

Philippians 2:12-18

Shining Like Stars in a Dark World

Paul talks 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.

Obedience is important to God, honoring and pleasing Him. What does living an obedient life look like? No beer? 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 does 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 you mature sin should have less and less power over you.

Note that Paul is not saying to work *for* or *toward* salvation. But there is a link between obedience and “work out your salvation”—the responsibility to cultivate a new character and new conduct in our new nature through 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 (vs. 12 and 13)? It's our responsibility to “work out” our salvation (v. 12), but it's God who is at work in us to enable us to do so.

There is an ageless 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—we become legalistic, relying on our own strength for spiritual power. Focus only on v. 13—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? Both to will and to work for His good pleasure (vs. 13, NASB). 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 v. 12 and 13? Comforting—we don't have to manage this Christian life/sanctification process all by ourselves. God helps us!

What are the characteristics of those who “shine like stars” among a “crooked and depraved generation” (v. 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, 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 ways of the world.

Why should we do everything without grumbling or arguing? To be a powerful shining witness to others in our depraved world, our hearts 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 is a biblical 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 ten instances of complaining while in the wilderness culminated in their refusal 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 hold out the word of life—the gospel (John 6:68)—to the world, living as shining lights worthy of Christ.

Isn't Paul's boasting self centered (v. 16)? Paul's boasting and joyfulness is about the Philippians (3 John 4). This "boast" is a pride that is not sinful, but rather the satisfaction of a job well done for the Lord—these believers continuing to mature, fulfilling their design in life. Paul will have great satisfaction—like a parent's pride 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 life of Paul's life as a living sacrifice to God. Paul saw himself and the Philippians as priests offering sacrifices—their selves and their works—to God.

To Paul, his life is not the important thing here—it's 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 kids—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 and assuring him of their joy in the Lord as they communicated with him.

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

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