

“A Life Poured Out”

Philippians 2:12-30

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Philippians 2:12-30

12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;

13 for it is God who works in you

both to will and to do for [His] good pleasure. 14 Do all things without complaining and disputing, 15 that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, 16 holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain. 17 Yes, and if I am being poured out [as a drink offering] on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. 18 For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me. 19 But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. 20 For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. 21 For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. 22 But you know his proven character, that as a son with [his] father he served with me in the gospel. 23 Therefore I hope to send him at once, as soon as I see how it goes with me. 24 But I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly. 25 Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need; 26 since he was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. 27 For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. 28 Therefore I sent him the more eagerly, that when you see him again you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful. 29 Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem; 30 because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me.



Our series on Paul’s letter to the Philippians church is entitled “*The Art of Contentment.*” Yet we certainly have been challenged as to our conventional wisdom concerning such! We have already delved into the “dying to self and culture.” We talked about the need to grow up in the faith and about being a “slave” to Christ and the kingdom pursuits. We read about “**striving** for the faith”...and there was discussion about being persecuted for our faith, even to the degree of other confessing believers slandering and attacking you. We even hit on literally dying for Christ! Perhaps you have been left scratching your head wondering where the “Letter of Joy” is in all of this. Is this really the path to true contentment?

2:12-13

Paul begins verse 12 with the word “*Therefore....*” Or “in the light of what I just said, *then...*” Then live out your life in light of the humble obedient model Christ displayed in **His** pass through this world. He goes on then to utter those immortal words...“*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*” Ahhh...words that have troubled so many and debated by yet even more!

If one is willing to accept it on face failure and not try to dance out of it in one manner or another, this is actually one of the most important verses in all of scripture concerning the issue of our sanctification. What is sanctification, short and sweet? It is our *maturing*...the ‘growing up’ and living out of our salvation. The New Testament talks about sanctification in terms of becoming more Christ-like through emulating, imitating, following, and disciplining. The most succinct definition is...and Scripture teaches us thus, that sanctification is the fruit of the Holy Spirit in you and our surrendering to His control. It’s our living with the law written on our hearts. Not just up on a wall somewhere, but wherein the truth of it has been so pressed deep down into our hearts so that it’s no longer just a philosophy but the actual embrace of Christ-centered living. A faith that flows organically out from our heart’s passion.

The New Testament talks about sanctification in terms of our being reshaped in the very image of God. In Genesis 1, we’re told that God made mankind, *...male and female ...Adam and Eve...in His image*. The great Triune God engaged this world saying, ‘In *our* image... *We* have created him, male and female.’ (Genesis 1:26)

And so we bore the image of God in our original creation form. But because of Adam and Eve’s rebellion, what happened to that image? Was it lost? *No*...but it was certainly marred! It was scrawled across...bent and misshapen, and caused to not bear the beauty that God had originally intended.

And in the act of sanctification what is God doing? He is addressing that marring and healing it and restoring it to its former glory so that we would begin to look and be what He intended us to look and be in the first place: *the very image and likeness of God Almighty*. When God saves us, He **accepts** us and He **adopts** us. But he does not stop there! He goes further than that, in the fact that He also profoundly **changes** us.

But what is Paul saying in this verse? Is he saying that we must somehow make that happen ourselves? That we can in anyway save ourselves by our works? No. That we can somehow add to the cross? Definitely not! If we look thus far at the context of this letter; *is the Apostle Paul telling us how somebody is converted?* No. *Is he telling you how someone is justified?* No. *Is he telling you how you are accepted with God?* No. Then what **is** he talking about? He’s talking about how Christians become more *mature*. He’s talking about how Christians **grow in godliness**.

Paul is exhorting people who have already taken hold of Christ on some level. Especially those who have already put their faith in Christ, and already trusting Christ alone for salvation. Not a faith plus works, but wholly trusting in Jesus Christ for justification. Having arrived at such a place, Paul is now calling them forward...to *keep growing* in grace. To embrace a sanctified life now! To put on your big boy pants and put some shoulder into it...to strive for godliness.

Paul is not talking about what we do in order to be converted or justified in anyway in God’s sight; rather he is exhorting us to do something to progress in our “likeness of Christ.” Actually exerting some personal effort to be more like Jesus. Paul is calling upon us to *pursue godliness* because God is actually available and at work in us to legitimately achieve that godliness. But short of just rejecting this passage altogether, we must acknowledge that whether we are comfortable with it or not, Philippians 2:12 is calling us to be personally and actively involved in the pursuit of that holiness.

Therefor there is nothing here that should cause us discomfort. Indeed we are to desire to be more godly. We are to work to be more like Christ because God is at work in us that we might be more godly! God is at work in us that we might be more like Christ. Paul’s teaching has never propagated the principle that God so accepts you as you are that no change is necessary in your life. No, his position has always been that God so accepts you, that

therefore change is now possible in your life! God loves you so much that He is unwilling to leave you the way you are today.

Certainly there are large sections of the modern “church,” that holds to the position that God accepts you just the way you are and therefore it doesn’t matter how you live. God accepts you, and so you shouldn’t worry if you are living like a pagan and actively participating in an overt sinful lifestyle!

Paul’s message is that God is so engaged with you...*yes, even in your imperfect state*, that you actually have the power to change. *To be more. To be more like Christ.* Many of us are loathe to acknowledge it, but change is an essential part of His ongoing relationship with us...all part of His continual salvation process. We “have been saved”...we are “*being saved*” and we “*shall be saved.*” Therefore personal change is not optional in God’s plan. Growing up is not discretionary. Over and over, the Apostle Paul and Peter has stressed and *will stress* to us that change does matter! That God is actually steeped in the business of transforming how we live...

This issue is so important because all of us have been there! We all have found ourselves saying “*Lord, how can it be that You have saved me with such a great salvation and that I continue to do what I don’t want to do, and I continue to not do what I so want to do?*” The answer to that question is ‘because He is not done with you.’ You are not finished. We must continue to “work out our own salvation.” And you know... it takes a life time. We are called to do all of this “with fear and trembling.” Why the language? Because this is so very important and it requires great humility and a serious focus.

Through it all we should be encouraged! Let us not forget...**God** is at work in us! And please note that that statement is given to us in the **present tense**! God is at work **now** to change us! God is still involved...still engaged with us... and He expects us to be also. This thing is meant to be a **relationship**, not fast-food restaurant. There is no part of authentic Christianity that says our humanity will somehow melt away and our tendencies toward the flesh will magically disappear. He is calling us to keep moving forward and is saying when we do, *He has our backs*. So it’s important that we understand through this, that we’re not accepted by God because we try hard to live a new life; we’re accepted by God because of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us. But the reach of that salvation goes beyond our positional standing in heaven. It will have real and even profound changes in our practical living.

Nowhere in the New Testament do you find taught the idea: ‘Since God is at work in me, working to change me, I don’t need to do anything.’ In fact, it’s actually the opposite! Since God is functioning in me, I now act upon the power and faith that is now inside me...in possession of me. Since God is operational in me, it’s not that I don’t need to work; it’s that I now engage relationally with Him ... Him empowering me for the life success I never knew without Him.’

Throughout this chapter, Paul has been driving home the same issue: “Having been accepted by God... having been forgiven... having been converted... how do we now go about actually living this Christian life?” He told us in chapter 1, verse 27 to do what? “*Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel.*” And then in 2:5, he said, “*Have this attitude in yourselves, which was also in Christ Jesus.*” Paul is not talking about how we’re “accepted” by God...how we are” born again.” He’s telling us rather how we’re actually changed by God. In our salvation we contribute absolutely nothing. But in our maturing and growth, things are different. We have to participate with the Holy Spirit in a journey. For that’s what it is...not a ‘flipping of a switch.’ We must acknowledge that indeed obedience is a natural, vital, and necessary part of the Christian life. However, for some folks...as soon as you mention the issue of obedience, they light up like a rocket: ‘Obedience? That’s for legalists!’

Paul is commending these Christians saying, ‘You are doing it exactly right! You’re obeying, even when I’m not there. Keep it up.’ What can we gather from that? What does that tell us? It says that obedience is a vital and essential part of the Christian life. And that fact is important to understand because there are a lot of folks that just start freaking out when you start talking about “duty” and “must” and “ought” and “command” in the Christian life. They start chanting “Grace! Grace!” over these words in an effort to drown out Paul’s plea and Christ’s directions. Their logic is ‘I’ve been accepted by God apart from my doing; therefore, my doing doesn’t matter.’ But the Apostle Paul is saying “You don’t understand. You have been accepted by God apart from your doing, and now, in response to that free gift of positional redemption, you need to allow the Spirit of God to possess you...consume you...and yes *change you*.” Yes... your doing **does** matter.

Paul is calling upon us to take a ‘pro-active’ approach to our maturing in Christ. We cannot be passive on this issue if we are to ever know the fullness of life with Him. Just like our chronological life...some things of an adult life will just never be experienced or never experienced well unless we grow up. If we are willing to step up, we will experience God in a very real and tangible way. But again, it will not be found sitting on your couch. You have to put some feet to it...

2:14-15

Following Paul’s remarks in verse 12-13, he lays out some further practical instruction and direction for us to successfully pursue the fulfillment of what he is calling us to. First of all, we are to strive to “Do all things without complaining and disputing...” Some newer translations render the word “disputing” as “making excuses.”

One of the things we are being called upon...*right from the beginning*, is to ‘adopt a new attitude.’ Complaining and making excuses for something that we actually need to be responsible for, is the act of a child. And let’s again remember that this letter is essentially about growing up into maturity...coming to know the “art of contentment”... experiencing the “life poured out” as Paul did.

Frankly, many of us simply have never, *and quite possibly will never*, achieve that “grown up” state of being. We will simply manifest the ways of a child throughout our natural life. It’s what we typically call the “spiritual Peter Pan syndrome.” Paul desires more for His brethren, just as I do for all of you.

The fact is, we are able to rationalize so much in our flesh. Truthfully, we can explain away just about anything with a little effort! In fact, Romans 1:21 ...KJV...renders this same word “disputing” in verse 14 as “imagination.” “*Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their **imagination**s, (disputings) and their foolish heart was darkened.*” Paul wants us to **grow up** ‘blameless and harmless’...children of God, not children of the flesh! We are being called to do this even in the middle of our “crooked and perverse” generation!

Jesus in John 17 prayed to the Father with a similar idea, saying “*I’m not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one. They do not belong to this world any more than I do.*” As we said in the past, we aren’t called to withdraw ourselves as believers to walled compounds in an effort to hide away from the evil. To do so merely expresses our lack of understanding that the evil is not just “out there” but rather also in *here* ...inside of us!

In fact, we are called to do the opposite. We are called to walk in holiness...*to live differently in so many ways*, all while being a light in the dark world that we no longer belong to. Please note that Paul speaks of our **actions**...our outward manifest of faith. Even though a vast segment of the greater church today tries, we are incapable of separating our inward passions and commitments from our outward actions. What we **are** and what

we **do in the body**, reflects what is **happening on the inside of us**. Remember what happened to those who complained and grumbled in the wilderness after being freed from Egypt? They died out there. They grumbled against God, and they questioned their spiritual leaders, and it brought about what? Dissention and strife, and ultimately death.

What **are** we to be? We are to be a light in the world. To show our sanctification in our living. To show our doctrine by our lives. To let our sanctification, let our holiness, let our Christ-likeness, let our pursuit of godliness, all serve as a witness to unbelievers. *Let your life together testify to the reality of gospel grace.*

2:16

Think about it...the **'word of life.'** Jesus is 'the Word.' And it is 'life' that He bring us. It is this "*manner of life*" that this letter is all about. In that "manner of life" we find our "Art of contentment." This world does not have such contentment. For the world we live in today is as good as dead. After all, without light, life ceases. The text speaks of us "holding fast" to this Word of Life. **Hold on to** the Christ of life!

He is the *answer to* and *possessor of* spiritual maturity and growth...that is what **He** brings to the table. Our part is in the "holding fast." We are to do so, not because God will somehow drop us if we fall short, but rather because some of us...*like Paul*, want to actually rejoice on that day when we stand before God. We want to "abound in his love" (1:9) We don't want to end our lives "ashamed (vs 20) because we didn't respond in kind to Gods love. We want our lives to say "*to live is Christ*" and our deaths to say "*to die is gain.*"

I wonder about all of us individually. Will you personally 'rejoice' when you open your eyes on the 'other side?' Or will you be embarrassed and perhaps even ashamed at that moment...uncomfortably aware of your unwillingness to run, to strive, to labor for the Lord? Paul does not want to exit in that manner, and neither do I. I can't imagine trying to explain to Christ how His sacrifice at the cross was not enough of a motivator to spur me to action...to cause changes in my life...to cause me to labor for Him and His kingdom.

Can you imagine it?

"I'm sorry Lord...I was really busy...I meant to get around to it. I love you Lord...really I do...I know I didn't really show it that much."

"Uh...thanks for dying for me...sorry I couldn't find any time to serve you!"

"What's that Lord? Oh yes Lord...I'm aware that you gave me a clear and repeatedly call on this matter....uh, no Lord...it's not that I didn't know..."

2:17

No such conversation was going to take place with Paul if he had anything to say about it! No, he was bound and determined that his first "post-exit" meeting with Christ would not go down that way. For Paul...it was his whole life that had been given over. He was...by his own admission, "**poured out.**" He had offered up His life in sacrifice. "Poured out" speaks of a permanence. Afterall, one cannot put that back into the cup...it's done!

Paul was not special...he had not been called to a higher sacrifice than the rest of us. His salvation was not worth more than ours, nor was God more in love with him than with you and I. Paul was adding himself to the sacrifice and the service that the believers in Philippi had already offered up. Please note again...*they had given more than just their lip service...more than even their hearts...they had given themselves in sacrifice and service to the kingdom.* And because of such a testimony, Paul is rejoicing **for** them and **with** them all.

2:18-30

Paul considered himself one with these believers. Indeed, He was ‘out there.’ He had given all of himself not only to God, but also to them. He had bared his soul, and by doing that, he allowed himself to be venerable. They would be able to hurt him now if they wanted to. There is no other way to love people without putting yourself in such a position. Loving God...and loving others, is a dangerous thing. We see what it cost Jesus, as well as all those who “poured themselves out” as a drink offering. One of the people to whom Paul had opened himself up to in such a way was a young protégé by the name of Timothy. He was a “brother-in-arms.” They were on the same path together.

Paul reminded the believers in Philippi that they knew Timothy and what he was made of. It wasn’t just words...he had actually “showed his stuff.” Anybody can talk it. Paul and Timothy **lived it**. And in their “day of Christ” they had indeed not run in vain nor labored in vain. For them, all they wanted to hear was “Well done, good and faithful servant; ...enter into the joy of your lord.” I know of no reason that that is exactly what they finally heard...