

**Notes from Sermon given by Ian Stackhouse Sunday 3rd June 2007
Philippians 2:12-18**

There is nothing worse than expending your energies on something only to find it has been a waste of time. For example: an athlete trains for four years and when he gets to the Olympics he gets two false starts and is disqualified; or a restoration team puts years into trying to restore an ancient tea-clipper, the *Cutty Sark*, only to see it destroyed by fire; or in business you put time, effort and money into a bid for a project only to have it rejected in favour of another.

It is soul-destroying.

This is how Paul feels on hearing the news of the split in the Church for which he has poured out his life. His ultimate fear that, come the Day of Christ when every church will be under the scrutiny of the Lord, it will all have been in vain, is coming true.

Not to mention the fact of the futility of their evangelism, when the church can't get its own house in order. Paul has in mind the words of Daniel 12:3 when he writes about shining like the stars in heaven as you 'hold out the word of life'. If the church is squabbling, the stars that are meant to shine are reduced to nothing; they are like the brown dwarfs in outer space we have read about this week – not planets, not stars, just useless. As someone said of such churches 'they are so busy dividing they don't know how to multiply.'

This church in Philippi is very dear to Paul's heart, and so he reminds them, as we saw last week, of the U-shape their lives should take, of humility and servanthood. He urges them to continue even when he is absent to work out their salvation. He is addressing the corporate aspect of this, not in the sense of 'grit your teeth', but because God is at work in you, by His Holy Spirit. You have to work out what God has worked in. Because God is not after just a one-to-one relationship with you, but He wants a people. 40% of the New Testament is about relationships, and only 3% about the gifts of the Spirit. The Church is to be a prophetic sign, a shining light in a dark place, 'knocking holes in the darkness'.

He says the way to work it out is to do everything without complaining or arguing so that you will become blameless and pure. 'If you want to shine, don't whine'. This will go a long way towards the missionary purpose of the Church. In the Old Testament the Israelites were noted for their grumbling and murmuring and because of it spent years wandering in the desert before entering the Promised Land.

So imagine what it would be like in this wicked and depraved, whingeing and cynical generation to enter a place like this, where people loved one another – it would be like heaven on earth. This is what the Church is called towards, a colony of heaven, an outpost of the Kingdom of Heaven. We demonstrate this not primarily through doctrine, but through love, service, humility, honouring and encouragement, acts of kindness. So people will ask: 'What is it that causes people to be like this?'

The Church of Philippi is splitting over two women, Euodia and Syntyche. When Paul was there, they used to work together with him, and where there is unity God commands a blessing. Now they were head-to-head, which produces conflict and weariness. How do we get out of this? We come with the opposite spirit. We bring words of encouragement and building up, speaking well of one another – this is what makes the Church flourish. If you want your children to come to faith, or your friends to come to faith, the worst thing you can do is grumble about the Church in front of them. We should live so that you are not ashamed to sell your parrot to the local gossip!