



4. Shining for Christ

Philippians 1:27-30, 2:12-18, Matthew 5.13-16,
Psalm 119:105-112

Series: Philippians

17 August, 2025

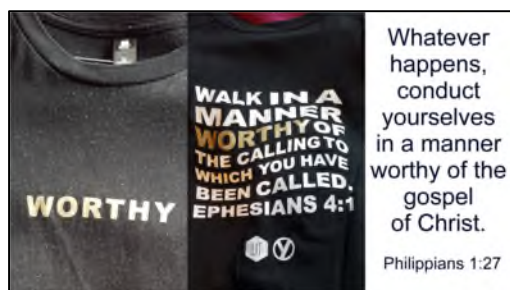
St George's Battery Point

Today we are looking at the next section in our series studying Paul's letter to the church in Philippi. We'll be trying to work out together what it means to shine for Jesus, in good times and bad. The reading starts off

²⁷ Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Philippians 1:27

This first verse in our reading from Philippians chapter 1 today reminded me of ... a T-shirt! It would make the perfect sermon illustration. But then when I got the T-shirt out



The front was OK. But when I looked at the back ... Oh dear.

It wasn't the verse that I was expecting, just a very similar one from Ephesians 4:1. "Walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called. And Colossians 1:10 is also very similar. It says "so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing

fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God."

But then, if the Bible says similar things more than once, if it's a recurring theme, it suggests that its importance is being emphasised and we should be sure to take extra notice. And, of course, there are very many other references in the Bible about how we should live.¹

²⁷ Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Philippians 1:27

Back to that first verse again. "Whatever happens" – in good times or in bad, in health or in sickness, in comfort or in suffering. In many places in the world, Christians are persecuted for their faith, even to the point of death, but they still seek to live a life worthy of the gospel of Christ.

So, how are we to be "worthy"? And how is this related to shining for Jesus? There is a song that was very popular in the 1990's, "Shine, Jesus, Shine"² that gives us a clue. It emphasises that as Jesus' light shines on us, and our hearts are changed, we can then shine that light and love to others. So, it is Jesus' light and love that we shine to the world around us, not our own. When we do that, we will find that we are "conducting ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ". And then the rest of the verse:

²⁷ ... Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel ²⁸ without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you.

¹ E.g., Micah 6:8, Romans 12:1, John 15:8, Mark 12:30-31, 1 Corinthians 10:31 ...

For a more extensive list, see [https://www.openbible.info/topics/how we should live our lives](https://www.openbible.info/topics/how_we_should_live_our_lives)

² <https://genius.com/Graham-kendrick-shine-jesus-shine-lyrics>

I wonder if, with the language here, of “striving together as one”, Paul and his hearers were thinking about the ancient battle tactic of the phalanx?



3

In a phalanx, a large group of soldiers formed into a block with shields and spears. Each man's shield protected his neighbour and together they made an impenetrable formation as they advanced in unison, as long as no one broke ranks. In the same way, we as the church need to stand firm together, protecting, encouraging and supporting each other, facing in the same direction, striving together as one, standing united against our enemy the devil, strong as the Holy Spirit leads, helps and guides us.

And the Philippians were facing trials, difficulties and suffering.

²⁹ For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, ³⁰ since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

Sometimes we expect that once we have become Christians, everything will be good and easy, that there will be no trials. The reality is that God has not promised us an easy life, but that he will walk through it all with us,

God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'

Hebrews 13:5b

Sometimes we just need to be brave.

⁹ Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.'

Joshua 1:9

Do everything without grumbling

And now, in Philippians chapter 2, we jump to a whole new section on how we are to live and why. In the NIV it has the heading “Do everything without grumbling” and starts with

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

Philippians 2:12

So, the Philippians are Paul's dear friends. Distance doesn't change the relationship.

But, why does it start with “Therefore” – In the previous section Jesus had humbled himself and was obedient to death.

³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phalanx> Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=667442>

“As you have always obeyed” – for the Philippians, this was obedience to the gospel of Christ, of which Paul is a servant.

Paul commends the Philippians for continuing to be faithful to God by following his teaching, even when he was in prison and so he wasn’t able to provide on-the-spot leadership, care, and correction if it were necessary.

But ...

“Work out your salvation” ?

Philippians 2:12

What does this mean? Sometimes, this verse has caused real problems. It has worried people because they think it sounds as though, if we work hard, if we are good enough, then God will accept us. We can earn our salvation by “works”.

But when we compare this with Ephesians 2

“Work out your salvation” ?

Philippians 2:12

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

Ephesians 2

we see that salvation is a free gift of God. It is not something that we can earn. Jesus has earned it for us. He has paid the price, not us.

“Work out your salvation” ?

Philippians 2:12

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

¹⁰ For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Ephesians 2

But when we add in verse 10, we get more of the idea of expressing that salvation in good works.

So, this helps us work out what Philippians 2:12 means.

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 ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose.

So “work out your salvation” must mean that if we love and follow Jesus, if we have accepted his free gift of salvation, then we should see the effects of this “working out” in our lives.

“[It] emphasizes the concept of active faith. It reveals that while we receive salvation as a gift from God, it requires our participation. We are called to live out our faith daily, interacting with God, His Word, and other believers. It’s not mere belief but a profound engagement that shapes our actions, thoughts, and interactions with the world.”⁴

So, “there is [one] sense in which our salvation is complete, in the sense that Jesus has done a complete work for us. Still there is also a sense in which our salvation is incomplete, in that it is not yet a complete work in us.”⁵

⁴ <https://explainingthebible.com/philippians-2-12/>

⁵ https://www.blueletterbible.org/comm/guzik_david/study-guide/philippians/philippians-2.cfm

And in other translations it says, “work out your own salvation.” Sometimes we are so concerned about the salvation of others, that we neglect our own walk with God.

Paul encourages the Philippians to “continue” to work out their salvation, so they must have already made a good start.

And, what does it mean “with fear and trembling”? This is not fear in the sense of terror, but awe and reverence for God. We want to please God, to live our lives as a gift to him, but at the same time not forget his awesome majesty. This is something that we all need to take seriously.

If we claim Jesus is our Lord, then he is Lord of our choices, and people around us should also be able to see the difference following Jesus makes – between us and the surrounding society, and/or between us now and before we started to follow Jesus. What should those differences be? What changes should they and we be looking for?

First, let’s look in the Bible to see what Jesus said and did. How deeply do we love and care for the poor, the needy, the hurting, the abused, the excluded?⁶ These were Jesus’ priorities.

In 1 Peter chapter 3 we find more clues. Are we kind, loving, compassionate, humble, seeking peace, repaying evil with good, resisting the temptation to do the wrong thing ourselves and cultivating what is good in our lives?⁷ Not just a short-term thing, but for the rest of our lives.

This morning, we read that, for the psalmist, God’s word was a lamp for his feet and a light for his path, and he obeyed it.⁸ God’s word is our guide too. In it we can find how we should live (among other things). And here is the image of lights and shining again.

So, these are some of the ways that we can shine for Jesus ... to be light and salt to the world, to point others to Jesus; not to elevate ourselves, but to bring glory to God.

Because it is God working in us, we have an even greater responsibility and motivation to grow and serve, to spend time with him and learn from him so that we can shine for Jesus.

Most translations use “pleasure” instead of “purpose” so we see that as God works in our lives it gives him pleasure. He enjoys our company and wants the absolute best for us. As Jesus said,

... let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.
Mathew 5:16

Again, this is not to make ourselves good enough for God to accept us, but to let **his** goodness, love and mercy flow out from us to a lost, lonely and hurting world.

But we are not going to be instantly perfect, so how quickly do we turn to the Lord in repentance when we fall short?

And are we ready with an answer if people ask us what makes the difference in our lives?

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.
1 Peter 3:15

Have we thought about our reply if someone asks what makes the difference in our life? Are we prepared to be vulnerable? What will we say? How do we rely on the Holy Spirit to know what will

⁶ Matthew 25:34-36, Luke 14:12-14, 1 John 3:16-18, Luke 4:18-19 (quoting Isaiah 61:1,2), Luke 5:30-32 ...

⁷ 1 Peter 3: 8-12

⁸ Psalm 119:105-106

touch that person's heart? This requires love, prayer and sensitivity. And, above all, courage to step out in faith.

And it helps to remember that, if we get it wrong, our readiness to apologise and ask the person that we may have hurt for forgiveness often speaks the loudest of all about our faith.

Back to Philippians chapter 2

¹⁴ Do everything without grumbling or arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may become blameless and pure, 'children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.'

"Do everything without grumbling or arguing ..." That seems fairly straight forward. It is never very pleasant being with someone who is always complaining about everything. But is this verse referring to grumbling to or about God, or to or about other people, or all four? Perhaps the answer is "yes" ... "all of the above".

The language Paul uses here is reminiscent of that describing the number of times that the Israelites complained, murmured or grumbled in their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land?⁹ They grumbled against God, they complained about Moses, the food, how hard life was, how difficult the way ahead looked. Each time, God provided for their need. When they complained about Moses and God (again), God sent "fiery serpents" among them. Many people were bitten by these fiery serpents, and many died. Then God told Moses to make a bronze snake and lift it up on a pole. When someone who had been bitten by a fiery serpent looked at that bronze snake, they were healed.¹⁰ Jesus used this image to explain that in the same way he must be lifted up on the cross so that all who looked to him would be saved.¹¹

But what about us Aussies today? I remember when we used to hear about people in another country (that will remain nameless) that took each other to court over grievances. We used to think "Australians don't do that" and felt safe in that knowledge. How times have changed! Australians are now known as a nation of complainers.¹² But what about the church? How are we known? Do we stand out here, like lights in the darkness? Are we known as people who don't grumble and argue but just get on with caring for the poor and needy?

Philippians 2 continues

Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky ¹⁶ as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labour in vain.

Stars shine brightest when the sky is darkest. And the darker and more dismal the surrounding conditions, the more important it is for the lights to shine brightly. This can be an encouragement for us to persevere and not give up in our darkest times. As Corrie ten Boom said after her time in a concentration camp during the Second World War, "There is no depth that God is not deeper still." And we remember that at the time Paul wrote this letter, he was in chains in a Roman prison too.

"As you hold firmly to the word of life". - To "hold firmly to the word of life" is something that is not just a sudden enthusiasm, it is a commitment for the whole of our lives. But this could also be

⁹ <https://thehlukejourney.wordpress.com/2017/09/27/14-times-the-israelites-complained-or-grumbled-from-egypt-to-the-promised-land/>

¹⁰ Numbers 21:4-9

¹¹ John 3:14-16

¹² <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2011-08-24/napper-snobs-and-whingers-the-new-australia/2853464>

translated as “hold forth”, so “the word of life”, God’s word, is something that we need to share, to hold out and offer to people.¹³

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. ¹⁸ So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

These last few verses, including “do all things without grumbling or arguing”, remind me of 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, which says much the same thing, but is couched in more positive terms.

¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray continually, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

In the Christian classic, *The Hiding Place*, Corrie and Betsie ten Boom were in a concentration camp in Germany during the Second World War because they had been hiding Jews in their home in Holland.

They were in overcrowded, filthy conditions in their barracks room. Betsie quoted this verse and started listing the things to give thanks for – the crowded conditions because many more women would hear of Jesus in the pages of the Bible that they had smuggled in. She prodded Corrie, “Oh, all right. Thank you for the jammed, crammed, stuffed, packed, suffocating crowds.”¹⁴

Betsie continued, “Thank you for the fleas ...” but this was too much for Corrie; there was no way even God could make her thankful for the fleas.

Each evening, they had a worship “service” that continued to grow. “A single meeting might include a recital of the Magnificat in Latin by a group of Roman Catholics, a whispered hymn by some Lutherans, and a sotto voce chant by Eastern Orthodox women.”¹⁵ At last either Corrie or Betsie would read from the Bible in Dutch and translate it into German. Others would translate it into French, Polish, Russian and Czech. Then Corrie “would know again that in darkness God’s truth shines most clear.”¹⁶

And they eventually found out why they had so much freedom in that room. The guards would not step through the doors “because of the fleas. ... That place is crawling with fleas!”¹⁷



So, in all we do, let’s commit together now to live and shine for Jesus, without grumbling, but full of praise, and in all circumstances, particularly for us as the family at St George’s. Let’s live up to being known as “the light on the hill”.

Let’s pray. Father, help us this week to spend time with you in your word and prayer allowing Jesus’ light, life and love to so fill our hearts that it overflows to those around us, so that we can walk honouring Him, worthy of his calling, and shining his light wherever we go. In his name we pray. Amen

¹³ <https://www.biblegateway.com/verse/en/Philippians%20%3A16>

¹⁴ *The Hiding Place, 35th Anniversary Edition*, Corrie ten Boom et al., 2006, p 210.

¹⁵ Ibid, p212

¹⁶ Ibid, p213

¹⁷ Ibid, p220