

“Spiritual Workouts” Philippians 2:12-18

Wednesday 2/27/19 – Jeff Lyle

What does it mean to work out your salvation with fear and trembling? Why did Paul call Christians to that kind of lifestyle? In another place, he says that the Lord never gives us a spirit of fear, so why did he leave such an ominous assignment in the book of Philippians? This message highlights our call into deeper partnership with Jesus that will result in a life that is radically different from those who do not know Christ. In fact, Paul goes so far to indicate that, if our Christianity is flippant, casual and detached from holy life-change, then we might not be Christians at all. Keeping the Day of Lord regularly in view will help us to finish our race in such a way that will bring eternal reward and joyful peace throughout the days of our journey.

I. Cooperating With Those Who Lead You (12-13)

A. Honoring spiritual authority (12a) – “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence...”

To become a Christian, there is a foundational acknowledging of God’s authority is required. Being born again comes through an intentional surrender of one’s life to Jesus Christ. This surrender usually comes to pass through some form of the sinner realizing that he or she has violated the righteous law of God. There is also a sense of a penalty that accompanies that violation. When grace makes it clear that it is not God’s pleasure to punish us for our sins, and that He offers us grace to be forgiven, we surrender ourselves to His mercy and love. Yes, salvation includes an awareness of God’s authority. Whereas all Christians acknowledge God’s authority, not all acknowledge that God also establishes human authority within the Body of Christ, the Church. Paul’s writings reveal that he rarely asserted his authority. He preferred to lead via love and servanthood. Yet, when division or rebellion threatened the unity of God’s people, the Apostle would remind them that God had established him in a place of delegated authority. As he is writing the Philippians, he releases a very gentle reminder that he expected them to obey his instructions whether he was present or not. There were no threats from Paul. He did not tell them what would happen if they failed to honor his authority. He spoke an affirmation of his confidence that they would obey him as the servant of the Lord whom God placed over them for their own good. Spiritual authority has been abused countless times by men and women who used their position for their own advantage. Having acknowledged that, we still are called by God to obey those whom he places in authority in the Church. Paul indicates in the verse above that it was an even greater virtue to obey

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those authorities when they were not physically overseeing the goings-on in the church. Paul wisely used his authority for the good of others. In this, he was very much like his Lord.

B. Taking initiative with your own soul (12b) – "...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling..."

Here is a command that the present generation of Jesus-followers must rediscover. Though we are saved by grace through faith, and not via our own attempts at working righteousness, we are called to intentionally work out what God was worked in. While it is not abundantly clear what all Paul was referring to here, there seems to be a few things of which we can be certain. The fear and trembling component is a call to take very seriously the state of our own soul. This statement dismisses the possibility that a Christian can live in a perpetual state of casualness about his or her relationship with God. While Paul teaches that a spirit of fear does not come from the Lord (2 Timothy 1:7), he constantly calls us to put to death the desires of our flesh, resist the temptations of our culture, and lean to resist the devil's strategies against us. To do this requires a healthy dose of spiritual soberness. In recent decades in the Western Church, a flippancy has become the new norm for believers and churches. While legalism and dour Christianity is not a true reflection of Jesus, neither is a faddish, culturally-cool trajectory that causes people to lose their sense of holy awe with God. To work our salvation out means to live wisely, intentionally and strategically in such a way that keeps the Judgment Seat of Jesus Christ in focus. We will all give an answer for how we lived our lives as believers. The New Testament speaks frequently about our being rewarded according to our sacrifice and service for the glory of Jesus. There is also the reality that, though a person may give a verbal confession of Jesus as Lord, apart from a visible confession in their daily living, there is no legitimate hope of being saved. When we recognize that our lives, our outworking of our salvation, are the true evidence of whether or not we have been saved, fear and trembling may very well be the result.

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C. Partnering with God for His purposes (13) – “...for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”

Paul brings us relief when he reminds us that the very same God who saved your soul remains at work in your soul. The work of God inside the Christian includes the refashioning of our desires to match His own. This is what it means that God works in you to will (want) His good pleasure. God aligns our hearts to actually desire what He desires. When we embrace His desires as our own, He then works in us to accomplish those desires. This is an awesome evidence of salvation: we want what God wants and we find the power from Him to accomplish those things. God does not wind us up like a toy robot to mechanically march into the world of trying to please Him. He saves us, enters us, remains with us and remakes us into being and acting like Him. It is a relational process that He initiates and continues unto completion all throughout our lives.

II. Aligning Our Activities with Our Identity (14-15)

A. Holy Spirit will help us with our speech (14) – “Do all things without grumbling or disputing...”

Now, Paul gets down to some brass-tacks instruction for the Philippian Christians. He zeroes-in on the light problem hitting their faith community. There was apparently enough disunity to where people were complaining and grumbling about one another. There are fewer things that discourage spiritual leaders than to know that those entrusted to their care have forgotten how blessed and graced that they are in Jesus. Mark it down: a grumbling spirit is born from ingratitude. All of us are susceptible to forgetting the goodness of God on our lives and, consequently, become distracted by those things that are not as we would like them. When you add to the mix the reality of relational conflict, we can actually become people of divisive speech instead of unifying praise and prayer. Paul did not leave any room for doubt when he instructed Christians to remove complaining and divisive talk from every area of their lives. Just as we are forbidden to murder, commit adultery, lie or steal...we are forbidden from complaining about our circumstances and murmuring against others. At its root, a complaining heart accuses God of either being ignorant or deficient in what He is allowing to transpire. That is what we communicate when we complain about our circumstances. When we perpetually speak divisively about other people, we are

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operating in pride, vaulting ourselves to a higher position over the person against whom we complain. To do this is the exact opposite of the love which Jesus displays. He went lower and lower in order to save us. When we use our words to divide against others, we are exalting ourselves and operating more like the accusing devil than we are the Savior who always rested in the goodness of the Father.

B. Father will help us with family resemblance (15a) – “...that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish.”

What an amazing statement! Paul details that our refusal to murmur and complain is part of the process that validates our position as a child of God. In this statement, Paul connects our patterns of speech with the position of our soul. If we are the true children of God, we will be growing in His likeness. We are told here that we protect our blameless testimonies and childlike innocence when we operate in speech patterns that refuse to complain about our circumstances or cause division with other believers. In the end, we mature out of spiritual diapers, spiritual childishness, spiritual adolescence and into spiritual maturity without blemish. We have to acknowledge what the Word is saying here: we cannot claim to be like God until we have mastered our mouths.

C. Jesus will help us illuminate the world (15b) – “...in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world...”

Here, again, is a practical reminder from the Apostle, who is also a wise Pastor. The way we live as Jesus-followers is to serve as a light to a culture living in a spiritual blackout. When Paul is stating that the present world is crooked and twisted, he is highlighting the reality that the culture is far removed from the design that God has always had for humanity. The world is warped, society is sordid, and the culture is corrupt. The embracing of various sinful ideologies over generations has put deepening distance between the Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of humans. The depths of sin that are in operation all around us are referred to as darkness. The human condition, outside of Christ, is an inky-black existence where nothing of eternal value can be seen. Christians who are working out their own salvation with fear and trembling are operating as lights – Gospel lights, beacons of hope, righteous torches and glory-reflectors in a world that knows nothing of the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul calls us to intentionally pursue these kinds of lives. Everything, from our personal morality to our personal

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patterns of speech, serve to either brighten the light coming from us or to dim that light. God, through Paul, is calling us to live in such a way that we shine brightly.

III. Remembering That We Have A Finish Line (16-18)

A. Stay faithful to the truth (16a) – "...holding fast to the word of life..."

The Apostle Paul was a worker of supernatural signs and wonders. He healed the sick, cast out demons, and raised the dead. He believed and practiced the *charismata*, the gifts of the Holy Spirit. He declared that he spoke in tongues more than others (1 Cor. 14:18). Paul prophesied, had visions and dreams and even had an experience with God that so intense that he did not know if he was in his body or out of it. That is intensely supernatural! Yet the man who flowed in this degree of the supernatural went to great lengths to call Christians to hold to the objective truth passed down by the Apostles. Jesus imparted TRUTH to His disciples. They then imparted that truth to others. Apostolic doctrine was eventually placed in written form and codified in the Bible. One of the many titles given to this truth is "the word of life". We must know the truth of God – the objective, authoritative, non-negotiable communication of the Almighty. The written Word is the plum-line for all prophetic words, words of knowledge, dreams, visions or any other mode by which people say that God is speaking to them. If there is ever a contradiction between someone claiming supernatural communication from God and what we find in the written Word, we must obey what Paul says here: hold fast to the word of life. God does not force us to choose between our bibles and the supernatural communication of the Holy Spirit. Yet, we are called in multiple places to test the spirits and to evaluate prophetic statements. The singular place where each and every believer can know for certain that they have heard God speak is when they open their Bibles and read what is contained therein.

B. Remember how God has invested in you (16b) – "...so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain."

Paul connects the finish of the Philippian believers to his own sense of value for what he poured into them. He gently calls them to "up their game" so that he would never need to wonder if he wasted his investment in them. In mentioning the Day of Christ, Paul again reminds us that we will all give an answer for our lives and what we

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did with them. Paul wants to be able to stand before Jesus and have no regrets about his investment of time, love and energy into the Philippian Church.

C. Live sacrificially to finish in joy (17-18) – “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.”

In closing this section, Paul calls the Philippians to a mutual pursuit of joy in Jesus. Referring to his possible martyrdom as a drink offering that is poured out unto the Lord, he declares that he can envision that possibility with rejoicing. Using his own testimony to motivate them, he calls them to leave petty, trivial differences aside and to enter into a liberating pursuit of the fulness of joy that is theirs in Christ.