

Philippians 2:12-18

Paul talked to the Philippian Christians about their obedience—in both his presence and his absence. **Why was their obedience in his absence so important to Paul (v. 12)?** It was a mark of their character and maturity. It was easier to act like a Christian when Paul was around. His presence provided external motivation for good behavior. But the best way to measure a person's character is what they do when no one is around or watching.

Obedience is important to God, honoring and pleasing Him. **What does living an obedient life look like? No alcohol? R-rated movies?** It's not merely the stuff we *don't* do—it's also *doing* the right things, being sensitive to the Spirit's leading in following after God's will (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

What does it mean to “work out your salvation?” Isn't salvation a gift from God? Paul did not mean *getting into heaven*, which would contradict justification by faith alone—a free gift from God (Ephesians 2:8). Salvation can be viewed as a progressive series of events or stages. When we initially place our faith in Christ for our salvation, we are immediately saved from the PENALTY of sin—we are adopted, sealed, heaven-bound, children of God. As we live our lives and go through the maturing/sanctification process, we are progressively saved from the POWER of sin. And one day when we step into eternity, we will be saved from the PRESENCE of sin. Paul is referring to the power of sin here. As we mature, sin should have less and less power over us.

Note that Paul is not saying to work *for* or *toward* salvation. But there is a link between obedience and “working out your salvation.” We have the responsibility to cultivate a new character and new conduct in our new nature through the work of obedience, the grueling grind of daily warfare.

What then are some practical ways to “work out your salvation?” Feed yourself spiritually; wrestle with sin; be engaged in battle; invest in the lives of others; be intentional in living an obedient Christian lifestyle, etc.

What is the critical balance in regard to the sanctification/working out process (vv. 12-13)? It is our responsibility to “work out” our salvation (v. 12), but it is God who is at work in us to enable us to do so (v. 13).

There is an age-old tension between the responsibility (or free will) of man and the sovereignty of God. Both coexist without conflict in Scripture and must be kept together. Concentrate only on v. 12—and we become legalistic, relying on our own strength for spiritual power. Focus only on v. 13—and we become passive and complacent. The Christian journey is a team effort requiring our full cooperation with God so He can accomplish in us and through us all He desires.

What is God's work in us (v. 13)? “.....to will and to act according to His good purpose.” God provides the will and does the work in and through us. He empowers and equips us with everything we need to do what is right (1 Corinthians 12:6). He works in us the very things that please Him as He transforms us into His image.

What is your reaction to the truth of vv. 12-13? Comforting and encouraging— we don't have to manage this Christian life/sanctification process all by ourselves. God will help us!

What are the characteristics of those who “shine like stars” in a “crooked and depraved generation” (vv. 14-16)?

- They do everything without grumbling or arguing
- They are among the people of the world, but untainted by their ways
- They hold firmly to the word of life

What does it mean to shine like stars? Jesus Christ, the Light of the World, dwells in us (John 8:12)—and His followers are meant to be lights to a dark world (Daniel 12:3, Matthew 5:14). Paul wanted the Philippian Christians to display a strong light of witness not obscured by sin (Matthew 5:15-16); to be a visible, positive contrast to the dark ways of the world.

Why should we do everything without complaining or arguing (v. 14)? To be a powerful shining witness in our depraved world. Our hearts should be full of gratitude for all Christ has done for us. By working out their own salvation with fear and trembling, rather than quarreling, the Philippians would show themselves to be blameless and pure.

What are the negative effects of complaining and arguing? We frustrate God's work of producing unity, which He achieves by reproducing the mind of Christ in us (i.e. humility).

Note: Charles Spurgeon lists three things we must not murmur against: The providence of God, one another, and the ungodly world.

What was an Old Testament example of the negative impact of complaining and arguing? After God miraculously brought the nation of Israel out from 400 years of slavery in Egypt, their multiple instances of complaining while in the wilderness culminated in their inability to enter and occupy the Promised Land (Numbers 13-14).

What does it mean to hold out the word of life (vs. 16)? How do we do that? Just as the Statue of Liberty holds out her torch offering liberty, Christians are to hold out the word of life offering the gospel, i.e. spiritual freedom to the world.

Was Paul's boasting self-centered (v. 16)? Paul's boasting and joyfulness was about the Philippians (3 John 4). This "boast" was a pride that was not sinful, but rather the satisfaction of a job well done for the Lord—as these believers continued to mature, fulfilling their design in life. Paul will have great satisfaction—as a parent is proud of a child.

What was Paul's perspective on his possible impending death sentence (v. 17)? He described his present life as the pouring out of a drink offering (2 Timothy 4:6) like what was done in Israel's worship (Numbers 15:1-10; 28:4-7). After the priest presented a burnt offering (a lamb, ram or bull), he poured wine beside the altar, the last act in the sacrificial ceremony. The poured out wine reference here pictures the gradual ebbing away of Paul's life as a living sacrifice to God. Paul saw himself and the Philippians as priests offering sacrifices—their own and their works—to God.

To Paul, his life was not the important thing here—it was the Philippians' faith which is a substantial and valuable offering. Paul was holding up their faith and achievements for admiration and placing all his achievements—even his death—as a secondary offering, at a very low point on the scale of Christian service. Even if Paul would die, he could rejoice that he had made a contribution to their sacrificial service for God.

Service and sacrifice are inseparable, going hand-in-hand with ministry which requires the pouring out of ourselves for others just as Christ did for us. As Christians emulating Christ, pouring out ourselves for others—especially our children—is the most meaningful and satisfying thing we can do in life.

Why should the Philippians rejoice (v. 18)? The Philippians would not rejoice over the prospect of Paul's death. But they could rejoice over the knowledge that they, as did Paul, had presented themselves to God as acceptable sacrifices of spiritual worship (Romans 12:1). The apostle urged them not to sorrow over his trials and their trials, but to rejoice as they worked out their own salvation, adopting his attitude toward life's difficult situations. They could share their joy in the Lord as they communicated with him.

Paul wanted to make sure he was not sending these believers on a guilt trip, but that they rejoiced with him. He was not holding his effort on their behalf over their heads as a club to beat them whenever they didn't come through spiritually. Rather he wanted them to share in his joy.