

Phillippians 2021 - Part 5 - Life spent for God

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[0 : 00] We're in Philippians chapter 2, verses 12 through to 18.

So if you'd like to turn in your Bibles there this morning. Many of us will be familiar with the book of Philippians.

It's one of those books within the New Testament that is perhaps read frequently. In fact, I would imagine that the New Testament is read far more frequently than the Old.

Perhaps the Psalms are read quite a lot in the Old Testament. But I don't imagine that even some of the most devout readers are reading perhaps the book of Lamentations more than once a year.

You know, if you're reading through the Bible in a year, you'd go through Lamentations once. But if you don't follow that type of program, then it's easy to skip over books.

[1 : 00] But here we have been making our way through in Philippians. And so we come to this next section. And I'll now read Philippians chapter 12. Sorry, chapter 2, verse 12 and finishing at verse 18.

So now hear God's word. 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 questioning 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, the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.

Likewise, you also should be glad and rejoice with me. Let me pray before we come to God's word together. Father, we ask of you this morning that these words would penetrate our hearts and our minds, that they would be words that we don't just receive, but words that we live by.

[2 : 45] We are exhorted here to hold fast to the word of life, and we pray that we would do that this morning, knowing that what we have read is the word of life.

So be with us now in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, the main underlying theme or perhaps overarching theme, whichever way you want to look at it, in the book of Philippians may not be a joyful church.

That would be certainly the aim, to have a joyful church. That's certainly what Paul is aiming for. But I think one of the questions that is worth asking is, finish the sentence, church after the image and likeness of...

Now, the answer should be Christ. It should be Christ. But it's very clear that implicit within these verses is church after the image and likeness of those who attend, because they are not Christ-like.

And therefore, churches that reflect their own individual images are reflecting their own individual images to the world, and not really the likes that they are meant to be, that God requires them to be.

[4 : 05] So the very simple principle here throughout the whole book of Philippians is that simple statement. Finish it. Church after the image and likeness of you, or after the image and likeness of Christ in you.

Now, of course, it should be fairly easy to understand what I've just said. The difficulty, however, is what does it mean to be Christ-like? And this letter of Philippians explains very clearly what it means to be Christ-like.

So previously, we learned how Christ used his life, and how his life was used up, earthly speaking, to death on the cross in obedience to the Father.

And then it follows that Paul then begins to write to the church, or continuing to write to the church, an exhortation that they ought to be like Christ. Paul gives us a personal example of his own life, and his own life mirrors that of Christ, not serving his own interests, but the interests of others.

But more importantly, he is mentioning several things over again. And whenever Paul repeats himself, it is not because he is absent-minded, and he has forgotten what he has said.

[5 : 25] It is because the repetition is necessary. He even goes as far to say, it's no big deal for me to repeat these things, because it is necessary for you that they are repeated, and that you would receive them, and that you would take them in and understand.

And so he returns to some familiar ground. The first one being, it should make no difference whatsoever whether Paul is present or absent in this church when it comes to you living your life for Christ.

It should make no difference whatsoever whether or not Paul is present, whether or not he is there to say, do this or don't do that, to exhort you.

You should be able to live for Christ with the motivation that God gives you who wills and works in you to follow him completely. So his presence or absence should make no real difference.

What you do should be in light that God is your judge, not Paul. And therefore you should live for the approval of God. You should not live for the approval of men, to quote Jesus, to put it in the words of Jesus.

[6 : 40] Now, of course, within this, he is seeking the idea that we would serve the true interests of God on earth, in the church and in the world. And serving the true interests of God means that we serve the interests of others.

We have our own interests taken care of because others are serving our interests. So there is this communion of that if everyone is serving the interests of others, everyone is taken care of.

But if you have a church that is not Christ-like in that way, and they're not serving the true interests of others, then you have people that will default to serve their own interests because they're not being looked after within the congregation that they are found.

So it becomes very easy to see why a church can become very focused and self-centered and self-dependent rather than trusting and loving one another as we have here.

because it's an issue of whether or not we are emptying ourselves of self. We should not grasp for equality, he said last time, as a reason for not serving other people.

[7 : 53] Well, you're no different than me, I'm no different than you, you do it. No, Paul says you shouldn't do that because Christ, though equal with God, didn't grasp after that equality. And therefore, if Christ didn't grasp for equality with God, you shouldn't grasp or guard the equality that you have with each other as a reason for not serving the true interests of each other.

So, Paul is returning to familiar ground, though in a slightly different way. His main point, again, which he returns to, is that he does not want his work amongst the church to be a labor that is in vain.

Now, if he has to repeat this, then it's obviously a concern that Paul can spend years within a church, let's say five or ten or fifteen, whatever it may be, exhorting a church, speaking to a church, and then the work has been in vain because the people within the church have not held fast to the word of life.

They have not adhered to the exhortations that they have received. And so, there are plenty of reasons for repetition, not because people need to be instructed all over again, but often because people need to be reminded all over again.

See, when you tell someone or you ask someone to do something, perhaps someone younger than you, perhaps someone in your family, and they've not done it, then the issue that you have is, well, did they not understand the instruction or have they just forgotten?

[9 : 30] Nor if they've forgotten, the next time you tell them is a reminder. You're not telling them the instruction all over again, you're just reminding them what you've asked them to do.

And of course, when a person's heart is not really ready to receive the reminder, they'll say things like, you've already told me once. But if you had paid attention to what I'd said once, there would be no need for me to say it again.

So Paul, the very fact that he has to lay out to this church, again, that he does not want his work amongst them to be a labor in vain, would mean that he is concerned that it might be.

He wants them to follow Christ and to be faithful, which has to be understood biblically. What does it mean to be Christ-like? Well, it means that you serve the true interests of others.

What does it mean to be Christ-like? Well, it means that you do not grab or guard the equality that you have with each other as a right and therefore not serve in the church.

[10 : 36] Rather, it means that you hold true to what God has given you. You hold true to the word of life. And then, Paul knows that if these Christians do this, then his labor has not been in vain.

In other words, he's able to know with a certain degree of certainty, a large degree of certainty, whether or not his labor is going to be in vain based upon the response of this church as to whether or not they grow in Christ-likeness.

Now, this doesn't question Paul's faithfulness. It only questions their own because Paul has faithfully come and exhorted this church. Now, all the emphasis is on the response of the congregation.

So, as we make our way through, this portion of Scripture follows beautifully with the previous one, but it's very neatly put. We can summarize it in this way.

So, in verse 12, Paul acknowledges that the church has been obedient up to the point, but then he says, you are to work out your salvation with fear and with trembling.

[11 : 48] He goes on to say that it should make no difference whatsoever whether or not I'm here or absent. You should be doing it anyway, and then the reason comes.

For, it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. In other words, there was once the book written, what do I do when I don't desire God?

I'm not, I've read the book, I'm not quite sure I understand what the book is saying because of this one verse. In other words, where does desire come from to live for Christ?

And two Philippians, one Philippians, Philippians 2, verse 13 says, it comes directly from God. God works in you to will, to will, to change your will, to give you those desires and to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

And this is for his good pleasure. In other words, Paul can be confident that his work amongst them will bear fruit because of God's work within them.

[13 : 08] And therefore, the fruitfulness that will appear in the church is the result of God working within their lives to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Now he knows, he's kind of confident that those who respond are responding to the work of God within their own life which is being explained and applied by Paul's letter to them.

Now those who don't, of course, it becomes obvious that if they don't have the desire to do it and the desire comes from God, then suddenly there becomes an identification within the church.

You are identified by your desire and service because God places that identity within you. God works in you to will and to work for his good pleasure.

These are like the fingerprints of God. You can tell where God has been because of the fingerprints that he leads and the fingerprints that he leads within the church is willingness and work.

[14 : 20] These are the fingerprints of God within a congregation. So the fingerprints of God on your life or rather in your life is that you desire. You desire the things of God.

You desire to do what God wants you to do. You desire to love God and to praise God and to worship him and you desire to serve him and then that is if you desire it naturally is linked to the idea that you will then do it.

I mean don't you do the things you desire? Don't you eat the things that you desire? Don't you go to the places that you desire to go to? I mean can we agree that there is a link between desire and then action?

Well God is saying here it's exactly the same when it comes to Christian service. So verse 14 goes on to address their response now to our desires and to the work.

Do it without grumbling and do it without disputing. Without grumbling or disputing. Now my mentor Gordon Taylor used to say when he needed to not all the time but when he needed to he would have to say you may not like the way I serve God but I can guarantee to you I don't like the way you don't serve him.

[15 : 48] Because often those criticisms come from people who say well I don't like the way you do things are often people who are not actually doing anything other than commenting on what you're doing.

and there are plenty of Christian commentators who are willing for you to provide all the answers and then sit back and then give their opposition to it. They don't want to do any of the thinking they just want to criticize your thinking.

This is of course a big issue within the church because it means that when I say something not only has a lot of thought gone into it throughout the week of preparation or even longer than that when it comes to going through a book like this and not only have I consulted hundreds of books on the subject so it's not just my understanding but hopefully a gathered understanding within the church for them quickly to be dismissed as an opinion rather than an exhortation of the text is taken with a pinch of salt by me but it absolutely damages the church absolutely damages the church because there is no exhortation to the teaching of God's word everyone's left with well we just do our own thing and it becomes apparent when a church does their own thing because they can never agree you will never have the church saying well it seems good unto us in the Holy Spirit you will be in the position where the church is unable to make any decision because it can agree with each other so this idea here of do all things without grumbling or disputing is measuring it against our attitude firstly to the work and then towards each other do the work without grumbling and do the work without disputing and the disputing is often related to those that you're working with you don't dispute with the work you may grumble about the work but you don't dispute with the work you dispute with the people that you might have to work with and so what

Paul is addressing here is rather our attitude now to the work that God works in us do it without grumbling and without disputing be joyful in doing the work that God has given you as a church and then as you undertake that work don't be in a matter of dispute with the world with those that you have to work with rather you have to come to the understanding what is the true interest of God the true work the true interest of God and the reason verse 15 he says is so that you may be blameless and innocent children of God without blemish in a world full of the opposite in other words if you are like this and you are grumbling and you are disputing you're not going to stand out in a world that does exactly the same thing there is no differentiation between you and the world who grumbles and disputes the one identifying mark here that Paul addresses is that you will stand out in the world by not grumbling and by not disputing with each other you will then be those lights to the world that you are meant to be in a crooked generation in a twisted generation you will stand out by not being like them that is how you be a light in this world and then he calls us verse 16 to hold fast to the word of life that Paul has labored amongst them then he says verse 17 that his life if it is used up like a drink offering like a sacrificial offering then that is a good use of his life for his life to be used in that way and then verse 18 the church should have the same type of faith concerning the same type of issues about life you should not mind at all that your life is going to be used up for God rather you if you think about your life as a bank account and you decide this morning how much you're going to spend on

God it should be everything your life should be fully spent for God not half spent Christian service should not be as C.S.

[20 : 24] Lewis once put it like paying taxes this is for me and that's for you but often Christian the Christian life is very much divided that way this is my part and this is my time and you you'll notice that there is there is no mandate whatsoever in the New Testament church to tithe via law a tithe is a legal obligation introduced under the law in Corinthians it is it is lifted to a much higher status than a tithe and that is that though he was rich he became poor that you through his poverty might become rich now when you consider what it means to give it is linked to Christ giving his life rather than to an old law and therefore it is not that tithing is wrong it is just a lower standard of offering compared to the life of

Christ who says that life should be fully spent for God so what does it mean then to have a life fully spent for God in other words how you live matters it matters a great deal because it matters how you appear before God and then it will matter how you appear before the world it will matter whether or not you use your life you spend your life for God or you spend it in terms of a little bit here a little bit there on your own interests rather than the true interests of God and others in other words what we're being asked to do here is what we're being asked to do almost throughout the entire New Testament and that is to live by faith day by day following Christ reflecting Christ being faithful to Christ God is at work in us we work that work out just be faithful in the same way a candle is used up in the dark your life is to be used up in a dark world that the image is striking but it's simply striking that a candle has one purpose of course you are more complicated than a candle but you understand that the moment you light it you use it and you will use it up and one day it will go out because you have been fully spent and your life is very much like that and wouldn't it be good to be able to come before God with a clean conscience and say

I have been fully spent for you that that that burning process has been always been in the right place and for the right reasons now of course this burning this spending our life draws attention to God because we are lights in the world and God throughout the New Testament is saying as you do your good works as you live in this way the nations around you will see this and give their praises to God it will have a transformative effect upon them because they would have never seen anything like it before and of course this is linked to what Paul has already said that you live your life this way because you are working out your salvation with fear and with trembling you don't mind your life being fully spent for God because that's what the desire of God in you creates and that's what the work of God in you creates and it should make no difference just to restate this whether or not Paul is present or absent you should be doing it anyway why now why does Paul have to say this

I used to think that it might have something to do with the authority of the pastor within the church and maybe it does maybe it is to do with that exhortation moment where church needs to be led but I I'm not entirely sure it can be that because of the difficulties that Paul was identifying here about whether or not they can be led because he says I don't want to labor in vain there's the clear there's a clear mark there where he's saying well I'm leading but that doesn't guarantee that you're following you know I could be just laboring in vain and then I thought well as you listen to Jesus it might have more to do with the fact of what we do and who we do it for because Jesus says do what you do not to be seen by men but for the approval of God and Paul could then be saying it should make no difference while I'm present or absent because God is your judge what you do you do for God's approval not for my approval there's an apostle you know as a one of the founders of the church so to speak and

I think that seems to be more fitting that what we do we do for the approval of God and not for the approval of others to put it a slightly different way it is absolutely impossible to be lights in the world without the practice of private righteousness before God without that private righteousness that Jesus speaks of in the sermon of the mount going to a secret place just between you and God offer up your prayers without that private righteousness you cannot be lights in the world regardless of what we do together everything hinges on whether or not God is your judge or you treat those that you sit with as your judge it all depends on whether or not you look to God for approval or whether or not you're looking to your fellow man for approval in other words as you conduct your life whose approval are you looking for you know you don't you don't you don't want my you don't want my approval and the thing is my standards are not high enough you know when you when you compare your life to the standards of

[26 : 46] God you begin to realize just how high they are and Jesus says that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees and you begin to worry what well of course it can in Christ Jesus who wills into works according for his good pleasure and so now we begin to appreciate what is being said it doesn't make any difference whether or not Paul is present or absent because it is not Paul's approval you should be looking for it is God's Paul is not your judge God is your judge and so we serve the true interests of God and we serve the true interests of others and we do not grab for a quality that we have with others as a reason for not doing anything we empty our self of self and we serve God and how can we do this because God is at work in you to will and to work to do that very thing but here's the exhortation as we close now learning all of this in this church let me just identify then in this church learning all of this would be fruitful but fruitless rather if it was not for God going before all of us working in us this very morning that God must be doing to us exactly what he's doing to these Christians here to will and to work according for his good pleasure it follows then that if God is doing this in us then

I can expect to see a response not because you're responding to me but I can expect to see a response in my own life before God as you can expect to see a response in your own life before God in hearing these words if indeed God is at work in you to will and to work for his good pleasure there's the condition right the response can only be seen if God is at work in you to will and to work for his good pleasure and so faithfulness to Christ has to be identified by what it looks like biblically what does it look like biblically it looks like holding fast to the word of life it looks like serving not only your own interests but the interests of others it looks like not guarding your equality but serving it looks like working out not figuring out but rather working out practically your own salvation with fear and with trembling and your life is a gift Paul says just like his it is an offering a spiritual offering that should be fully used up the moment it is given when offerings are given throughout scripture they're not used again they are used once when you lay down that offering it is used once and so our whole life is to be that one act of offering that as we lay ourselves down our life will then be fully spent fully used for the purposes of God and this should be a moment of rejoicing this is something that you should rejoice over to love and to serve God in this way and so I'll finish with this if you're still confused after all these weeks so far in

Philippians if you're still confused and you have still not got it then look at Christ and look at Christ and look at how he lived and then remind yourself that that is what God expects from you so if you're confused go read Jesus and the gospels in the New Testament and then you'll be able to see the expectation of what it means to live for God Amen Amen amen