



Philippians 2:12-18
Character and Reputation
The Church's Character and Reputation

Rev. Brian North
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This morning we wrap up our series on Character and Reputation. Next Sunday we will start a new series that will take us through the rest of this year. The series is titled, “What’s In a Name?” (**Series Poster**) and in it we will look at some of the names of God in the Bible. No one name can really encapsulate all of who God is, and so there are a number of Biblical names God is known by. We won’t get to all of them, but we’ll cover nine of them – some that are probably familiar to us, others maybe not so much.

But today we finish this series on Character and Reputation. (**Sermon Graphic**) To briefly recap: After an introduction to the series three weeks ago, we looked at Jesus’ character and reputation two weeks ago; last week we looked at our individual character and reputation; and today we look at the character and reputation of the Church. On one hand, the character and reputation of the Church is really just the collective character and reputation of individual Christians, such as we talked about last week. This is true, because the church is made up of individual Jesus followers – like a body with many parts.

But there is also the character and reputation of the Church that stems from things that the church does as a body, as a unified group of people, as opposed to a collection of individuals. We could speak of this as the Church with a capital “C” – the church worldwide, and we could speak of this as the church with a lower case “c” – the local church, an individual church, such as Rose Hill Church. What is the character and reputation of the local church, of Rose Hill Church?

No matter how you look at it: **The primary goal is that our character – individually or collectively as a church – would be like Jesus’ character.** He is the one we pattern our lives and our church after. And we want to focus primarily on that, as opposed to primarily managing our reputation, because you can’t please all the people all the time. But we do want to be cognizant of our reputation for the sake of reaching a lost world, because our reputation *is* how people perceive us. So, we live with high character that pleases God

first, and our reputation hopefully follows and people are interested in discovering more about Jesus.

Today's passage helps illustrate all of this for us. **This passage is dependent on the verses just before it.** We looked at them a couple weeks ago in regards to Jesus' character and reputation. We know today's verses are tightly connected to the verses before because of the first word in verse 12: "Therefore." In other words, Paul is saying, "In light of what I just wrote, here's what it means for you and your church." So, to recap: in the first few verses of chapter 2, Paul is encouraging the church in Philippi to live with humility, love, and unity that is all rooted in Jesus. He tells them to "have the same mindset as Jesus, who..." and then he goes on in verses 5-11 to describe Jesus' mindset, or his character, including that he was a servant and had humility. That's what we looked at a couple weeks ago.

Then, having described the character of Jesus, he comes back to speaking to them with, "Therefore..." and then he continues on with these words for the church that we just read. "As Jesus was, so are you to be," is what he's saying. And then the additional thing he does here is, he connects a church's character, or "how a church lives out its faith" with its "reputation" to use the language of the series. It's not the word he uses, but it's effectively what he's describing as we'll see in a moment.

He says to "work out your salvation with fear and trembling..." (Philippians 1:12). That's a plural "your" by the way, in the Greek. In other words, "all of you" in the church, and collectively as the church: live out your faith in Jesus. That's what he means by "work out your salvation". Understand what it means that Christ died for you on the cross and was raised from the dead, *and then take that understanding and live it out.* And then briefly, there are three things he puts in here that give more detail about what it means to live out our faith, or work out our salvation. First, he says to do so with fear and trembling. Why? Because it helps us with the whole humility thing Paul wrote of earlier when describing Jesus. "Fear and trembling" helps keep us in our right place in relationship to God: He is God of the Universe with complete autonomy and free will in regards to

everything, right down to our very souls...so, he's saying: keep that in mind as you live out our faith.

Second, we're not on our own in this. He reminds them, and now us, in verse 13 that God is "at work in you [us]" to accomplish His purposes. This is good news: God is actively at work in our lives and in our church. Third and last, he says, "Do everything without grumbling or arguing" (Philippians 2:14). Oh my goodness that's a tough one, right? It's almost like it's human nature to grumble and complain...even in the church it happens...Paul is writing to a church, remember...But keeping the big picture in view and trusting that God is working in us and through us even if something is hard or not how we'd do it if we were making the decision...all of that is a part of living out our faith, and working together as a church.

That (working out our salvation in the way he describes here) will lead to a blameless and pure life, a life that really demonstrates the connection to God our heavenly father who has brought about salvation through Jesus.

And then we finally get to what this all really leads to. Note that the "pure and blameless life" and being "children of God" of verse 15 isn't the end. If we end there, then we really are only in this for our own selfish motivations. Much as Jesus taught, Paul writes, "**Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life**" (Philippians 2:15-16). *This* is the reason for living out our faith and doing so in the way he describes in the previous verses.

And by the way, like last week: Paul is writing to Christians who are being persecuted for their faith. Paul himself is in prison for his faith as well – "in chains" as he puts it earlier...and he alludes to his persecution in these verses as well. And so the "them" – when he says "you will shine among them" is connected all the way back to what Paul wrote in 1:28 when Paul encourages them not to be "frightened in any way by those who oppose you." So by living out their faith – by "working out their salvation" – in the midst of that, they will shine like stars among them – among those who persecute them. **Their church will stand out and be a beacon of light and hope for Jesus.**

What a witness among the community and a positive reputation! And it's not like this is a mega-church, or a church with a lot of satellite churches scattered around the city, or a church with a Facebook page and a YouTube account on which they can stream their services. This is a "house church" as essentially all the churches were at this time. And Paul is simply encouraging them to live out their faith so they would shine like stars.

Let's not let the importance or the meaning of the metaphor slip by us. In their day, the stars were what people navigated the seas by. They were how you knew what direction you were going and where you were. So there's that implication here: that our lives and our church would help people find their way through the world, give them hope and comfort and know that they're not alone. Do you remember 10 years ago or so when the night sky looked like this **(Picture)** for a while? (Smiley face.)



Literally, the stars and planets (I believe Venus is one of the "eyes" of the smiley face) of the night sky brought a sense of wonder and joy to people's lives. This last summer many of us were in awe of the comet that was visible throughout much of July, and some of us had the good fortune of spending time with a church member who had a really high-powered telescope to view it and we also could see Jupiter and its moons, and Saturn and its rings. It was pretty awesome.

That's how we as a church are to shine, as well. It might be through tangibly coming alongside someone and helping them in their time of need, or it could be simply that we live as an example of supportive community...we live a life that people see and they say, "I want to be like that." That's how a church like ours ought to be.

But the words Paul uses here are actually that they would "shine like lights in the cosmos." That's how the phrase reads in Greek. And people are attracted to light. Lights get our attention. We need it in the darkness. If someone is lost at sea at night they first look to the stars; but if they don't know how to use the stars to navigate, they'll look for other points of light – a lighthouse, other lights on shore, or the lights of a city – to help them find their way. People look for light in the darkness. Yesterday I was under our

house (oh, joy!) running Cat-6 wire from our modem to other rooms in the house because the Wi-Fi coverage wasn't working for us...and we've had these wires going through our living room and dining room and down the hall...so we finally took time to put them in their proper place...and I needed light to see where I was going and what I was doing. I had a work light, a headlamp, a flashlight, and even my cell phone light if I needed it. Four sources of light! And the light was helpful! I needed it in the darkness. And that's how a church ought to be: a light shining in the darkness, helpful and blessing the community around it.

So, Paul is imploring the church in Philippi, and us, to be attractive.

Clearly, not physically attractive or I couldn't stand here and preach this message. Spiritually attractive (not that I have that perfect, either). Attractive in how we live our faith – which doesn't mean living a perfect life, but living a life well. Handling adversity well – which was the situation for this church in Philippi; and handling success well – which is harder than it sounds. Just ask the plethora of people from athletes to lottery winners who got rich quick only to end up broke a few years later.

Being this kind of church isn't easy to do. Yes, God is at work in us, as this passage says...but there is so much that seeks to get in the way. This week I discovered a Christian organization called, The Jubilee Centre. They are a London-based Christian non-profit that helps people in the United Kingdom and beyond think about how they live their faith in the public sphere. What does it mean to be a Christian and work at Microsoft or Amazon or live in a retirement community? What does it mean to be a Christian and teach in the public schools or work at Costco, or be a college student? And the Jubilee Centre has a really excellent article on “reputation” where they write, **“Recent research has revealed that, as an institution, the church's reputation in UK society is largely a negative one, creating a real barrier to the effective proclamation of the gospel” (Jubilee Centre Article on “Reputation.”)**¹

I would suggest to you that this probably isn't a whole lot different here in the U.S. The article goes on to say: “These issues of reputation are not just

about the behaviour of church leaders as individuals, they go to the reputation of the church as a whole.”

I often wonder what our reputation as a church is here at Rose Hill. This last January, a retired pastor friend of mine who has also served at the denominational level and has literally worked with (and been in, on Sundays) a couple hundred churches, visited us on a Sunday. He didn't announce to anyone he was a pastor or that he knew me, but was simply here as a first-time guest like anyone else who might walk through our doors on a Sunday. He was genuinely impressed with his experience, except he did say the preacher needed some serious help. I'm kidding. ☺ He was genuinely impressed with a lot of his Sunday morning experience: from the worship services – he attended both and thought the worship band and the organ playing and the choir were all fantastic – to children's ministries, to youth ministries...I think he sat in on part of an adult ministry class, if I remember right...he spent time in the lobby visiting with people just like anyone else...and his feedback was that: **There are a lot of really solid things happening here at Rose Hill on Sunday mornings.** (Remember, this was pre-Covid, so all these things were happening here on Sunday mornings!)

And the thing he said that I was most proud of, and that he thought we nailed better than most churches he'd been in, is that we were genuinely friendly and welcoming to him. Every church says they are friendly. And all of them are – to their own folks. Not every church does a good job of making room for, welcoming, and being friendly to new people. That was not his experience. He said that 5 or 6 people, or couples, visited with him, with three of them inviting him back to church the next Sunday – including one person who invited him back even after learning that he lived down near Gig Harbor! (75 minutes away.) I see that kind of engagement every Sunday: even in Covid, we've had several new people who have been attending and pretty much every Sunday someone different engages with them. I think that is a genuine part of our reputation in the community.

But I think for people who haven't been here on a Sunday, they may not know a lot about us. There's not a reputation – except maybe in regards to the sign out front. I can't tell you how many people, when they find out I'm

the pastor, tell me, “Oh! I love your church sign – the funny messages, the inspiring ones...I drive by on my way to Costco all the time...you always have something interesting on there!” And usually they try to give me credit for it and I always let them know, “I’m not the sign guy.” So that’s great...but is that our reputation? We’re the church with a sign out front? We’re the church by Costco? Why isn’t Costco known as “the store next to Rose Hill Church?”

What if we were known as the church where real hope, love and life – the phrases on the banners along our driveway – were more tangible and accessible than anywhere else? What if our reputation was that we had a big impact on our community? What if our church were one that if it were to disappear from the face of the earth, that it would leave a gigantic hole in the fabric of our community?

Here’s a way to think about this. **Imagine your life without Jesus: No hope for eternity, no forgiveness, no Father in heaven.** We’re just floating on the third rock from the sun, spinning around in a galaxy lost somewhere in this colossal place called “The Universe.” Imagine that for a moment, but not too long, because it’s kind of depressing, really. It’s a life without hope.

Now, imagine if that’s how people in the community felt about Rose Hill Church if our church disappeared. Not just for those of us who call RH “home,” but the entire city of Kirkland and the neighboring communities, too. Imagine if they were that bummed about Rose Hill disappearing. That’s a church with a vibrant presence in the world. What if we mattered that much? What if our reputation was that sterling and shining for Jesus because our character was so formed by Jesus? And I don’t ask us to imagine that because I think we should be building the Kingdom of Rose Hill or that other churches aren’t valuable. **I ask it because along with the others: our church matters.** Rose Hill matters. *You* matter to God and for His Kingdom purposes. God has put Rose Hill here for a reason. God has put you in this church for a reason and in your neighborhood for a reason. And together, along with all the other churches around, we want to “shine among the people around us, like stars in the sky;” we want to have a solid reputation

for living out our deeply held convictions, character, and beliefs about Jesus, helping people navigate life and find hope in the midst of the darkness.

I hope and pray that we will grow into being that kind of church more than we already are. We do have an impact...but I believe it could be greater. I believe God is calling us to shine like stars for that purpose – for His name and His kingdom. I pray you'd be an active part of that here at Rose Hill.

I'll wrap up this message and this series with these closing words, from Psalm 115:1, **“Not to us, O Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness” (Psalm 115:1)**. May you and I and our church and the Church worldwide always be about the Name of Jesus; and through our character and reputation, may we bring Him all the glory. Let's pray...Amen.

¹ <https://www.jubilee-centre.org/cambridge-papers/style-or-substance-does-the-reputation-of-the-church-matter-by-david-mcilroy>

I highly recommend this article if you want further reading on this topic. It hits on a lot of great points – some of which we've covered in this series. And the Jubilee Centre is itself a great organization and worth exploring more to encourage you in your faith.