

Phil 2:12-18

12 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, 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. 14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing, 15 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, 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. 17 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. 18 Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

I. Intro

- Good morning. My name is John Seago, I'm an elder here at City Life Church and am honored to bring God's word to you today.
 - Whenever I preach I always have to make a deliberate effort to introduce myself like that, "My name is John Seago, I'm an elder here at CLC." I have to make an effort because 90% of the time I introduce myself I'm in a different role representing the non-profit I work for.
 - So 9/10 times I'm on the phone, testifying, or giving a speech I say something different, "My name is John Seago I serve as Legislative Director for Texas Right to Life."
 - So that's my default introduction, the default mode.
- This doesn't just happen in titles, but in the way we speak, the tone, speed and vocabulary.
 - In linguistics, its called mode or code switching. You switch from your professional language at work to something else when you go to a causal dinner with your friends.
 - This is usually not a conscious decision, it happens to my wife when she's on the phone with her family that lives in North Georgia. The accent and vocabulary they use is very different than her day to day mode.
- Those modes, personas are accessible, but which one is us? Which one is the one we typically walk in?
- In the heart of our discussion today we'll see that so much of our spiritual walk, pivots on our functional identity, what mode we usually draw from when thinking about ourselves, our responsibilities, and place in the world.
- So this morning we're going to look at a Paradox, Participation of the Spirit, Our Presence in the World, and the Purpose.
- Usually I have three points, but this morning there are four. Also, no slides, so I apologize if change makes you uncomfortable.
- So Paradox, Participation, Presence, Purpose.
- Let's Pray

II. Paradox

- You may have noticed, in the middle of our passage we seem to have a paradox: something that looks contradictory, inconsistent, or even nonsensical.
 - Two statements that at first glance its not immediately evident how they are compatible. Actually, even after multiple glances it could be perplexing.
- So the first side of the paradox in verse 12, "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,"
 - This is the main thought of the paragraph.

- It's a unique phrase in the NT. Grammar here could be translated "continue working out your own salvation."¹
- But, then we look over at the second part, a seemingly contradictory phrase in verse 13, "for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."
- Paul is saying, work out your own salvation because God works in you.
 - What do you do when Scripture gives us these complicated problems?
 - Are we just to add it to a list of things we don't understand?
 - On my list of "Mysteries," right after man buns and fidget spinners, I'll put Phil 2:12-13?
 - No, this is important. Understanding the very Word of God is important. Let's not give up on this so easily.
- Back to the first point: continue working out your own salvation.
 - What does this really mean?
 - Does this mean that the weight of our salvation rests on our shoulders?
 - Is Paul telling the Philippian church to go and earn your access to eternal life?
 - In Romans, Paul quotes Isaiah claiming that "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks God."
 - So, with that in mind, this idea that we must save ourselves should absolutely cause fear and trembling.
 - Like with any confusing passage in Scripture, some try to handle this by studying the words themselves:
 - The term "continue working out" means "to cause a state or condition, bring about, produce, or create."
 - And, we see Paul consistently, even twice already in Philippians uses this Greek word for "salvation" here to mean "personal, eternal salvation from divine judgment." It will be hard to argue that only in this one case can we abandon the typical meaning of the word.²
 - Whew, yikes. Not getting any better. I'm supposed to bring about, I'm supposed to produce or cause my own salvation?
 - Well, let's look at the other side.
- Look back at verse 13, "for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."
 - Paul tells them to work out their salvation but immediately adds "for it is God who works in you?"
 - This could also be translated, "For the One who works mightily in you is God."³
 - Look at what he's doing: He's producing the will in us and the work in us for his good pleasure.
 - God is the one doing the work in you.
- In verse 13 we see a few things about His work. It is:
 - **Active:** The Lord is never dormant, we cant neutralized or boxed out.⁴
 - **His work is effective:** While sin has corrupted our ability to seek God, He recreates our wills and imparts onto us his holiness.
 - **God's work is complete:** Remember 1:6, "he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."

¹ A principal clause with a verb in the imperative mood.

² which some try to do convincing us that the word in this verse really means, "social harmony or health" among their church.

³ Like a title – God is the Infinite worker. O'Brien, 286.

⁴ He never lets his people go – our relationships ebb and flow– God is always there

- **The work of God is done by freely:** This is why God does it. He freely chooses to work in us for his good pleasure. He wants to do this to and for us.
- In verses 12-13 we actually see the same Greek word “work” three times:
 - We are to work out our salvation
 - God works in us
 - God produces two things our will and our work for his good pleasure.
- So, there are two workers here – us working out and God working in
- Ok. We see both sides of the coin, but really how are they compatible? How do we balance them?
- Two errors we could fall into:
 - 1) False voice of “let go and let God” or as the great American philosopher Carrie Underwood said, “Jesus Take the Wheel.”
 - We’re really just puppets, so we don’t have to fight temptation or get up early on a Sunday to come help the church set up. God’s the worker.
 - Really, why make such an effort to understand the Bible in the first place?
 - See, we have Jesus take the wheel, then...
 - 2) some have a firm death grip on the wheel. The error of thinking we’re the only worker: “God helps those that help themselves” that you prove to God your worth being on his team.
 - I’ve got a check list and I need to set my alarm early, drink lots of coffee and frantically work in my own strength.
 - Grunt through life doing the right thing.
 - As we’ve been going through Philippians have you been keeping a list of to dos? Love one another, share the gospel in suffering, honor the Lord in my body, esteem others higher than yourself, etc.
- Are you in one of these camps this morning?
 - Maybe you mode switch: When it comes to your job/career, you’re a frantic worker and its all up to you, no room for the work of God, but in faith or family life... “Let go & let God!”
- But its both! There is a tension. How are we to understand this paradox?

III. Participation of the Spirit

- This severity of the dichotomy, the paradox, is somewhat artificial. The way we typically frame the debate is not accurate.
 - Really its us bringing to the Apostle Paul this question “Well, who does the work? Us or God” is a little bit like bad journalism.
 - Going up to someone in an interview and asking was our former president the country’s messiah or the anti-Christ? Well, the answer is more nuanced. That’s not the story.
- So, let’s look at the real story, the real context.
- Paul is talking about **Obedience** in this passage, two points.
 - First, Paul starts our passage with a “Therefore,” so this section is the conclusion, the application of 2:1-11 that “Christ hymn” we discussed last week which covers the humility and preeminence of Christ.
 - Here our passage is a reflection upon a worthy response to Christ.⁵
 - The response to Christ is to emulate his humility and obedience.
 - Look at 2:8, “And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

⁵ In the Bible we learn not only the truth, but how to respond to the truth. Paul easily moves from theological observations to practical implications. We cannot separate what we believe from how we live.

- At the heart of Christ's humility was his obedience to God the Father.⁶
 - That high praise & theological truth about Christ is tied here in verse 12 when...⁷
- So, Paul makes an explicit call for obedience in verse 12.
 - Earlier in this sermon we jumped to the "work out your salvation" line but look before that "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,"⁸
 - Paul commends them for living in obedience then encourages them to continue obeying in his absence
- In this framework, Paul tells us to work out our own salvation:
 - There is not a divide between our 1) Faith, our salvation, and 2) works and obedience are not as separate as we make them.⁹
 - James 2 tells us "For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead."
- This "work out" language is a "more specific – or at least a more suggestive – way of expressing the idea of obedience." –walking in submission to the Lord.
- In this sense, Paul is saying "make that salvation fruitful in the here and now"
 - We should interpret scripture with scripture, use the clear parts to handle the not so clear parts, and the Bible is very clear that God alone has saved us. Not a team effort.
 - Thankfully, there are painfully clear passages like Eph 2:8-9, For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, **9** not a result of works, so that no one may boast."
 - So, we are not saving ourselves, we are not conjuring up faith ourselves, but working our faith outward, living out our salvation...
- So we miss the point when we ask if our belief and our obedience is up to God or to us.
 - The critical point here in Philippians... the call to follow Christ is consistent with who we are.
- Who are we?
 - At the beginning of chapter 2, the Apostle Paul points out that we have the Participation of the Spirit, and before that spoke about the "affection of Christ"
 - Christ's love is actually empowers/enables us to love.
 - So, we don't do this alone. God is working in us through the Holy Spirit.
 - Not just something outside of us changing the inside, but we have deep union and oneness with God through the work of the Spirit.
 - If you have been given the gift of faith you have participation in the Spirit. You have union with Christ, a restored relationship with the Father, and experience the Spirit who shapes our will and helps us work.
- **And having the Spirit changes who we are**
 - **We now have a new identity.**
 - Look at how Paul identifies us in verse 15, "Children of God."

⁶ This example is the grounds for Paul to encourage us to be obedient and we'll see God actually empowers us for obedience.

⁷ So that theological truth of who Christ is and what he did is not removed from our practical call to be obedient. "Christ's death on the cross and his universal Lordship are not abstract theological concepts far removed from the nitty-gritty problems of everyday life." G. Walter Hansen, 168.

⁸ We see here, this section is really tied to the thought started all the way back in 1:27.

⁹ One author puts it this way, "Our obedience is the way we enter in experience, into the totality of what God is doing in us. Since he, therefore, is doing all, we must do all: it is our total response to his all-sufficiency."

- That's the core of who we are. That should be our default identity, the self-image we should naturally have of ourselves.
- **City Life Church, this means we now are more associated with the works of God rather than our sin.**
- If you believe the gospel and you're a child of God, when the Lord looks at you this morning, he doesn't see your failures, the ways you failed your spouse, your kids, friends this week. He sees the perfection and obedience of Christ. You are children of God without blemish.
 - Maybe you're not sure about faith. Never confessed your sin and repented, come talk to us after the service. Your heavenly father may be calling you to faith this morning.
- When we do have faith, as we grow in holiness, we see our sin more and more clearly so it can be hard to accept that we are primarily children of God without blemish.
- Look at how Paul talked about this in Romans 7:15, *"For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate... (verse 17) So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin."*
- The apostle Paul, this super saint, professional Christian in prison for preaching the gospel, he wrote in Romans that there was a war waging inside of him. On one hand he saw his sin, his disobedience to God and on the other hand, his desire to obey, he saw the spirit prompting him to strive for holiness and follow Christ.
- So we're not alone in this struggle. BUT LOOK in this passage Paul identifies himself with the work of the Spirit in him. At his core, his true identity was not his sin, but his faith and the desire for holiness the Spirit had given him.
- He still repents, has to confess, feel consequences of sin, but at his heart he was a child of God. OR as he identified himself at the opening of this letter - a servant of Christ. That was his identity.
- **This is the key to the paradox: There is no contradiction between our and God's work because God is in us.**
 - We can strive to work out our salvation because it is God who works in us.
 - There is a balance: there's the effort and working out we do, but in reality beneath the surface it is God doing the work in us.
 - This is a tension for sure.¹⁰ Ephesians 2:10 highlights that tension well.
- What does this look like practically?
 - Christian life is a blend of rest and activity – not alternating from one to another, but a blend in which at one and the same time, the Christian is both resting confidently (for example, on what God is doing within) and actively pursuing (for example, the duty of being blameless).¹¹
 - It means working hard and resting harder. When you're prompted to serve someone else, to demolish that idol of comfort and serve your spouse, children, friends... do it.
 - There's grunt work in going and helping someone move or maybe ruining a lazy evening at home with making plans to host someone over.

¹⁰ Another way, to see verses 12-13 is as effect and cause – We work because God works in us.

¹¹ Motyer, 126

- You do have to have discipline to get out of the bed to come help Create and Restore set up.
- When that alarm goes off, it feels like its all you... do it in prayer.
- Ask the lord for strength then roll your lazy bones out of bed.
- When we work, serve others, or hard work of parenting we can do it out of a confidence that the Lord is sufficient to accomplish this job.
- My wife, Brandy and I, often go through this cycle when we're preparing our house to host city group or have someone over.
- "The priority of God's work does not [invalidate] our responsibility to work."
- There is a tension, a balance. Where do you fall?
- Maybe this morning you've gone Carrie Underwood, you've grown lazy and are not working, seeking to strive for holiness. We are responsible for us, ourselves, to shoulder the weight of working, doing the hard things, being disciplined. The care for your soul belongs to you. Paul emphasizes our work here, not God's and not the church's.
- Or you might be on the other side, you work too much. You ignore the fact that God is the one who has secured your salvation. He will complete the good work in you.

IV. Presence in the world

- We talked about how the context of the passage helped us avoid a false dichotomy, and tackle that paradox, but we also have the context we live in.
- Our obedience, our daily walking in the good works is done in a specific place and time: right now and right here.
- Look at what Paul says about our setting: in verse 14-16:
- "14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing, 15 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, 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."
- When we seek the Lord in obedience we "shine as lights in the world"
- This shining light is not just our moral will power, our positive attitude, but the source of our holiness is "holding fast to the word of life"
 - That is the cause of our light that dispels the darkness.
- That word is the gospel, and the Scriptures. (Pick up Bible)¹²
 - The Philippians did not have this.
 - Is that how you think of the gospel? The Bible?
 - Is it a word of rules? A word of embarrassing instructions like "do all things without grumbling or complaining?"
 - The scripture is the word of life!
- The word shines two directions:
 - **Downward for us:** Ps 119 says 'your word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light to my path.'
 - Imagine this, you have a creator, a designer, who knows you better than you know yourself: your passions, aspirations, longings.
 - THAT same Creator wrote a book full of history, wisdom, poetry, encouragement, and the good news for us.

¹² Paul often uses "the word" to mean "the gospel" like in 1:14. 1 Thess 2:13, "And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers." Ephesians 1:13, "In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promise of the Holy Spirit."

- Often we treat the Bible like a duty, a burden, a ‘to do’ to add on to our list:
 - I’ll study it after I recharge and reward myself with a night of Netflix...
- NO, this is the word of our lives.¹³
 - Remember, the gospel is what Paul was so excited about spreading in Chapter 1. He was pumped that he was in prison because it was helping spread this word, the good news about Christ.
 - If you’re stuck not knowing what to do with the Bible, come talk to us. We have several resources to recommend to help you get the most out of this amazing source of wisdom, grace, and faith.
- The gospel is the good and true news that Jesus has defeated sin, death, and evil through his own death and resurrection and is making all things new, even us.
- **That news, word also shines Outward for others:** It shines through us against the background of a ‘crooked and twisted generation’¹⁴
 - Terms crooked and twisted – these are terms to describe a perversion, bending something from its intended purpose.
 - This is important contrast – we are called to obedience to be more like what we were created for, but
 - This generation in sin is rebelling from their true purpose: So they live in a distorted or backwards manner.¹⁵
 - Romans 1 & 2 make a compelling argument about this effect sin has.
 - City Life Church, we are called to be salt and light in the world.
 - This means, a preservative grace to our city, but also a light, a disruptive force that shines to truth to a lost and wanting generation.¹⁶
- So what does a child of God look like? Well Paul told them to obey in good works, but here gives us some unavoidable practical points: “Do all things without grumbling or disputing” which is one way we “live in a manner worthy of Christ”¹⁷
- The purpose is not to be a better friend, spouse, parent, or more successful in life, but look at the reasons, the purpose Paul gives us...

V. Purpose

- Shortly, Paul gives us three reasons for obedience and working out our salvation:
 - That’s who you are – children of God
 - Its for other’s good
 - God’s glory.
- We saw this. We are Children of God, though we have sin and see the waging war in us, we primarily are Children of God who will be most fulfilled, we’ll flourish, we’ll find joy and meaning when we obey and love our heavenly father.
 - Where are you being called to obey this week that you’ve been resisting.

¹³ Its not a book of rules, of fairy tales, of duties, of guilt, or moral bondage... it is a book of life.

¹⁴ So, to summarize in Verse 14-16 – “He speaks of the setting in which the Christian lives (in the midst of... among whom), of the contrast between the Christian and that setting (shine as lights) and of the means by which the contrast is achieved (the word of life).” Moyter, 133.

¹⁵ Terms “crooked and perverse” comes from OT to refer generally to people who are turning from the Lord and seeking other gods.

¹⁶ Matthew 5:13-16

¹⁷ Could be translated, “complaining or arguing.” This is back to the early admonition in 1:27 to “live in a manner worthy of Christ” “Grumbling is a self-centered heart trying to take control through the machinery of criticism and the promptings of self-interest.” Grumbling: Meaning of term– selfish complaining, unbalanced criticism of small matters, impatience towards what is not understood, grudging unwillingness to be helpful – all expressed outwardly.

- You don't want to give up something for yourself.
- Others' good
 - We're not called to obedience because it will help us live fulfilled lives, but also that is how we serve others.
 - This is what we've looked at multiple times in Paul, and again look at verse 17-18.
 - Paul writes, "17 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. 18 Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me."
 - Here we see Paul's perspective. He sees the importance of walking in holiness and counts his sacrifice of being in prison as worth it if it causes them to walk towards the Lord.
 - Paul is willing and rejoices to give up his freedom, likely be killed, so that other believers can grow in their faith and holiness.¹⁸
 - Our obedience sometimes looks like us pouring ourselves out for others, this is believers and the world.
- God's glory
 - Lastly, the purpose of this obedience and work is God's glory.
 - Look at the end of verse 13, that continued working out of our salvation is "for his good pleasure."
 - He is working for his good pleasure – not just some arbitrary preference but for "God's redemptive plan,"¹⁹
 - The gospel is that God is up to something in the world through the sacrifice of Christ. He's redeeming his people and his world to bring him glory and us joy.
 - "God energizes your will and your activity in order that you may fulfil his good pleasure in your completed salvation."
 - Also, look in verse 16, Paul is calling us to holiness with the end in sight.
 - The "Day of Christ" is coming. Scripture tells us that all we long for will be answered in the future when Christ returns and ushers in the New Creation where all things are renewed, restored, and we are raised to life everlasting.
 - That is when God will be most glorified. All creation, everyone will realize who God is, what he's been doing in creation, and the amazing love and holiness he has and has shared with the world.

¹⁸ He rejoices with them that they will persevere in the faith and good works even though he is suffering, in dire circumstances and unsure of whether he'll die in Rome.

He tells them they can be glad and rejoice with him in his suffering because of the fruit it brings for the church and the spread of the gospel.

¹⁹ God's good pleasure and his love is his motivation: Deut 7:7