

Philippians 2:12-18

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Preacher: David Moser

[0:00] Well, good morning again. I invite you to turn with me to Philippians chapter 2 as we continue our sermon series in Paul's!

As you turn to today's passage, I'd like to say one more thing about last week's passage. I couldn't help myself. Last week in Philippians chapter 2 verse 3, Paul said, Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

We spent a lot of time talking about this last week, and something that I really couldn't not say as I just contemplated the passage throughout this week.

This command comes with no caveats, no qualifications, no loopholes. I say that because our natural inclination is to read things that demand something of us as narrowly as we possibly can, right?

Our tendency is to say, well, that doesn't apply here, but because... And then fill in the blank. But this applies.

[1:21] Period. Period. Period. Right? It applies always. No matter the circumstance. Whether online or in person.

Right? And I think one of the ways that we might kind of put a qualification upon it is to say, right, a particular circumstance that we might be inclined to disregard this command is like that let others look to the interest of others, or let us each look to the interest of others, is when we're in charge. Then we might put that aside a little bit. But the fact that you've been given a position of authority, whether you're a manager or a parent or a husband or a pastor, that doesn't entitle you to do anything from selfish ambition.

Quite the opposite, in fact. When Scripture talks about authority, it shows us an increased responsibility to put others first.

So I just wanted to tie up that loose end from last week. This applies. Always. No exception. And Paul continues today with another kind of totalizing idea.

[2:47] Something that applies always and in every way to God's people. So let's direct our attention in today's passage, beginning in verse 12.

Verse 12. Where Paul says, 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. Do all things without grumbling or disputing, 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, 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.

Likewise, you also should be glad and rejoice with me. This is God's word. Lord, will you, in these moments, work so that the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

Amen. Amen. I wonder, when you read, when you hear verse 12, work out your salvation.

[4:38] How do you feel about that? If you are a particularly Protestant Protestant, that might set your teeth on edge.

The Protestant Reformation of the 16th century had to do in large part with the question of whether we work to earn our salvation.

Martin Luther was trying to reform a church whose teaching bordered on saying that we earn our way into heaven. So he picked up his Bible and read the apostle Paul's words to all who adhere.

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.

Yet, work out your salvation, also written by Paul, sounds a lot like work to earn your salvation.

[5:46] Now, that's not some debate for the ivory tower, for the academy, for the eggheads. That is so relevant to every single person who has ever drawn breath.

Life is short. You will soon stand. You will soon stand before a God so great, so holy, you won't be able to take it in.

And that is true for every human being. And you will give an account for yourself.

And the way that account is received will have everlasting consequence. So, far from being irrelevant academic debate, this question, how can I be right with God?

Is the one thing that is relevant to every single person, regardless of any part of their circumstance or background.

[7:01] Nothing could be more relevant, more important than this one question. How can I be right with God? So, how can we?

Let me be frank. As someone committed to the truths of the Protestant Reformation, my initial reaction to this passage, work out your salvation with fear and trembling, that's...

So, my natural inclination, mine, is to try to explain this passage away.

Isn't that our nature? To shut out or shut down the uncomfortable? But let's fight that desire.

Let's not explain away this passage. Let's seek to explain it. Perhaps the first thing that we might say, one helpful place to start, is asking the question, what doesn't it say?

[8:12] Because sometimes we infer an idea that actually is not stated there. In this case, it's important that whatever it does mean, Paul doesn't say, work for your salvation.

Not only is that not what he says, but he also cuts off that line of interpretation in the way that he uses, the way he speaks in the rest of the book.

Let's look forward. Let's look behind. Both ahead of us and behind us, he has cut off that interpretation. From the very beginning of the book, literally chapter 1, verse 1, he says, Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi.

And if you were here when we preached on that, we actually preached on that in the second sermon of this series. We kind of left the introduction and then came back to it. We looked at that word saints.

It means holy ones. So Paul's audience, when he gets to verse 12 of chapter 2, he has already declared that they are holy in Christ, that they are acceptable to the Lord.

[9:33] Something has already happened to them so that they are right with God. And the question is, how did they become right with God? How did they become holy in Christ?

And it's, well, the same way that it happens for anyone. And that's maybe, let's look ahead to chapter 3. Because Paul explains how he came to be holy in Christ.

In chapter 3, the outline of the beginning section of chapter 3 is basically Paul saying, hey guys, I did the religious observances better than anyone.

I worked for my salvation better than anyone. And it got me nothing with God because I didn't love and trust him. But then Paul stopped striving to earn God's favor and cast himself on God's mercy. And suddenly he was, chapter 3, verse 9, found in him. Which sounds a whole lot like the holy saints in Christ.

[10:37] He was now found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ. The righteousness from God that depends on faith.

And so his righteousness isn't something that Paul offered up to God in order to make himself right with God. No, he placed his faith in Christ.

And Christ bestowed upon him righteousness. Right standing with God. And then contrary to, you know, our human way of thinking, it's actually at that point that religious observance becomes valuable.

It's valuable to us. It's not a way of earning God's approval, but as God's children already, it then becomes, well, spending time with and enjoying him as our Father.

So as we look where we've come, literally from the word go, chapter 1, verse 1, and where we're going, chapter 3, verse 9, this means that the Christians in Philippi had already been set right with God.

[11:53] Now certainly they, like us, were waiting for the day when they saw Christ face to face. There was still a future completion of their salvation, but the definitive thing had already happened.

And so we come to chapter 2, verse 12, knowing that Paul can't mean do works to earn your salvation. That's what it can't mean.

Before we consider what it does mean, let me just call to any who've not actually experienced that reality and been set right with God.

You can. You can be found in him, not having a righteousness of your own. I'm just quoting chapter 3, verse 9 to you, right?

That comes from your own obedience, because we know we can't measure up if we contemplate who Christ truly is and who we truly are.

[12:52] But that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith, you may be right with God this moment.

And for all eternity, by casting yourself on the mercy of Christ. And like I said, it is the most relevant question to your life, because it has everlasting consequence.

And so you might find forgiveness in the one who has already paid your debt on his cross, bearing your sin, and the consequence of it on his shoulders, rising again to new life to offer that life to all who would come to him for mercy.

So won't you? And that's how we know that verse 12 can't mean do works to earn your salvation. But then, what does it mean?

Just by reading the surrounding context, it's pretty clear what Paul is talking about. He says, As you have always obeyed, so also continue obeying.

[14:17] Verse 13 talks about working for his, that's God's good pleasure. He expects us to live lives pleasing to God. And what pleases God?

Jesus said, If you love me, you will keep my commandments. Verse 14, again, talks about our manner of our lives.

So Paul is talking about obedience here. Again, we have to be careful here. It does not mean do works to earn your salvation. We now understand that he's telling us to work deeds of obedience in light of the salvation that Christ has already provided for us.

It's as if he is saying, live out the truths of your salvation. We walk in holiness because he has made us holy. Chapter 1, verse 1, saints.

We walk in righteousness because he has given us the righteousness from God that depends on faith. Faith, chapter 3, verse 9. And we walk like Christ because we are in Christ, chapter 1, verse 1.

[15:29] We are found in him, chapter 3, verse 9. So actually, what we're seeing here is a resumption of what Paul said at the end of chapter 1.

If you look at chapter 1, verse 27, he said, Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel and not frightened in anything by your opponents.

This is a clear sign to them of their destruction but of your salvation and that from God. Notice how much similarity is in the language between that section at the end of chapter 1 and this section in 12 and 13, verses 12 and 13 in chapter 2.

In chapter 1, he said, Whether I come and see you or am absent. In chapter 2, he says, Not only as in my presence but much more in my absence. In chapter 1, he said, This is a clear sign of your salvation.

In chapter 2, he says, Work out your own salvation. In chapter 1, he says, And that from God. In chapter 2, he says, It is God who works in you.

[16:45] And so, we should read, Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ in parallel kind of as a synonym of work out your salvation.

And as we looked at it, we said, Hey, that's also prone to the same misinterpretation as work out your own salvation. Isn't it? Right? We could read that, be, not just like live in a manner of, let your

manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.

We could read that as be worthy of Christ. Couldn't we? But that actually wouldn't make any sense of it, would it? The word gospel means good news.

But if the message is be worthy of Christ, that's not good news. That's bad news. Because we know we aren't and can't.

Not if Christ is as worthy as the scriptures show him to be. So it's clear in both, chapter 1, verse 27, and then when he picks it back up, here in chapter 2, verse 12, that these are, they're parallel passages.

[17:56] He's talking about the same things. It's about the gospel and it's about our lives. And so he says, let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel.

Let us obey as is fitting of those who have been redeemed. And he's not going to leave us in the dark about what that's supposed to look like practically in our lives.

He's going to go into the details of that in chapter 2, verses 14 through 18, which unsurprisingly are also parallel to the end of chapter 1 if you line them up side by side.

But before he tells us what to do, he equips us to actually do it. He gives us the spiritual power necessary for obedience.

He does it in verse 13, which we will get to in just a moment. When Paul says, work out your salvation, he's telling us to obey, to work in light of salvation, the salvation that Christ has already made for us.

[19:06] So let's think about the salvation that Christ has already made for us. If we have been saved by Christ, pardoned of all our guilt and made right with the Father, there are new realities about us that cause us to live lives of obedience.

For example, 2 Corinthians chapter 5. Again, Paul is writing this and he says, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come. All this is from God who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

which means if you are in Christ, you are no longer the same. You have been spiritually raised from the dead and given a new nature.

God has produced new life in your inner being and new life lives. That's one of the new realities in the life of the believer that causes us to live lives of obedience.

[20:24] Another is the fact that you now belong to a family that is responsible for and to you. You have brothers and sisters in Christ who help you live a life pleasing to God through encouragement and correction, through church discipline even.

He has given us the church to help us walk in these paths. Another of these new realities is that word, that idea, salvation.

That's a huge concept. Broader than we normally think of it. Perhaps you think of salvation as the forgiveness of your sins.

The Bible calls that justification and that is one of the critical components of our salvation. But notice I just said one of the components because salvation also includes.

Our God is so great that He bestows so many blessings upon us. Our salvation also includes imputation. Did you notice in chapter 3, verse 9, He actually didn't talk about forgiveness.

[21:35] He talked about Christ's righteousness being placed on us. Jesus didn't only take your sins to His cross.

He poured out His righteousness on you if you are in Christ. So if you are in Christ, you are better than forgiven.

You are holy in God's eyes. Salvation also includes the hope of the resurrection. Salvation also includes the promise that you are co-heirs with Christ.

Salvation also includes not just a right standing with God but adoption from Him. So, live like you're forgiven and live like you're an adopted child of God.

What does that look like? What does it look like to live like an adopted child of God? It means live like you can never be put to shame because you belong to the one whose name is above every name.

[22:46] It means if you're an adopted child of God, live like you aren't desperate for people's approval so that you would sacrifice anything, demean yourself, to receive love from others because you have been loved at the highest price by the one whose name is love and He has promised to love you always.

Live like you have an eternal inheritance. Don't grasp for everything that you can possibly get in this life because you have eternal treasure and it's better than the whole world.

Don't feel like you're defined by your earning potential. Because someone has earned for you the right to walk on streets of gold.

Don't set your heart, it's okay to want to improve your station in life, that's fine, but don't set your heart on a nicer home because someone is preparing for you a place in his home.

All these are new realities for the Christian which lead us, encourage us, empower us to live out our salvation which I think is a good way of understanding work out your salvation.

[24:13] We are citizens of heaven. Let's live like it even now on earth. God and in verse 13 Paul specifically gives us another new reality that comes from the gospel that empowers us for obedience when he says for it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Here Paul is talking about the doctrine of sanctification that God progressively makes us more and more holy in practical lived terms.

He might also be hinting at another reality of the gospel when he says that God works in you he might not only be talking about God reaching down from heaven with a powerful hand to reshape our hearts which is true.

he might also be talking about the doctrine of the indwelling Holy Spirit when a believer is found in Christ. Christ comes to dwell in the believer by his Spirit.

And Paul points out two specific things here that God accomplishes in the life of the believer to empower works of obedience worthy of the good news of Christ. First God causes us to desire different things which is actually very similar to our conversion to Christ isn't it?

[25:59] Conversion to Christ is not simply knowing the information of the gospel. Plenty of people hear the gospel understand it.

I've even had a conversation with someone who I convinced like yeah I think Jesus actually did rise from the dead. But they didn't want to live a life worthy of the gospel and so they didn't want this thing.

They didn't want the gospel. When someone comes to a saving knowledge of Christ something happens within them. They see the beauty of the gospel and they embrace it.

Which has implications about how we share the gospel but that's for another time. Similarly, God is in the business of changing our heart's attitudes.

Changing our desires not only towards him in conversion but also towards the way we live our lives. He's about changing our desires that our will.

[27:04] He works in us to will good things. He wants holiness for us.

If we are in Christ and if we are walking in the word we will see that when he wants a holy life for us the thing that he's changing about our desires and our attitudes is that we come to see that when Christ wants us to walk in holiness he is not a kill joy he is not keeping things from us this is the path of freedom and of life and we can resist that can't we we could resist it actively setting your mind on the cost of obedience making it look worse and harder or setting our minds on the pleasures of sin or we could resist it passively simply by ignoring this call on our lives at all but if we know it truly to be the path of freedom and of life and soon as we'll see in verse 14 something that is pleasing to God and we love him and want to please him as someone we love then he begins to reshape!

Our heart's desires to will and to work and you think obedience is too hard well it is on your own but there is no obedience that he has called you to love whether it's forsaking a sin or walking in acts of love that you in Christ in your new creation are unable to do anymore because he supplies power to obey so when you come to the end of yourself which if we are growing in Christ we will do there is strength to keep walking in faithfulness because the supply is from him not from me and like

I mentioned at the end of this verse we are working for his good pleasure in conversion we come to love Christ for who he is and what he has done the smile of a person that you love is a treasure isn't it think of someone you love think of making them smile it is a treasure when you walk in obedience

when you walk in the path of righteousness in the way of holiness it is pleasing to the Lord because of course he loves for his children to walk in the way that is best the way that reflects his own nature your obedience to God is an act of devotion and worship and brings a smile to his face not in a way of earning!

[30:34] but in a way of communing of being with which is why Paul ends the passage the final verses talk about our lives and his life as a sacrifice as an offering to the Lord and then he concludes let's be joyful about it walking in obedience garners the smile of God a treasure beyond counting but that's not all beginning in verse 14 Paul expands our idea of obedience obedience he moves us from my individual obedience to our obedience as a congregation Paul's actually been focusing on honoring God together all throughout if we have eyes to see it in chapter one he says striving side by side for the faith of the gospel at the beginning of chapter two he said do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit but in humility count others more significant than yourselves let each of you not only look to his own interest but also to the interest of others today in chapter 2 verse 14 he says do all things without grumbling or disputing it takes more than one person to dispute right I hope further on in the letter he's going to encourage two people who are in conflict to reconcile and he'll give the whole congregation the job to help them make that happen look look like all manner of things personally but

Paul's kind of crowning point of application isn't about the individual it's verse three that individuals think of others first it's verse four that individuals look out for the interests of others his concern is that the church work out their salvation live as citizens of heaven here today and heaven is marked by peace and unity everyone's focus there is the lamb and his throne and so the church ought to be at peace and center on the gospel verse 16 he says hold fast to the word of life and so what does that mean for us as a congregation we make decisions based on what would make the gospel visible to our community and to the world as a congregation we demand of our pulpit here right that the gospel be at the center that the pulpit hold fast to the word of life as he said

I hope you've seen the gospel weaved all throughout this and every sermon that we have preached here it also means that when we disagree as a congregation on all sorts of things whether it's a matter of interpretation in the bible or a matter of wisdom or a matter of church practice that we hold the gospel over all these things it unites us even in our differences we love our brothers and sisters who differ from us it just happens that we have an opportunity to put that into practice upcoming right what are we going to do on april the third if the lord hasn't returned and this building is still here right we will be here and after gathered worship we're going to vote on something like kind of a big thing as we consider buying land building a building and when the decisions are big that's when we get attached to our our opinion on that that's when fights can get

I mean churches do fight over the color of the carpet sometimes you hear but like these are the big decisions the big decisions are the ones that could fracture a church right how do we live this out in the next couple weeks as a church family if Paul is concerned about a church family well one thing from the elders we've discussed it this week our constitution requires for some things that the congregation votes upon for it to be a simple majority just 51% of the members vote and we can approve the budget for example we can't change the doctrinal statement or elect elders or certain other things without a super majority like two thirds of the congregation must vote to approve those kinds of things the purchasing a property or building a building those aren't things that our bylaws require of us to have anything more than a simple majority but we don't think that's wise for our church family if only 51% of our church family voted to purchase land that's probably not the way to go so we're going to require a super majority on

[36:40] April the 3rd the two thirds of the we haven't said whether it's two thirds or three quarters yet but like a super majority is going to be required for this because we think we see what Paul is talking about here as unity and we want to honor that in the big things in our church family and individually how can we prepare to be unified as a church family the scriptures do not command churches to build a building they do not command churches not to build a building it is an issue of Christian freedom and of wisdom both of which we can differ on and that's okay this is a vote of what is the wisest way to do gospel ministry as a

congregation now and into the future so make the decision about the gospel not about your preferences you may choose not to vote for the location please do so for gospel reasons not for your own preferences if you're thinking in that direction you're probably thinking we can use our energy and our finances in better ways to advance the gospel don't say hey

I don't want to do fundraising that's not prioritizing the gospel but saying there are better ways that's prioritizing the gospel and if someone votes in favor of it recognize that they're not your enemy they are your brother and sister in Christ and they saw a different way to proclaim the same central thing the gospel you may choose to vote in favor of purchasing land do so for the cause of the gospel not for your own preferences and if another member votes against it recognize they are not your enemy they are your brother and sister in Christ and they saw a different way to serve and proclaim the same gospel that is central in your decision and so either way either way that we decide as a congregation will you decide now ahead of time how you will react to it if you are disappointed if you are disappointed react as

Paul says here without grumbling or disputing support your church family's decision either way it goes because then we will shine as he said like stars in the midst of a generation that doesn't understand how wait you didn't want to do that but you are going to support it anyway wow that's kind of impressive that's kind of cool because verse 16 we are 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 perhaps you've heard the phrase what gets measured gets managed it's often used in the business world or I heard it a lot in the coast guard if your manager is always on your case about how quickly you reply to her emails you'll learn to drop everything whenever your inbox pings you even that means hanging up on a client or interrupting a critical design meeting just to type out a prompt reply and it'll crater your unit's efficiency but you'll have gotten the thing they care about done quick what gets measured gets managed what is

Paul measuring here how does Paul measure success the measure of success is that we hold fast to the word of life that is the Bible in general and the gospel in particular we do that as individuals and as a church right that's what we've been seeing here work out your own salvation in light of the gospel you're a citizen of heaven live like it keep the gospel center as a church let's do it with let's do all things without disputing because we hold the gospel at center and that's not in dispute it's just the practicalities of how we walk in it and so the thing that is central let it remain central in and among us let that be the mark of this congregation that we keep the word of life high and central let's pray

Lord as we think about this incredible passage Lord might the gospel be centered Lord we need your help will you work in us to reshape our desires and to walk in it would help us to hold the gospel at the center because it is because you are what is central in all the world and in all the universe and at all times from alpha to omega you are good we pray these things in the name of [43:10] Jesus Christ our risen king whose to whose lips we long to bring a smile amen stand and sing there's a reason why the curse of sin is broken there's a reason why the darkness runs from life there's a reason why we stand here now forgiven Jesus is alive there's a reason why we are not overtaken there's a reason why we sing on through the night there's a reason why hope remains eternal

Jesus is alive praise the king he is risen praise the king he's alive praise the king death's defeated hallelujah he's alive hallelujah he's alive he's alive there's a reason why our hearts can be courageous there's a reason why the dead are made alive there's a reason why who share his resurrection Jesus is alive praise the king he is risen praise the king he's alive praise the king death's defeated hallelujah he's alive hallelujah he's alive he's alive who could not ignore it all the saints are roaring now where is your victory death where is your sting the world could not ignore it and all the saints are roaring now where is your victory death where is your sin praise the king he is risen praise the king he's alive praise the king death's defeated hallelujah he's alive hallelujah he's alive and grave could not ignore it when all the saints are roaring now where is your victory death where is your sin the world could not ignore it and all the saints are roaring now where is your victory death where is your sin praise the king he is risen praise the king he's alive he's alive praise the king death's defeated hallelujah he's alive hallelujah he's alive hallelujah he's alive amen as a

reminder we'll be meeting at shepherd's fold today the email will come out with the address it's 12 and a half marguy street i believe andrew's giving me the nod of approval yes we'll meet there at 345 today that'll come out in email as well so you can pile in together there is limited park it's undeveloped land it's not a lot to see right now but a lot to imagine perhaps and actually our realtor asked if I could get an idea of how many people coming if you're thinking they're coming maybe I can just we'll say 10-ish 20-ish maybe-ish we'll see what happens okay all right and yes that I got on that so 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