

## **Work Out Your Salvation, Thus Being the Light of Jesus**

Our Life in Christ

Philippians 2:12-18

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*Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*

*Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me. Philippians 2:12-18 (ESV)*

For those who are visiting this morning, we are studying the book of Philippians. I want to reset the stage for us for a moment so that we can launch into today's scripture with some common background. We know that on Paul's second missionary journey that Paul and Silas were led by the Holy Spirit to this small Greek town of 10,000, filled with Roman culture and an apparent dislike of the Jewish people. There were not even enough Jewish men in the city to have a synagogue and therefore on one Sabbath, early on when Paul arrived at the city, Paul found a place of prayer outside of the city gate where some women of God were gathered. It was here that Paul met Lydia, a seller of purple or high-end goods. Lydia was likely a woman of means who supported Paul's ministry. Through the church, she and her family came to Christ and were baptized. The jailer who was placed in charge of Paul during his short imprisonment also came to Christ along with his family. And we know that there were others who came to Christ but these people are not personally identified in Acts. It was a small, close knit group of individuals who were new to faith in Christ and dependent very much upon Paul for spiritual wisdom, teaching, and overall encouragement.

So here they were, new Christians in a small city with a culturally mixed background located right on the well-known road to Rome with Paul as their spiritual mentor and teacher. It was apparent that they had a great relationship with Paul for we know that this church brought Paul great joy. They loved Paul, which is evidenced by the fact that they supported him monetarily. We know this because one main reason for the letter was to commend Epaphroditus who traveled from Philippi to Rome to deliver a monetary gift during Paul's imprisonment. We also know that the church was not without conflict because Paul's letter references a disagreement between Euodia and Syntyche. The strife was significant enough to warrant Paul's attention and thus his words on unity in the letter. Paul was truly concerned about unity in the church something which was addressed two Sundays ago when Dustin Crowe, Joe Wittmer and Mark Schuitema preached on unity and humility.

This is the backdrop of the letter to the Philippian Church, an upbeat, joyful, supportive, church very dependent upon Paul for guidance and leadership. It was an exciting time because the Holy Spirit was at work. It was a time when the church was growing, trying to find its way, dealing with various personalities, all while living in the midst of a people who really did not like what they were doing.

## **Paul Loved the Philippian Church (vv.12-13)**

So please turn with me to our scripture for today as we look at these verses. Let me start by saying that Paul's key message in these passages is that we are to ***"work out our salvation and by doing so, we become lights in the midst of a dark world."*** We are going to look at several things from the text this morning including:

1. That the motive for our continued work towards our sanctification is found in the previous verses where we see that Christ humbled himself by taking on the form of a servant and was obedient to the point of death on a cross. The motive for our sanctification also serves to answer the question why is this important to us.
2. That we are called to work out our salvation but it is really the work of God.
3. That our lack of faith in God is the source of grumbling and disputes while our living blamelessly and innocently in faith leads to us being lights in a dark world.

In verse 12 Paul starts off powerfully with the phrase "Therefore my beloved." To begin with, we see in this opening phrase the depth of love that Paul has for the Philippian church. Paul calls these people his beloved. This is what God said about his Son Jesus during the Transfiguration in Matthew 17:5. He says "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." It is a word that carries respect, admiration, deep concern and a radical, powerful type of love.

Paul's love for the Philippian believers is what drives his desire for them to flourish, to be in unity, to be in prayer, to live harmoniously. It is like a father who wants the very best for his kids so he provides them with encouragement, direction, accountability, and cheers for him at every turn. He longs for his family to make good decisions and avoid the pain and suffering that poor decisions can bring.

So while it is true that this letter is full of theology, we need to understand Paul is writing from the heart and appealing to his church family first and foremost or we could miss the richness of this wonderful letter. Philippians 1: 8 "For God is my witness how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus." We see clearly that this is a letter of love, intimacy, encouragement, and entreat. Yes, there is theology in here but we must see that first and foremost Paul is not writing from a theological and doctrinal basis but primarily from a relational framework.

We have this here at College Park don't we? Mark Vroegop is a great preacher and we are blessed to have him teaching. He is certainly skilled in bringing the Word but there is more to him than just preaching. We know that he loves this church. We know that he loves us and cares for us intimately. His love for us makes his appeals that much stronger. We all are far more eager to listen and respond to someone when we know that they care deeply for us. Paul's relationship with the Philippians is very similar so we should feel a closeness to this this letter.

## **Our Motivation is the Work of Christ**

So beloved is a great word signifying warm, loving relationships. But, the word beloved is not nearly as powerful to me as the word "therefore." As Joe Wittmer said two weeks ago, when you come to the word therefore, one has to ask why the word therefore is there for. The word therefore implies that something of importance is the basis for something else of importance. Paul is saying hey because of that, because that is so important, you need to do this.

In my personal opinion, this is one of the biggest therefore statements in all of Scripture and therefore all of history. Paul is saying to the Philippian believers, you need to awaken your souls to something here because it is a big deal. Why? Because the therefore is referring to the most amazing, most humbling verses we could ever read, Philippians 2: 5-11 which Joe preached on last week. Paul explains that Jesus emptied himself taking on human flesh. He humbled himself to the point where he died on the cross. He went to extreme measures so that we might be forgiven of cosmic treason. We get a glimpse of the majesty, power and holiness of the presence of God in Isaiah 6 where Isaiah recounts his encounter with God. "In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple." Seraphim were calling out holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. Thresholds were shaking. Smoke filled the house of God. This, my friends, is a display of majesty and glory. This is holiness, power, might, wisdom and everything else that makes up God. Hopefully, this will give you a fresh perspective on the significance of Jesus taking on humanity. Jesus, possessing all of this, took on the form of a servant and went to the cross for me. He took on flesh to come to earth. This, College Park, is what the therefore is therefore. This is the key, driving motivation for us to obey the instructions of Paul to work out our salvation. This answers the question why we are to pursue obedience to Christ.

When I sit and contemplate these verses about the example of Jesus in Philippians, they evoke great emotion in me and I am sure you as well. Joe mentioned the same thing about himself last week. If they do that for us today, just imagine how Paul must have felt when he was writing these verses to the Philippian church being filled with the Holy Spirit. If he used a scribe, I imagine his voice getting louder and louder and speaking faster and faster as the Holy Spirit spoke these words through him. If he penned this himself I imagine that the point of that writing instrument was getting pressed hard onto the writing surface as Paul's hand gripped tighter and tighter while pushing down harder and harder.

*And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*  
Philippians 2:8-11 (ESV)

Paul had to have carried this emotion into his next words as he states "Therefore my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." I get the feeling that Paul is at a fever pitch at this point.

### **Paul's Imperative to Work Out our Salvation (v.12)**

These instructions, then, are a big deal to Paul. So, where is Paul going with this? What is Paul saying? What does he mean "work out your salvation?" By working out our salvation, is our ultimate salvation dependent upon our work and our efforts? If so, how does this align with his teaching in Romans? Let me try to address some of these questions and start by providing some context.

Paul is not talking to individuals here, but he is addressing the church collectively. The Greek word for "your" when he says work out your salvation is plural, not singular. Paul is addressing the Philippian believers corporately versus a direct appeal to each person individually. Therefore, individual salvation does not appear to be the focus.

And, Paul is making it clear that his personal presence is not the motivation for their obedience but, as I have already laid out, their motivation should be the Gospel. Paul enjoyed a great relationship with the

believers while in Philippi and was in a great position to share the Gospel, to teach, to serve and to encourage. The Philippian believers responded very well to Paul's teaching as evidenced by the fact that they obeyed Paul in his presence. But now, in his absence, Paul does not want them to be discouraged. He does not want them to be down by the fact that he is in prison and not able to be in their midst teaching them and praying with them. Rather than be discouraged, they should be even more motivated to do the work of Christ because they now have Christ and the Holy Spirit. They do not need Paul to be present to live out their faith. This should serve as a reminder to us that College Park does not rest upon one man or a group of individuals. We should find our motivation in Christ and not man.

So let's move from context to the implications of Paul's words, work out your salvation. In order to understand these verses, we must realize that when Paul says, work out your salvation, the word salvation here is not intended to mean "saved" with respect to our justification. By justification I mean the removal of guilt and the payment of the debt we owe God for our sin. We do not work out being saved. We do not work out our justification nor, in another manner of speaking, do we work "for" our ultimate salvation. To be justified is to be declared righteous and to be in a right relationship with God. This happens once and for all at the time when we place our faith and trust in Jesus Christ. At that time we are forgiven for our trespasses and declared righteous by the blood of Christ. This was the work of Christ on the cross and not our work. In other words we ARE versus we "become." We do not earn it, it is a free gift from God through grace as it says in Romans 3:24 (ESV) "justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." In Philippians 1:6 (ESV) "And I am sure of this, that **he** who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." It is quite obvious that with respect to justification, there is no working on our part to earn anything regarding salvation. Not only that, I believe that Paul is saying that once we are saved, we are saved for eternity.

### **"Working out our Salvation" Defined**

So what exactly does Paul mean when he says work out your salvation? I have just stated that he is not referring to our "standing" before God. Rather, he is referring to our sanctification, which is a practical progressive holiness in a believer's life while awaiting the return of Christ. It means that we continually strive, cooperating with the Holy Spirit, to be more like Christ. To work out our salvation means we are to try to live according to the example set by Christ. This is an imperative. Paul does not merely suggest that we do this but basically commands that this be done. We are not perfected yet even though we are saved, but we must continue to work out the living of our Christian lives until that day when we will be with Christ when all things are made new. It means that we strive to have servant hearts thinking of others more highly than ourselves. It means we strive for unity in the body of believers. It means that we demonstrate love for others by caring, serving, praying, and loving on others. It basically means that we strive to live according to the example and teachings of Jesus.

### **So we are to submit to God**

To work out our salvation, means we must humble ourselves and be in submission to God. As Jesus was totally submissive to the Father, we are to do the same. We no longer live for ourselves but we strive to live in total submission to God. We are to work to be obedient to God even if it costs us our life or our belongings or job or even family.

I am not referring to a legalism. I am not referring to a behavior where there is a list of do's and don'ts; where we measure our faith by whether we abstain from what we consider to be wrong or by the nice things we do all the while our hearts are far, far away from the heart of Christ. This is not about morals

and ethics. We are not to be whitewashed tombs where we work to perfect our behavior while inside, our hearts are hard, cold and anything but spiritual.

I am talking about a heart that loves God so much that you want to do everything you can to be like him, to mimic him, to follow him, to be with him and to please him. There is a huge difference in a marriage between a husband who simply does things for his wife in order to keep peace or to get his way, or to look good to others; there is a huge difference between that and a husband who adores his wife out of love and affection and therefore does things because he wants to see her derive pleasure from his actions. It is her satisfaction that drives him. There is a huge difference in buying flowers at the last minute because it is Mother's Day and you better have your act together verses having the love for your wife that leads to a desire to please her, to honor her, to serve her, and to respect her. It is a matter of having the heart of a servant, of dying to self and serving our wives. Jesus did not go to the cross out of obedience bemoaning his state of affairs but went willingly out of love and a desire to be submissive to the Father. There was love, respect, admiration, and humility. Submitting to God means dying to self and putting God first, to put others before ourselves, to outdo each other in love and affection.

### **We are to cling to the things of God, not the world**

In addition to being in submission to God, we are to avoid those things in the world that are opposed to God. We are to stay away from the sinful ways of the world and hold onto the things of God.

We read in 1 John 2:15 (ESV) "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

Clearly we cannot love the things of the world and the things of God for a house divided against itself cannot stand. As you know the world is hostile to the ways of God, and this country is becoming ever and increasingly intolerant of the Christian worldview. We should not be surprised by this. Why? Because Jesus himself warned us that we are going to be hated as a result of our association with him. As John 15:18 (ESV) says, "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you."

So, it is becoming increasingly more difficult to live to our Christian principles because everything around us is becoming more and more unlike Christ. But we need to stay the course because Jesus says that we are not of this world and that we are children of God. Paul appeals to the Philippians based upon their status as children of God in verse 15. He knows that they are his precious chosen ones and thus need to live as such. They, too, faced persecution for those who lived in Philippi held to a totally different standard than the ways of Christ.

We have been adopted into God's family. We are reborn. We have come from death to life. As children of God, we have a special bond with the Father and therefore represent him. The Holy Spirit now dwells in us providing us with special care and favor. We are now set apart from the world and should strive to live that way every day.

Martin Lloyd Jones once preached the following:

*The world is godless, ready to make fun of God and religion. It is not interested in God; it panders to the flesh, and ridicules everything that is connected with God. But the New Testament says that working out my salvation means avoidance of everything that is opposed to God. (The Life of Joy, page 177)*

## **Fear and Trembling; Awe and Respect (v.12)**

Now Paul calls us to do all this, to work out our salvation with “fear and trembling.” See verse 12. These are remarkable words that can cause some real angst in us if we do not understand the intent of Paul. Paul was anything but fearful from a worldly perspective. He was one of the most courageous individuals that we see in the Bible while facing death and persecution. Let me try to explain this by what I think that Paul is not saying and then address what I believe he is talking about.

Paul is not talking about being fearful of losing our salvation. Remember that Paul is talking to the Philippian believers. These people are justified through their faith in Christ and therefore Paul is not saying that they should be fearful of losing their salvation if they do not work hard enough or are not good enough. Paul states in Romans 8:30 (ESV), “And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.” God’s intent is for those who place their faith in Christ, to be saved in the end.

Paul is also not saying that we are to be fearful of death or suffering. There are many verses written by Paul, which make it clear that Paul looked forward to being in heaven and was not afraid of death. We just read where Paul says that his desire is to depart and be with Christ for that is far better. No, we are not to be afraid or tremble at the thought of dying when we are believers. Nor should we be afraid of other men and what others think about our faith.

What I believe that Paul IS saying is that we should strive to be like Christ knowing that we are secure in Christ all the while being in total awe of the majesty, glory, holiness, and power of God. Yes, we are saved from the wrath of God but we should not lose our perspective on what would have happened to us had we not been saved. We should contemplate the sheer power of God to doom us to a miserable eternity in Hell if not for the saving faith in Christ that he provides us. Jonathon Edwards helps put this in perspective for me in his sermon entitled “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” He is speaking to nonbelievers and we, as believers, can have confidence that we are going to be with Christ but please listen to Edward’s thoughts about God’s wrath and the precarious state of the unbeliever.

*The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked: his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times more abominable in his eyes, than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours. You have offended him infinitely more than ever a stubborn rebel did his prince; and yet it is nothing but his hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment.*

God indeed is a wrathful God to those who do not place their faith in Christ. Christ has saved us from extreme consequences so we should be in awe and tremble at what could have been. Not only that, we should be in awe that God displays such grace and mercy to save us. We should be amazed that God is so loving that he chose to save his elect and assure that they will be with him in eternity. So this is a double-edged sword so to speak. We should be in awe of his wrath but also his love and mercy.

## **It is God Who Does the Work (v.13)**

Now let’s go to verse 13 regarding God’s work. You know and I know that working out our salvation is extremely hard work for even though we are saved, we are still sinners. Sometimes it is discouraging because we feel like failures because we can never be Jesus. Sometimes we feel the weight of this verse because we feel like we have to earn God’s favor. Paul recognized that this may be what the Philippians would think and wanted to make it very clear that it is God who does it. Verse 13 says: “For it is God who

works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." We could do a whole series on the theological implications of this but for today, the message I want to leave you with is this regarding this verse: Paul is stating that God gives us the will and the power. He creates the desire in our hearts and he creates the energy to be able to do it. So, we need not be discouraged but recall Philippians 1:6 where Paul says: "that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion." Paul's doctrine makes it clear that God does the work so we need to continue to go to God in prayer, seeking him at every turn, and He will do the work.

### **Do Not Grumble - Be Blameless & Be Lights to the World (vv. 14-15)**

Paul moves on to verses 14 and 15 to remind the Philippians that as children of God we need not complain. He stated in Philippians 2:14-15 (ESV) "Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world..."

Grumbling is a reference to the Israelites who grumbled against God in the wilderness. They did not trust God to carry out his promises. They did not believe that God would truly fulfill his promises to provide for them and because of this lack of trust, they basically said enough of you God and started grumbling and complaining. The same thing happens to us. When we face adversity and do not trust that God is sovereign in his love for us, we grumble and complain. When we become stubborn, lacking in faith, focused on the wrong things, then we murmur and complain against God, which ultimately leads to disputes in the body.

Paul then goes on to contrast grumbling and disputes with the idea of being blameless and innocent. We are to live lives in such a way that we give no one cause to bring a charge against us. We are to be innocent, pure, and kind hearted. When we are humble, loving, forgiving, not holding to bitterness, serving others, not given to greed, not motivated by power, money or success; when we seek the welfare of others before our own, are slow to anger, calm, peaceful; when we live pure lives avoiding sin; when we do not judge others; when we avoid negative conflict; when we do all of these things, people see the attractiveness of Jesus by the Holy Spirit.

This is the light that Paul was referring to when he told the Philippians that they "shine as lights in the world." The light is Christ shining through the church of believers. Paul says we live in "the midst of a crooked and twisted generation." Another way of saying that is that we live in a dark world. But when we live like Jesus, when we live out the Gospel, we are lights in a dark world. Peter says in 2 Peter 1:19 (ESV) "And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place."

### **Hold Fast to the Word (vv.16-18)**

This is not easy friends. As I have said repeatedly, to live lives in a manner worthy of Christ is hard. Paul knows this and states emphatically that we need to be in the Word in order to do this. In fact, the language is even stronger than that. It is more than just reading and studying the Word, but it is holding fast to the Word. To hold fast means to grip hard and not let go. We need to read the Word, dive into the Word, believe the Word, and live out the Word. Paul knows that one cannot hold fast to something unless it is solid. The word of God is solid and we need to read it and then hold fast to what it says. We need to understand it and obey it. We need to love it and cherish it. Paul encourages the Philippians to stay true to God's Word and this will be the best way to live as lights in the world. The Word will guide us

and direct us. The Holy Spirit works through the Word to sanctify our hearts and soften them to the ways of Jesus.

When we hold to the Word, Paul says that our labor will not be in vain. Verse 16 “holding fast to the word of life so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.” Our works, which ultimately depend upon God as we have said, will not return void. In this we can be glad and rejoice. This is what brings Paul joy and makes him glad.

Here at the end of these verses, Paul talks about being “poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith.” This is a reference to the drink offering poured out on the sacrificial meat and grain offering as described in the Old Testament. It is a very interesting way to describe his circumstances. He knows that he might be martyred although he does hold out hope that his present circumstances are temporary. See the word “if” at the beginning of verse 17. Paul sees this as a way of offering up to God his life as a way of bringing honor and glory to God.

I pray that we as a church would be able to see ourselves in this same way, that we would realize that we are to live as sacrificial lambs for the Gospel, working out our salvation day by day in order that we might be lights in a dark and twisted world. The light of Christ is a beautiful, radiant beam unlike any other. To be able to shine with the light of the Gospel is a glorious thing. Let us set our minds on that.

Hear the words of Martin Lloyd Jones:

*Beloved Christian people, let us be up and doing; let us take the torch of the word of God, and wave it abroad, so that the darkness of the world may be illumined, and men and women may be translated from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of Light, to the kingdom of God's dear Son. What a privilege we have to be lights, to be light bearers, at this dark and difficult hour in the history of our world. (Page 221, The Life of Joy)*

## **Applications**

- 1. Pray that God will reveal his majesty and glory to you.** Be in awe of who He is. Be in awe of his holiness and greatness and appreciate the fact that he saved you. If you have not placed your faith in Christ, please talk to someone soon because there is much at stake.
- 2. Humble yourself using Christ's example to motivate you.** Change your heart and submit to God. Do not allow yourself to get tangled up in the world but seek holiness.
- 3. Do not grumble or dispute but trust God to do His work in you.** As bad and confusing as things appear, do not lose faith in the fact that God is at work in you and is faithful to complete it. Rest in Him.
- 4. Be as lights in the world.** Let your humility, kindness, generosity, and unity show the rest of the world the amazing power of Christ.

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