



"A Brilliant Workout"

REVIEW

Paul's letter to the Jesus followers living in a Greek city called Philippi contains the necessary ingredients of a life of "Maintaining the Joy of the Lord No Matter What". The first ingredient is found in the first chapter where Paul calls us to **Adopt the Right axis in life**. Make sure our life revolves around the superior life perspective of exalting Christ in everything.

Paul shared his own testimony in chapter 1.

Joy in imprisonment

Joy in spite of fellow preacher's bad motives and ill will toward Paul

Joy in spite of impending death.

Joy in spite of continuing intense ministry

He then mandated the kind of behavior worthy of a citizen of the eternal kingdom.

Unity against the opposition.

Unity with each other based on humility

This was the clear prayer of Jesus before He went to the cross.

"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. John 17:20-21

Doing nothing from rivalry or empty conceit

Humbly esteeming others more important than ourselves

Looking to the interests of others over our own

Paul's initial prayer and subsequent exhortation was all about living in unity based on humility.

Humble obedience is the second clue to maintaining the joy of the Lord no matter what.

II. MAINTAIN THE RIGHT ATTITUDE -- SUPERIOR PATTERN OF LIVING

Humble Obedience modeled by Jesus

A. Jesus modeled humble obedience

He offered Jesus as the ultimate model of humble obedience. In order to reconcile man to God, Jesus voluntarily adopted a human nature.

1. What He did not do

- He **DID NOT** regard the public recognition of His divinity something to be insisted upon.

2. What He DID do

- He willing "emptied" Himself by taking the form of a slave while retaining His divine form.

- He "humbled" Himself by become obedient.

This humbling was evidenced by becoming obedient to death on a cross. This monumental act of the Second Person of the Trinity was critical to our salvation. We listed numerous benefits related to the fact that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

3. God exalted Him for His humble obedience

As a result of this humble obedience, God highly exalted Him.

For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Phil 2:9-11

God promises to exalt us for our humble obedience.

B. Application of the call to humble obedience

Paul used the example of Jesus' humble obedience as the model for us to follow.

Have this mind-set (thinking) in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, Philippians 2:5

The mind-set to which he is referring is one of humble obedience; the willingness to selflessly serve others. Paul began this section with a "So then my beloved brethren". Notice the tone of his admonition – dearly loved brethren. The "so then" signals a response to what had been written previously. On the basis of the example of the humble obedience of Jesus...

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain. Philippians 2:12-16

Jesus clearly defined our purpose on this earth.

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Matthew 5:14-16

Paul alludes to this purpose in this passage – "you appear as lights". Jesus said it is our "good works" that shine in a dark world. Paul also asserts that our works shine like lights in our dark world. Here is the overall argument of the passage before we break it down into its individual components.

ARGUMENT

Maintain the mindset of humble obedience demonstrated by Jesus. Continue to obey as you have been obeying by working out your salvation with a marked seriousness. Doing so will cooperate with what God is now continually doing in you. He is continually doing a work on the inside to bring you a point of not only doing what pleases Him but desiring to do what pleases Him. This working out of your salvation includes living without grumbling or disputing. Such a life clearly shines like a light in a dark world, demonstrating the magnitude of God's transforming work as we hold forth the word of life as blameless and innocent children of God. If you live like this I will have cause to glory when Jesus returns because my hard work and toil proved not to be in vain.

I used to think that the focus of this whole passage was service to people. That is part of it, but the clear focus of this verse is humble obedience to God. Jesus' mindset was to fully obey God which included sacrificial service to us. Paul's application is humbly obeying God which may include serving people. There are two primary instructions in this passage. Everything else flows out of the two commands. Both commands call for on-going attention. (Present tense verbs)

- Work out your own salvation.
- Do all things without grumbling or disputing.

1. Mandate #1 Work out your own salvation (obey).

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, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Philippians 2:12-13

a) Mandate “work out your own salvation”

What we can say for sure about this passage is that it does not say work FOR your salvation. The Bible clearly establishes that point in multiple passages.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, NOT a result of works, so that no one may boast. Ephesians 2:8-9

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Titus 3:4-7

So what does it mean to “work OUT” our salvation?

A physical analogy.

We were all freely given a body with amazing capabilities. It is up to us to explore and tap those capabilities through training and exercise.

A financial analogy.

I give you a million dollars. That can sit in a bank, or stuffed in a mattress. It is up to you to “work out” that gift.

A skill analogy

Any skill requires training and continual attention. Many are born with natural abilities but can only excel through working out.

God grants salvation as a free gift. It comes with unimaginable capabilities. It is up to us to “work out” what God has put in. He has given us the capacity to believe. It is up to us to exercise trust in all things. He has given us the capacity to love. It is up to us to apply that capacity to those God brings in our life. He has given us the capacity for joy. It is up to us to respond to life with His joy. He has given us the capacity for peace. You get the idea. The key to exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit is humble surrender to the work of the Spirit in our lives. Any behavioral command given in the Bible assumes an instilled capacity to obey that command and live righteously.

Living under grace does not mean that we have no obligation to live godly. Commands to live a certain way permeate the New Testament. Living under grace simply means that God does not grant our salvation on the basis of our works. However, the freely granted salvation leads to a transformed life and an obligation to walk worthy of the calling with which we have been called. In reality, the commands of the New Testament are more difficult than the old.

Notice that Paul called them to “work out YOUR salvation”. Technically, it is God’s salvation but the use of “your” here indicates a responsibility to personally give attention to their own growth. With this command, Paul attached two qualifying statements which inform us as to the manner in which we are to “work out” our salvation.

b) Manner

“work out your salvation with FEAR AND TREMBLING.” Paul had no concept of easy, comfortable Christianity. True faith regards commitment to Christ with a strong seriousness. Living out the life God grants is serious business. The New Testament abounds with passages that call for a seriousness about sin and a seriousness about living godly in an ungodly world. We are to realize that God is a God who requires accountability and has ordained cause effect principles. Yet God disciplines us out of love and has provided for the security of eternal relationship with Him through His Son Jesus who paid the ultimate price for sin on our behalf. We should hold our salvation to be a serious calling that requires continual attention and exercise.

The SECOND qualifying phrase actually offers greater understanding to the phrase “work out your own salvation.”

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,

Paul considers “obedience” identical with “working out”. Humbly obeying God is working out our salvation. Paul transitioned them from a focus on pleasing him to pleasing God. He twice hinted that they need to move on from dependence on him. He would not always be there to coach them. Character is how we act when no one is looking.

Why did God save us?

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:10

God did not save us BY good works but FOR good works. He transformed our heart to live pleasing to Him. The working out of our salvation has to do with living the way God created us to live. God did not just save us and then tell us to work it out on our own. Paul included a motivation to seriously focus on living out of what He worked in.

c) Motive – cooperate with God’s work in us

FOR (motivation) it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Philippians 2:13

God constantly invests in our life to bring about two things.

One: that we will work for His good pleasure (obey).

Two: that we will desire it.

The word for work is a word meaning “to energize.” Paul calls us to work out our salvation and obey God because He continually does and energizing work in us enabling us not on to WORK His good pleasure but WANT to. The motivation to work out our salvation is because He is continually working in us.

Pleasing God was Jesus’ passion.

*Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. John 4:34
He who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.”
John 8:29*

Pleasing God should be our passion.

At one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Eph 5:8-10

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy,

giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

Colossians 1:9-12

Paul includes our responsibility (obey) and what God is doing in us (strengthening).

Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. 1 Thessalonians 4:1

No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. 2 Tim 2:4

Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. Hebrews 13:15-16

How serious are we about living in obedience to God? This call to work out our salvation naturally flowed into a second mandate.

2. Mandate #2 Do all things without grumbling or disputing.

I used to think that this had to do with life in general. On closer inspection of the context, I think it primarily applies to our attitude related to obeying and pleasing God. How do we really feel about the things God calls us to do? What is our attitude when God challenges us with difficult circumstances? There are two reactions that crop up; grumble and argue.

GRUMBLING

to grumble because of disappointed hopes, expression of dissatisfaction, discontentment

The example that arises prominent in Paul's memory is the Israelites in the wilderness.

"Let us stop grumbling like some of them and were destroyed by the destroyer." 1 Corinthians 10

On their way to the fulfilment of God's promised new land these people continually grumbled about their circumstances.

Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. 1 Peter 4:9

When God calls us to count it all joy or rejoice when unexpected difficulties arise we generally find ourselves grumbling, "Why me!" On our way to the glories of a promised rest we sometimes lack faith and grumble. If not grumbling, we try to bargain with God or question God.

DISPUTING

Doubt, evil, negative thinking, wrong thinking, questioning, argumentation. Follow Job's journey to humble obedience from demandingness and disputing.

To grumble or dispute God is to question His plan and person. Grumbling and disputing arises from a place of pride and rebellion. Without faith it is impossible to please Him. Hebrews 12:6

3. Outcome of obedience

Paul includes the desired outcome of a humble God-pleasing obedience.

a) A shining testimony in a dark world

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, 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. Philippians 2:15-16

Paul emphasized how such a focus on pleasing God would demonstrate themselves as blameless, innocent children of God without blemish. Such a God-pleasing absence of grumbling and disputing would shine brightly

in a dark world where complaining and arguing have risen to an art form. The best witness is a God-honoring witness. The worst witness is one that comes from negativity. We are holding fast/forth the word of life. When we fail to exercise our wonderful salvation, our capacity to shine is diminished. We are called to hold forth the Word of life.

HOLD FORTH = Hold toward someone, Host offering refreshment, hold fast

We don't want people to refuse to take the word held out because our light is diminished by a negative attitude. The greatest damage done to the cause of Christ comes from those holding forth the word of life who don't live it. You cannot bear testimony to your faith while at the same time grumbling and disputing.

b) A validating testimony of fruitfulness for Paul

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. Philippians 2:16

Paul longed for evidence that the time spent among the Philippians bore fruit.

What now?

The call today is to God-pleasing humble obedience. Are you serious about “working out your salvation”?

What are you going to do differently? More time in the “gym”? More serious and consistent “workouts”?

How much time do you give to grumbling about life? How often do you fight against what God is trying to accomplish in your life?

Benediction

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Hebrews 13:20-21