

WHEELERSBURG BAPTIST CHURCH

Life Application Sunday School Class

Philippians - Session 10

July 8, 2001

READ Philippians 2:12-18

12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

Paul is exhorting these believers to continue to obey the word they had received, that from all of the reports he had received, that they were fighting the good fight, and persevering, and he was encouraging them to continue to pursue God's purpose for their lives. Let's take a closer look at this exhortation.

What does it mean to "work out" our salvation with fear and trembling? Does it mean that we earn our ultimate salvation? Does it mean that we work to keep our salvation, or that we must strive hard or we may lose it, or that we should be in fear of ultimately being rejected, and thus work harder? This is not what this passage is teaching, for it contradicts what the Bible clearly establishes, that salvation, that is being justified before God and having our sins forgiven, does not come by our effort or works, nor is it kept by our effort or works, but rather is a gift that was obtained and granted to us by grace, and comes to us by faith alone, apart from works. Look at Ephesians 2:8-10

Eph 2: ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

If our salvation comes in any way as a result of our effort, then we would have reason to take some credit. No, salvation comes through grace; a gift bestowed by God on the recipient apart from anything they have to offer. It is a gift. God takes us as we are, and based on the work of Christ, transforms us. He gives us a new heart, and makes us a new person. He places us in Christ, and declares us to be righteous based on His Son's work; His sacrifice, His death on the cross. The righteousness needed to obtain eternal life had to come from God because we don't have it. Salvation is a gift of God's grace - period. Look at Romans 3:21-23

Rom 3 ²¹ But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

It comes to us through faith, and even that faith is a gift that God gives us. Look at Romans 4:4-8

Rom 4: ⁴ Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. ⁵ However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. ⁶ David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: ⁷ "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. ⁸ Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him."

The Lord chooses to save us and not count our sins against us. Our sins and transgressions are covered, and this comes to us as a gift, not as something we have earned by our works or actions. And verse 8 says that our sin will never count against us. If we are declared righteous, and that righteousness is in fact Christ's righteousness, then we will always stand justified before God. Our faith and repentance are responses to God's working, and are both gifts bestowed.

So, if this passage doesn't mean that we work for our salvation, or that we work to maintain our right standing with God, what does

it mean? What is Paul admonishing these believers to do? Another passage later in the book of Philippians sheds some light on the relationship of the salvation that we have obtained apart from works, but that we must work out. Look at Philippians 3:7-15. In this passage, Paul was refuting the legalists; those who taught that salvation comes through man's effort and keeping the law. After going through his religious resume, and expounding his past history of legalistic righteousness and works, he says this starting in verse 7:

Phil 3: 7 But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

Again, Paul establishes that the righteousness that comes from God is received by faith in what Christ has done, and is in no way based on our own righteousness or works. In fact, to receive Christ's righteousness, we must count our own supposed good works and religious effort as garbage, filthy rags, manure. We must let go of our self-righteousness to obtain a right standing with God. But once that miracle of grace has occurred in our lives, then this becomes our passion, the passion of a new heart: look at the transition in verse 10

10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. 15 All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. 16 Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

We have been granted the very life of heaven - the righteousness of Christ is credited to our account. And along with this gift, comes a calling and responsibility, to live up to what we have been given. And this is a life long pursuit. This salvation that has been freely given to us, at no cost to us, needs to be worked out in our lives. The fact that we now belong to God, being purchased by His Son's blood, has far reaching implications. Paul clearly states that he had not arrived, and this letter was written near the end of his life. He says that he needs to press on, strain toward, work hard, give all of his effort, to pursue this goal, this goal of knowing Christ in all of His power, to share in His sufferings and death, and to experience the power of His resurrected life. Let's look at some other passages that address this same pursuit:

I Cor 15: 58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

I Cor 9: 24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. 25 Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. 26 Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. 27 No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

Paul did not want to lose out on the calling God had for him. He knew that one day he would stand before Christ and give account for what he had done with the salvation that he had been given. And the rewards that will be handed out on that awesome judgement day will not be temporal, perishable rewards. No, they will be eternal crowns to cast at our Savior's feet. Our capacity to honor and worship God for eternity is being determined right now. Our position in the kingdom is based on our stewardship of this great salvation that has been given to us. Therefore, we should do what is necessary to live up to the great salvation that we have been given. Look at Hebrew 12:1

Heb 12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

II Cor 7: Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

Eph 4:1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

Heb 6: 10 God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. 11 We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. 12

We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

II Peter 1: ⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷ and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. ⁸ For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God is worthy of every ounce of our strength. He has saved us to be a vessel of honor, one fitted to bring glory and praise to Him. This is the purpose for which we have been purchased, to display His glory in the earth. And to fulfill this calling, we must work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

What does it mean to work with fear and trembling? This is the attitude - humility, realizing our need of God to be successful. We have no confidence in the flesh, in our ability. We tremble and fear before God, respecting the fact that He is able and we are not, and that we desperately need Him to persevere and win this race and to finish well.

Now look at verse 13: ¹³ *for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.*

This is the divine/human cooperative. We work out our salvation - we press toward the mark - we give it all of our effort - we strive, and yet, it is in reality God who is giving us the will, strength, resolve, and ability to work out our salvation. Not only does he give us salvation by His grace, He enables us to work out our salvation by His grace. This does not mean that we do not strive, or strain, or push, or work hard. It means that we can strive, strain, push, and work hard because He is enabling us to do that. The encouragement is this, that as we strive and pursue the right things, that we have the very power and support of Almighty God. We do not need to depend on our own ability and strength, or even our own resolve and will power. No, in humility and reverence for God, we need to call out to Him for strength, and then move forward with great confidence in His ability and strength to accomplish His will in our lives. Paul said it this way in Philippians 4:19, that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

14 Do everything without complaining or arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe

A major part of working out our salvation is having the right attitude and demeanor. Verse 14 addresses two areas to watch - complaining and arguing. What is the meaning of complaining and arguing?

Complaining - KJV murmuring - Greek is gongusmos - means to mutter, murmur, grumble, say anything in a low tone (Eng., gong), an onomatopoeic word, representing the significance by the sound of the word, as in the word "murmur" itself,

Murmur

1. A low, indistinct, continuous sound:
2. An indistinct, whispered, or confidential complaint; a mutter.
3. To complain in low mumbling tones; grumble.
4. To say in a low indistinct voice; utter indistinctly: *murmured his approval.*

Mutter

1. To speak indistinctly in low tones.
2. To complain or grumble morosely.
3. To utter or say in low, indistinct tones.
4. A low grumble or indistinct utterance.

Grumble

1. To complain in a surly manner; mutter discontentedly:
2. To rumble or growl.
3. To express in a grumbling, discontented manner: *He grumbled a rude response*

Murmuring, muttering, and grumbling are an outward expression of a certain attitude - displeasure, discontentment,

self pity, moroseness, dissatisfaction. It is an expression of dislike of one's situation, company, or circumstances. Starting to get the picture? We are not to murmur, nor are we to argue. What does the word argue mean?

KJV Disputing - inward reasoning; opinion; deliberating, disputing. It is being contentious and causing a dispute based on holding to one's own opinions and reasonings.

1. To argue about; debate.
2. To question the truth or validity of; doubt:
3. To strive against; resist: *disputed the actions of his competitors.*
4. To engage in discussion or argument; debate.
5. To quarrel angrily.
6. A verbal controversy; a debate.
7. An angry altercation; a quarrel. See Synonyms at ARGUMENT.

Lets look at the context - In chapter 2 of Philippians, Paul was calling the believers to walk in humility, by looking to Christ as the ultimate example, how He laid His divine privilege aside and became a servant. In light of that example, we are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. And the first practical way to do this is to do everything without murmuring and disputing.

If we are humble, and meek, we will esteem others better than ourselves, and place their interests above our own. We will not think more highly of ourselves that we should. Murmuring, complaining, and arguing are evidence that one or more of the parties involved are not walking in humility and meekness. They are being selfish. The Epistle of James, chapter 4, says it this way:

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? ² You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. ³ When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

An aspect of working out our salvation involves learning to be content with our circumstances and those that God has sovereignly placed around us. What ever it is in life that tempts us to murmur and complain, and leads to arguing and quarreling, should be viewed as God's instrument to teach us humility, and an opportunity to display and develop the fruit of the Spirit. It is an opportunity to allow the sufficiency of Christ come through in our life. Is this easy? Why do you think that the previous verses talked about work. These things are not easy to do, but they are possible because it is God who works in us to do His good pleasure. And desire is that we do everything rejoicing in Him, and without murmuring and arguing.

14 Do everything without complaining or arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe

Verse 15 is talking about our testimony. The idea here is that when we are not complaining and arguing, we shine out like stars against a black background. The contrary is also true - when we exhibit speech that is not God honoring, it is a blemish to our testimony; it dulls our appearance and we do not look like God's children. No, beloved, we are called to be a contrast to those about us. We are to exhibit humility, joy, contentment, peace, patience, and thankfulness. And this comes out in what we say. Our tongue is a good indicator of our attitude and heart. Jesus said **The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.** The things that we say are to be in stark contrast with the perversion and evil that pervades those about us. There should be a contrast in our lives - specifically in our speech. We should speak words of love, and kindness, and consideration. Our speech should be free of complaining and murmuring and arguing. If we struggle in this are, Jesus would tell us to look into our hearts, and allow the Spirit of God to remove those thoughts, meditations, and musings that overflow into murmuring and complaining. The reputation of our Savior is at stake. We do have high calling, to reflect the goodness and purity of our Savior.

16 as you hold out the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing. ¹⁷ But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. ¹⁸ So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

Instead of murmuring and disputing, we hold out the word of life, which is the gospel. The words "hold out" literally mean to offer something that we have. We don't want our speech to be contaminated with carnal murmuring and disputing, but our tongue should

be used to hold out the gospel that is within our hearts.

Paul goes on to say that when he sees this good fruit in the Philippians, he rejoices that His labor wasn't for nothing. When the Philippians obey these admonitions, they are showing themselves to be good fruit of Paul's labor. Paul then uses a word picture of his relationship with the Philippians, that of a drink offerings. This refers to the topping off of an ancient animal sacrifice. The offerer poured wine either in front of or on top of the burning animal and the wine would be vaporized. That steam symbolized the rising of the offering to the deity for whom the sacrifice was made. Paul is saying that as the Philippians continue faithful to their calling, that Paul had reason to rejoice in his sacrificial service that had been poured out on them, who were also a sacrifice to God. He is telling them that they should rejoice with Him in the great work that God had accomplished through Paul and in them.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are the extreme views as well as proper view concerning the believer's effort in his sanctification? How have your views on personal discipline and effort influenced the success of your spiritual growth?
2. What are particular situations that tempt you to murmur and complain? What are some practical actions we can take to help us overcome this sin?
3. What does it mean, in practical terms, to fear and tremble before God? Is it possible for us to become to comfortable in God's presence?
4. Why do we sometimes put forth a mediocre effort toward spiritual growth? What are steps we can take to get back on track; e.g. back in the race - back to working out our salvation?