

God Who Works In You

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Preacher: Jonathan Chancey

[0 : 00] Please take your Bibles and open them up to the book of Philippians this morning. The book of Philippians. We're continuing on in our series through Philippians. We've made our way about halfway through chapter 2, and our passage this morning is Philippians 2, verses 12-18.

And when you've found it, let's stand in honor of the reading of God's Word this morning.

Philippians 2, verses 12-18. Philippians 2, verses 12-18.

Philippians 3, verses 12-18. Philippians 3, verses 12-18. Philippians 3, verses 12-18. Philippians 3, verses 12-18. Philippians 3, verses 12-18. Philippians 3, verses 12-18.

Philippians 3, verses 12-22. Philippians 3, verses 12-18. Philippians 3, verses 12-21.

Philippians 4, verses 12-18. Philippians 4, verse 13-18. Philippians 3, verses 14-18. Philippians 4, verse 13-28. Philippians 3, verse 13-86.

[1 : 38] open our eyes to behold wondrous things out of your word. Lord, would you transform us in this moment as we meet with you. Now we pray in Christ's name. Amen. You may be seated. This morning I want to take you all the way back to the early church father, St. Augustine.

St. Augustine. Many of you probably are familiar with that name, but you might not know that St. Augustine battled with all sorts of sin in the flesh.

He wrestled especially with sexual sin, but he would tell you he wrestled also with pride and with greed and with gluttony. He wrote about his struggle in his book called Confessions.

It's an honest portrayal of his battle with sin and then his eventual conversion to Christ. And here's what he said. He said, I was bound down by this disease of the flesh.

Its deadly pleasures were a chain that I dragged along with me, yet I was afraid to be freed from it. In fact, he said that in his youth he used to pray, give me chastity and give me continency, only not yet.

[2 : 51] In other words, I want to be holy, I think. I want to be like you, I think. I want to follow you, I think.

I want to obey you, I think, but not yet. Not until I'm done chasing after my sin. Christ, I want to be satisfied in Christ after I'm done being satisfied with the sins of my flesh.

And maybe you've prayed something like that, or even if you haven't prayed that, maybe you've felt something like that. I want to get serious about the Lord at some point, but maybe not quite yet.

Well, if that's you, you should know, not yet will never come.

And the call of our passage this morning is a call from the Apostle Paul to follow Christ with all of your heart, all of your soul, all of your mind, all of your strength.

This is a call to total obedience to Christ right now. So our passage this morning is, we see the call, and then Paul makes a case.

[3 : 55] The call to pursue total obedience, and then the case for why and how that's even possible for sinners like us to meet such a high calling. So first, let's see the call here.

Look with me to verse 12. Paul says, We saw last week, over the past several weeks really, this call for Christians.

We are called to lay down our lives in radical, selfless, humble, sacrificial love for others. You remember this from last week. Out of the example and the power of Christ Jesus for us, we are called to go and die for the good of others.

Christ Jesus has humbled himself. He who is God has set aside this right, this divine right to become a servant of sinners. And now Paul says, You likewise, if you are in Christ, you go and serve others as well.

So now in our passage today, he says, In light of this, in light of this example, and in light of the power of Christ's sacrifice, therefore, you go, work out your own salvation.

[5 : 12] Now what in the world does this mean? I'll tell you what it doesn't mean. It does not mean work for your salvation. Work to achieve your salvation.

Our salvation is based on the finished work of Christ Jesus alone. Not a single one of us can work for our salvation. That's not what it means. Others have taken this to mean, well, work out whether you are saved or not.

Find some evidence for your salvation. Determine whether or not you are actually a Christian. And I don't think that that's exactly what he means either. Although that application is here.

Here's what I think he means. I think that in light of what he's calling them to do here in pursuing total obedience, he's calling them and us to work out your salvation, meaning to live it out.

To work it out in your life. Show the outworking of what Christ has done in your life. Faith is invisible, but obedience is not.

[6 : 16] Faith is internal. It's invisible, but our obedience, our following Christ, the fruit of our salvation, is visible. And so he says, Christian, if you're in Christ, live it out.

Work it out. Show the outwork. Let God's grace play out in your life. Pursue full obedience. Genuine faith, it has to be lived.

It's got to be worked out in your life. A few places, a few references here. James, we know, tells us, faith without works is what? It's dead.

If you say you have faith in Christ, but then that faith in Christ isn't paired with genuine pursuit of obedience, not perfect, not perfect, but genuine pursuit of obedience, something's not adding up here.

John Calvin says, we're saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone. In other words, it's always paired with this outworking of our faith in our lives.

[7 : 22] One of the Lutheran confessions, it says, good works always follow justifying faith and are surely found with it, if it be true and living. For it is never alone, but always has with it love and hope.

So Luther himself, he says, idle faith is not justifying faith. You hear the call here, don't you? This is a call to live out your faith in Christ, to show it, to work it out by pursuing full obedience.

Paul says, work it out in your life. If you're a Christian, if you claim Christ, show it in your life, show it to be true, live it, walk in the good works that your Father's prepared for you beforehand, that you should walk in them.

Let me see your progress and your joy in the faith. And not only while I'm there with you, he says, but also while I'm gone, I'm in prison, I'm not able to be there to oversee you.

And that's the real test, isn't it? That's one thing to obey in the presence of some oversight. It's a whole other thing when you think nobody's there watching you, right?

[8 : 32] Maybe you've seen some of these videos of parents testing the obedience of their children. I think that this is cruel, okay? But they will set up a camera somewhere in the room. They'll put their children there in front of a big bowl of candy.

And they'll sit there with them and they'll say, I gotta go take a call real quick. Don't eat any of this. And then they find an excuse to get up and leave. Camera's rolling, right?

And they see whether or not their child will obey in the absence of their immediate oversight.

Believers, Paul says, believers are to work out their faith.

They're to live out their faith. They're to obey at all times, right? And with fear and trembling, not just because Paul cares about their obedience, but because we live our lives in the oversight of a sovereign God who loves us and calls us to constant pursuit of holiness.

Church, how is this going for you? How is it going for you? What part of your faith needs to be worked out in your life?

[9 : 38] What are you struggling with obeying? What part of the Christian call seems difficult for you to put on? You know, Paul, he calls us to a high call here. It's not just things big and obvious, obvious sins to put to death, obvious things Christians ought to do.

He applies this all the way down to the attitudes of the heart, even the way that we speak. Here at verse 14. Do all things without grumbling or disputing.

How are we doing? I failed this morning. Multiple times. Do all things without grumbling or disputing. You know, we laugh at that. We think it's a small thing. We maybe roll our eyes at it. Why would Paul make such a big deal out of this? But let me tell you, even the slightest little bit of grumbling is sin that must be put to death.

Especially when we think about the effect that it can have on a church family. Now you remember Paul's goal here. He's writing. He's fighting. He's urging them to pursue unity in the church, to work together, to link arms together.

[10:53] He wants to see them have joy in the church and unity. The slightest little bit of grumbling will disrupt the unity of the church. Before a church burns down in a bonfire, a bonfire of disunity, you know where it starts, church?

The slightest little flicker of a grumble. The slightest little argument that never gets dealt with. The slightest little bit of friction that we just let time go by and we'll never handle it.

Paul says, no, no, no, no, no. Let everything you do be done without grumbling or disputing. All the way down to the slightest grumble. We have to put our sin to death.

This is a call to total obedience to Christ. And that's a high call, is it not? So now let's turn our attention to the case. The case.

Because Paul never leaves it just as an empty command. He never does. He anticipates that we're going to ask, well, how do I do that? Why should I do that? What's the reason why we're called to live like that?

[11:54] How can sinners like us even begin to put sin to death? And he gives us three parts here to this case. And I'm going to work it backwards from the bottom up. Okay? So why pursue full obedience?

First reason is, this is Paul's aim as your brother. Philippians, why do all things without grumbling or complaining? Well, Paul says, this is what I want for you.

This is why I labored for you. This is my aim as your brother. This is why I'm laying down my life for you. This is, to say it more broadly, this is the aim of Christian ministry. My aim for you, church, is not just that I would see you come to faith in Christ and then stay there as a baby Christian.

Never grow up. My aim is to see Christ fully formed in you. I want to see you grow as disciples of Christ. I want to see you progress in maturity.

And none of us will ever reach full maturity until glory. But we all have a next step that we can take in putting sin to death and pursuing full obedience. This is the aim of Christian ministry.

[13:00] He says he wants them to approve what's excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ. Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

That's chapter 1 verses 10 and 11. He says in chapter 4, what you've learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things. Practice these things.

How much practice does it take to go and grumble and complain? We don't need to practice that, do we? That comes naturally. I've got to share the story. I was one of my boys who I will not tell you which one was playing a game.

He was pretending. He was in front of a mirror and he was yelling at that guy in the mirror because he was copying him. Stop copying me. You're imitating me.

Stop it. Cut it out. Cut it out. I said, you know what, son? Maybe if you would just ask him nicely, he might calm down too. You don't have to practice yelling and grumbling and arguing.

[14:03] That comes naturally. We've got to practice these things. We've got to practice holiness. We've got to practice making peace with one another. Full obedience is the goal of Paul's ministry.

Romans 1. He says, he received grace and apostleship. Why? To bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations.

It's faith and it's the outworking of faith. That's his goal. We go to Matthew 28. Back it all the way up to the Great Commission and see, what did Jesus command his disciples?

What's the mission of the church? Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to what?

To obey most of what I commanded you. everything to obey all that I have commanded you. This is Paul's goal. In fact, he says, I'd be willing to die for this.

[15:04] Even if I'm going to be poured out as a sacrificial offering, as a sacrificial offering of your faith, I'm glad and will rejoice with you all. I will give my life, he says, for your progress and joy in the faith.

We see this all over Scripture. I want to take you to one more place where maybe you haven't considered the connection here. It's to Jesus' parable of the sower. You know the story.

The parable of the sower. He shares this parable in Luke chapter 8. He shares it in several of the Gospels. Luke chapter 8, starting in verse 5, he says this, A sower went out to sow his seed and as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot and the birds of the air devoured it and some fell on the rock and as it grew up it withered away because it had no moisture.

Some fell among thorns and the thorns grew up with it and choked it and some fell into good soil and that soil grew and it yielded a hundredfold and as he said these things, he called out, He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

He explains it down in verse 11. He says, Now the parable is this, the seed is the word of God. The ones along the path are those who have heard and then the devil comes and he takes away the word from their hearts so that they may not believe and be saved.

[16:26] And the ones on the rock are those who when they hear the word they receive it with joy but these have no root. They believe for a while and then at the time a testing comes and they fall away. As for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear the word but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and the riches and the pleasures of life and their fruit does not mature.

But there's another category. Verse 15. As for that in the good soil, they are those who hearing the word hold it fast in an honest and good heart and bear fruit with patience.

church, I'm sad to say that I have seen every single one of these categories play out. And Paul knows that there is such a thing as a false profession of faith.

There is such a thing as someone who says I believe, I want to know Christ and then for whatever reason time goes by the cares of the world choke it out.

The enemy takes it away. They're distracted by something and there is no fruit, no obedience, no life in Christ. It is snuffed out completely.

[17:40] And so Paul says my desire for you Philippians is that you not just receive the word for a minute and then it's gone. And that you fall away. He says my desire, I want to be able to look at you in the day of Christ and be proud that I didn't waste my time ministering to you.

I want to be proud in the day of Christ that you are fully formed in him. That on that day when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Christ is Lord, I'll look at you and see that you're ready to receive him as king.

My aim, my goal in my ministry is that when he comes you will be standing there ready in the day of Christ. That's his aim. How will they do it?

Church, how will you do it? How will you make sure that the cares of the world don't snuff it out?

How will you make sure that the temptations of the enemy don't draw you astray?

What does he say? Hold fast to the word of life. Hold fast to the word of life.

[18:47] How does a gospel minister make sure his church is growing even when he's not there to see it, to help him, to minister to him? He says, you have the word. Hold fast to the word of life.

This is Paul's aim in his ministry, not only this. Second, full obedience is meant to be your aim as God's child. Meant to be your aim as God's child.

Look there with me to verse 14 again. He says, 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.

Here's the idea, church. Our identity shapes our actions. Our identity shapes our behaviors.

Our identity shapes our thoughts and the way we go about our life. If we see ourselves as part of this world, as belonging to this world, guess what you're going to act like?

[19:59] You're going to act just like this world. Paul says, you, by the grace of God, have been brought out of belonging to this world. That's what it means to be a Christian.

You realize this, right? To be a Christian means that by the grace of God, you have been given faith in Christ and with that faith in Christ, you've been given a new identity in Christ.

You've been adopted out of belonging to this world. You've been adopted now as a son or a daughter of the living God. So you're no longer a part of this crooked and twisted generation. You are a part of the family of God.

We all know that any parent in the room understands this, right? Your children come to you, maybe they see something that they see somebody else doing that they want to do or in my family it's normally they see somebody else eating something that they want to eat and so they come and they say, well, dad, but so and so is doing it.

So and so gets to eat that dessert and what's my response? It's dad. They're not my child. You're my child and as my child I expect you to follow my rules and I expect you to obey me as your father. [21 : 08] You're not a part of their family. You're a part of my family and so God says, as my child as my child shine as lights in the world in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation.

You know how normal it is to grumble, church? You know how normal it is to hear grumbling and conversations? I mean, you turn on the TV it doesn't matter what station, right? Politics, you turn on TV Fox News, CNN, MSNBC, it doesn't matter what station it is, what do you hear? You hear grumbling and disputing, don't you? You turn on sports, ESPN, what do you hear? You hear grumbling. I'm about to grumble about this. I wasn't going to say anything but now I can't get it out of my head.

All you hear is grumbling and disputing. You can't get away from it. You turn on the radio on the way to work, what do you hear? You hear grumbling, you hear disputing, you hear arguing. God says, not my children. Not my children. You belong to me. The way that we speak, the way that we act, the way that we live, the way that we treat one another, the way that we serve one another, honors God our Father when we do it like Christ.

[22 : 26] Meant to be our aim as God's children but not only this. Third, third and finally, pursue full obedience because this is God's aim as your Savior.

This is God's aim as your Savior. You realize I have, I've spent this whole time telling you what to do but I haven't given you power to do it yet. Here it is.

Look there again to verse 13. Actually, let me back up to verse 12. Again, the command is, 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, verse 13, for, here's the basis, here's the power, for, it is God who works in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

Here's the good news for sinners and for failures and for strugglers, those of us who are struggling to live the Christian life. Here's some really good news for you this morning.

[23 : 32] The power for the Christian life from beginning to end comes from God. You can't do it. The power to put grumbling to death cannot come from us.

You can't do it. If all you hear this morning is try harder, be better, you've missed it. You can't do it. It's God who works in you to will and to work for His good pleasure.

Paul says work. Paul says obey. Paul says pursue full obedience. Why? Because it's God who works it in you. This verse is just absolutely stunning and it's really not hard to understand if we just read it simply and so that's what I'm going to try to do here, okay?

He tells us both our working and our willing is from God. Isn't that what he says? Both our working and our willing is from God. He says your working is from God.

All the bearing fruit, all the putting sin to death, all the loving your brother, all the holding your tongue when you want to grumble and complain, all the counting others more significant than yourselves.

[24 : 41] Where does that power come from? Only from God. It's God who works it in you, Paul says. It's like when I want to build something or have some project I'm doing at the house.

Maybe I'm hanging blinds or maybe I'm building a table and I say, son, come build this table with me. What are they going to say? I can't do that. I can't do that.

I say, you just hold this drill and I put it in their hands and my hands go on top of his hands and together we place the bit into the screw and then together with my fingers on top of his fingers together we drive in that screw into the wood and I use some of my dad's strength to get it in there because he can't do it on his own and then it's done and he leaves and says, guess what?

I built a table. Yeah, you did. But it was the Father. The Father's work in you. And when a Christian say they hear God's command go and share the gospel with your neighbor and go bring this word of life to somebody who doesn't know it and so they work up the courage.

They take a risk. They have this gospel conversation with somebody that doesn't know Jesus and they put themselves out there for some social rejection. They say, this is the only way a sinner is saved is by faith in Christ and that person responds and says, you know, I want to hear some more about that.

[26 : 11] They go home rejoicing at what God has done in and through them. It's God who works in you to work for his good pleasure but not only that.

Paul says, even your willing is from God. Here's where my analogy breaks down a little bit, right? Because I can't change anybody's will. Paul can't change anybody's will.

I can make my son come and do what I ask. I can kind of force some obedience but I cannot change the human will. But here, Paul again, plainly, he says, God works in you to will for his good pleasure.

Now, this is a little bit controversial, isn't it? You get into conversations about human will and free will and God's sovereignty and everybody starts to get a little bit tense and so, y'all just take a deep breath.

Okay? Again, my goal is to make scripture be plain. Paul says, it is God who works in you to will and to work for his good pleasure.

[27 : 19] That doesn't mean that we don't make a choice. Of course not. You're involved in the choices you make but we make choices, we need to know we make choices in accordance with our nature and by nature.

Sinners outside of Christ are dead in the trespasses and sins. We're spiritually dead. We're unable to will the will of God. Spiritually dead sinners cannot desire God.

Those who are in the flesh, Paul says in Romans 8, cannot please God. We're not neutral towards him either. We're hostile towards God in the flesh. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God, he says.

The mind that's set on the flesh is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law. Indeed, it cannot. Martin Luther, he says that the human will is like a beast.

We'll call it a horse. The human will is like a horse. And that horse is standing in between two riders. If God rides, he says, it goes where God wills.

[28 : 26] If Satan rides, he says, it goes and it wills where Satan wills. And here's the point. The beast, the horse, can't choose who rides it. The riders themselves fight for control and possession of the will.

And so what God does when he saves a sinner is he kicks that old rider off and he occupies your will. He gives you a new will. He enlivens the sinner's will.

He resurrects your old, dead, sin-chained will and frees it to love and to do the will of God to the glory of God. He gives you a new heart that loves Christ and loves the law of God and loves to obey the Lord and desires holiness.

And where in the world did that come from? It didn't come from you. It is God who works in you to will for his good pleasure.

The amazing thing about the Christian life is that it is God from beginning to end. If you, this morning, have any desire for the Lord in your heart, if you hear these words and you want to grow in obedience, if you want to know the Lord and you want to pursue him with your life, praise God.

[29 : 43] That is his work in you. By grace, you have been saved through faith. It is not of your own doing. It is the gift of God. Not a result of works that no man may boast.

It begins this way in conversion. God speaks and dead bones live. Jesus calls and Lazarus walks out of the grave. The invitation is cast to sinners and they hear by the grace of God and they are made alive to the glory of God in the face of Christ.

It begins this way in conversion and it continues this way all the way until glory and the long duty of sanctification as God works holiness in you.

You realize any victory you have in the Christian life, any sin that you put to death this week, any obedience that you go and you do a good work for the glory of God, you know where that comes from?

It's God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. So church, let's close by coming back to Augustine.

[30 : 49] If you're struggling with coming to Christ this morning, maybe you just, if you're being honest, you don't desire him at all.

You desire sin, you desire the world, you desire anything else other than the glory of God and the gospel of Christ. Or Christian, if you are wrestling and struggling with putting some sin to death, you just don't know how in the world you can grow out of this, wrestling with giving yourself completely to him, maybe if that's you, you could pray something like what Augustine prayed in confessions. He prayed this, Grant what thou dost command and then command what thou wilt. You remember his struggle.

I want to follow you but not yet. I want to be holy but not yet. I want to follow Christ but not yet. Augustine struggled to come to faith in Christ and once he came to faith in Christ he struggled to fully obey.

He struggled like we do but then he had this life-changing realization. You know what it was? He realized he couldn't do it. So he said, you command self-control.

[32 : 06] You command holiness. God, you command that I love Christ. You command that I follow Christ but I realize no one can do it unless God gives it.

And so I prayed, give me the grace to do as you command and then command me to do whatever you want. It might be that. Some of you here are wrestling in this way and so here's my encouragement to you.

Non-believer, your prayer this morning might sound like this. You've commanded me to repent and follow Christ but I realize I cannot do it so Lord, I ask now, would you give me the grace to do as you command and then bid me come.

And for you Christian, the Christian life is impossible apart from the work of God. So for that sin that lingers in the flesh, for that command that you just struggle to find the courage and the power to obey, for that part of the Christian life that just seems impossible for you to put on, pray, Lord, would you give me the grace to do as you command and ask whatever you want.

The power for the Christian life is from God and God alone. Let's pray. Lord, we need you.

[33 : 28] We come to you this morning weak. We come to you this morning powerless to do anything that you've commanded us to do. God, each week I stand up here and I ask the impossible Lord in the flesh you must do it.

Father, would you give new life to those who are dead in their sins this morning? God, would you bring faith to those who don't know you this morning? Would you cause them this morning to call out to you to have a renewed will that desires life in Christ?

Would you do that this morning? And Father, for this church that I long to see grow in holiness and obedience, Lord, I can't make it happen.

So Father, I ask that you would do it. I ask all this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. He is here. Amen. Thank you.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.