road to freedom... Christ himself

#### E. Hold Out the Word of Life

***vs. 16 as you hold out the word of life***

1. Our own example of Christ is NOT ENOUGH to save lost sinners, however
2. No one will go to heaven by watching how much we shine for Christ
3. No one will go to heaven because we don't argue or complain
4. People go to heaven by hearing and believing the word of life

Jesus IS the word of life

***John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.***

Jesus also proclaimed that it is hearing and believing the word that brings eternal life:

***John 5:24 "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.***

Peter says:

***1 Peter 1:23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.***

So also Paul says:

***Romans 1:16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.***

So, Paul commands the Philippians to grow internally in their salvation so they can live up to their gospel message:

***Philippians 1:27 Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.***

But he also wants them to HOLD OUT the word by clearly proclaiming the message

Illus. D.L. Moody, American evangelist, made a commitment that he would not go to bed without witnessing to at least one person every day.

Perhaps you have a family member who is not saved, and you are called to hold out the word of life to that person for years

So you are also responsible to witness to your friends, neighbors, fellow students, etc. Day after day, holding forth the word of life

Illus. Steve, who led me to Christ, “held out the word of life” to me for over 18 months before I finally came to Christ

#### IV. Paul’s Example of Joyful Suffering (vs. 16-18)

##### A. Christianity is BOTH Taught and Caught...

BOTH learned from words and observed in life

1. God has ordained that godly role models be a major part of our growth in Christ
2. Christ Himself was the first role model
  - a. Jesus taught His apostles through sermons and instruction AND
  - b. He also lived His life out in front of them

***1 Peter 2:21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.***

##### B. Paul: Joyful in Suffering, Laboring for the Lord

Clear example from their own experience with Paul: singing in the prison cell with Silas

1. In this letter, Paul clearly presents himself as a role model
2. Openly taught in 3:17

***3:17 Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.***

3. Here, in Philippians 2, Paul models a lifestyle of Gospel Ministry.. of running a race for the glory of Christ

***vs. 16 “I did not run or labor for nothing.”***

***vs. 17 “Poured out like a drink offering”***

***“I am glad and rejoice”***

6. Paul is willing to suffer greatly, even to the point of death, to bring others to faith in Christ

Job said: “Though God slay me, yet will I trust in Him.”

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego said: “Though He slay me, yet will I obey Him.”

BUT Paul said: “Though He slay me, yet will I rejoice in Him.”

***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.***

7. All of this in the context of “holding out the word of life”

## V. Application

1. Understand the connection between the internal journey of holiness and external journey of evangelization
2. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling by God’s power SO THAT you can hold out the word of life
3. Learn to eliminate arguing and complaining from your life

Illus. Theology Professor: “Some people say the Bible’s too complex... the real problem is that it’s too clear... like ‘Do everything without complaining or arguing’”

Resolve: seek to make it through one day in perfect obedience to Philippians 2:14

- If your car breaks down, don’t complain, praise!!
- If your boss criticizes you, don’t argue, submit and pray

Learn to hate complaining as the exact opposite of what God created you for... JOYFUL PRAISE

Learn to hate arguing as exactly the opposite of what you are destined for in the future... perfect unity in Christ

4. Let your progress in sanctification be evident to the watching world

You are stars in the universe

Let your light shine before them

Let them see how different you are from the rest of the world

5. Be active in evangelism... holding out the word of life

TODAY: afternoon outreach

6. Learn from other role models
7. Be a role model yourself... disciple a younger Christian

