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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“SHINING LIKE STARS” ~ Philippians 2:12-18**

Night is falling. The darkness of immorality, injustice, and idolatry is getting deeper, thicker, more pervasive.

☑ {Sir Edward Grey, para.} **“The [lights] are going out all over ...”**; shall we **“see them lit again...”**? I wonder.

{Jn 3:19} **“This is the verdict: ... people [have] loved darkness instead of light...”** The world is in desperate need of light!

{Mt 5:14, 16} Christ Jesus has commissioned us to be the light: **“You are the light of the world .... let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”**

Alas! A lot of professing Christians are not doing so. A number are actively dimming the light.

E.g., some believers who stridently denounce same-sex immorality are silent about heterosexual pornography, fornication, and adultery. When we shrug off in ourselves what we revile in others we make the world darker.

Some believers who harshly condemn as liars the “other side” (be it left or right) are quick to repeat the speculations, half-truths, and fictions put out by their side. When we fight fire with fire, we make the world darker.

Some believers who angrily protest the smallest potential abridgement of their religious liberties support proposals to track, exclude, or expel members of other religious groups. When we use our freedom to oppress others, we make the world darker.

It is bad when people who have not seen the light spread the darkness. It is worse when we who claim to know Jesus do so.

{Jn 12:35} Lord, have mercy! Grant that we might **“walk”** in the light **“while [we] have the light, before darkness overtakes [us].”**

? Are we letting our **“light shine”**? Are we really **“the light of the world”**?

☐ Please turn with me to Philippians 2:12-18.

■ {Eccl 1:9} I have spoken as though everything is getting worse. Still, **“there is nothing new under the sun.”** The first century Greco-Roman world is rotten with pride, unbelief, greed, decadence, political corruption, and violence. Thus in verse 15 we find that our brothers and sisters in Philippi are immersed **“in a warped and crooked generation.”**

Like us, they are tempted to conceal the light. It is possible that darkness will creep into their souls and they will unwittingly spread it to others.

Possible, but not inevitable! God has equipped these Christ Followers with every resource they need to radiate his brilliant light.

■ In verse 15b Paul confidently declares, **“Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky.”** **“Then you will shine”** even **“among them”** (this **“warped and crooked generation”**) **“like stars in the sky.”**

{Mt 5:14-15} By the grace of God the Philippian church is able to incarnate the profile provided by Messiah: **“You are the light of the world. A city on a**

hill ... a lamp” that “gives light to everyone in the house.”

{Mt 5:16} By the grace of God they are able to fulfill the calling issued by the Son: **“In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”**

{Is 2:5; I Jn 1:7} The same is true of us, if we **“walk in the light of the LORD.”** For **“God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.”**

{I Jn 1:7} Notice that conditional conjunction, if: **“if we walk in the light.”** There are **“those who claim to be in the light”** even though they **“are still in the darkness.”** They think they **“know where they are going,”** **“but ... the darkness has blinded them”** (I John 2:9, 11).

‡ How can we **“let [our] light shine before others”**? How can we actually be **“the light of the world”**?

★ The first condition is fruitful discipleship, as the apostle Paul describes it in verses 12-13.

■ **“<sup>12</sup> ... Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.”**

{Eph 2:8-9} It is **“work out your salvation,”** not ‘work for your salvation.’ For <sup>8</sup> **“it is by grace [we] have been saved, through faith – and this [faith] is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – <sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast.”**

{Eph 5:8-11} Yet the Lord’s purpose in saving us is not merely to spare us from sin’s deadly penalty. It is that we will **“Live as children of light, (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth),”**

new creatures who **“have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness.”**

{Ro 12:2; 8:29} What is the sign and substance of salvation **“by grace ... through faith”**? It is the ongoing process of **“[transformation] by the renewing of [our] mind”** and **“[conformation] to the image of his Son.”** As a consequence, we **“do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”**

{Jas 2:17, 20, 26} Therefore, **“faith without deeds is useless”**. More than that **“faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead”**: as dead as **“the body without the spirit.”**

Is the man who prays the so-called ‘Sinner’s Prayer’ and goes no further **“saved”**?

Is the woman who professes orthodox beliefs yet does not exercise love for God and neighbor **“saved”**?

Is the person who is an active churchgoer but does not **“act justly ... love mercy and ... walk humbly”** **“saved”**?

{Mic 6:8} I do not know. I can say this: such ‘Christians’ do not shine brightly. Their light is dim. Sometimes they make the world a darker place.

■ But if we **“continue to work out [our] salvation with fear and trembling”** and **“God...works in [us] to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose,”** we **“will shine among them like stars in the sky” <sup>16</sup> as [we] hold firmly to the word of life”** (verses 15b-16a).

★ Discipleship is the first condition of shining. The second is healthy Church membership.

📖 {Eph 2:22} This membership is not official affiliation, wherein we complete the established protocols, our names are entered on the rolls, and we are granted certain rights and responsibilities. It is eternal inclusion in the household of faith, functional attachment to the body of Christ, practical incorporation into the earthly **“dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”**

I am not discouraging formal membership. Far from it! However, that formal status means nothing if we are not spiritually united to the family of God.

■ Take a look at verses 14-15a: **“<sup>14</sup> Do everything without grumbling or arguing, <sup>15</sup> 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.”** **“Everything”** covers worship, prayer, study, fellowship, ministry within, and mission without – all our shared activities, events that are official and unofficial, scheduled and spur-of-the-moment, public and private, repeated or a one-off.

☑ Paul emphasizes interaction with our brothers and sisters in the Church because discipleship is essentially relational and communal. Bonhoeffer nailed it when he asserted that, **“Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ .... We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ.”**

Hence, **“being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind”** and

**“looking... to [each other’s] interests”** (Philippians 2:2-4) is not a secondary matter. It is of crucial importance.

And **“[Clothing ourselves] with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience”** as we **“bear with each other and forgive one another”** (Colossians 3:12-13) is not a nice add-on that is good to do if we can get around to it. It is part and parcel of following Jesus.

{Jn 13:35} What did Messiah say? **“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”**

■ If you and I live cruciform lives marked by humility and service, doing **“everything without grumbling or arguing,”** we will **“become blameless and pure, ‘children of God without fault.’”** And the Church **“will shine among”** this **“warped and crooked generation”** **“like stars in the sky.”**

■ Finally verses 16b-18:

**<sup>16</sup> And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.**

At first hearing, this sounds disconnected from the preceding verses. What does this have to do with **“[working] out [our] salvation with fear and**

**trembling” and “[Doing] everything without grumbling or arguing”?**

Fruitful discipleship and healthy church membership always involve **“sacrifice and service.”** The **“service”** can be easy, or it can take everything we’ve got, as though we are **“being poured out like”** an **“offering”** for the Lord. The **“sacrifice”** can be as inconspicuous as holding our tongues when we are offended, or as dramatic as going to prison like Paul.

{Php 2:2, 18} Regardless, when we are faithful in these matters our **“light [shines] ... others ... [can] see [our] good deeds and”** our **“Father in heaven”** is glorified. In this the people of God are **“glad and rejoice”!** The majesty of the LORD displayed in the radiance of the Church **“[makes our] joy complete.”**

Night is falling. The darkness of immorality, injustice, and idolatry is getting deeper.

But all is not lost! The darkness is not complete.

God the Son has made us **“the light of the world”!**

By the power of him who dwells in us we can **“walk in the light.”** **“Then [we]”** – even you and I, Beverly Covenant Church (!) – **will shine ... like stars in the sky.”**

Philippians 2:12-18 is the Word of the Lord.