

Philippians

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Philippians 2:12-30

Intro:

- In verses 1-11 Paul makes an amazing statement about the Christ whom we serve. Here in the remaining verses of Ch. 2 he puts some practical application to the soaring theology of 1-11.

Verses 12-13

- In vs. 12 Paul gives the church a command. He compliments them on the obedience they showed to him when he was with them, now when he is away from them, he requires it even more, for he challenges them and commands them to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling”. The Greek word he uses here for work carries with it the idea of “bringing to completion”. In other words, Paul is saying, “Don’t settle for just some of what God has for you, but go on, discover all that the whole life of Christ has for you!”
- Paul uses a different word for work in vs. 13. Here is a verb that is only used when speaking of the divine and implies effective action. God’s work, if we do not resist Him, will continue to completion, for that is His will for you.
- So what are we to draw from this? 1) that salvation is from God; that once we accept Christ as our Savior the Holy Spirit begins a work in us to change from what we had become to what we were originally intended to be when God created us, a process known as sanctification; the process ultimately ends when we are in Heaven, but along the journey we become more and more like Christ, more and more perfect as our Father in Heaven is perfect. 2) that as in any love relationship, we do have responsibility; just as Jesus asked the man at the pool called Bethesda in John 5 “Do you want to get well?” we have to *WANT* what God has for us; if we do not want the best

God has to offer we won't ever get it 3) and we are to do this in a spirit of "fear and trembling"; not out of fear of being crushed by God (many served the Nazis with fear and trembling knowing what would happen to them and their families if they did not), but out of fear of what our life would be WITHOUT God and out of our fear that our ongoing sinfulness makes US responsible for crucifying Christ again and again (the hand holding the nail in "The Passion of the Christ" was Mel Gibson's hand as he wanted to show his personal responsibility for the sin that put Jesus on the cross); so we work out our salvation with fear and trembling as we think of what life would be without God and the pain it would cause Him should we ever divorce ourselves from Him.

Vss. 14-18

- We are to "Do all things" without "grumbling or disputing". This may be evidence that the Philippians were NOT Baptists! Baptist it seems haven't been able to do anything in 400 years with out grumbling or disputing.
- The word for "grumbling" is the same word used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament for the way the Jews grumbled against Moses during The Exodus: "Why are we out here in the desert? Were there not enough graves in Egypt? Where's the food coming from? Where's the water coming from? Are we there yet?"
- The word for "disputing" describes useless and pointless doubting and arguing.
- The point here is that "grumbling and disputing" do not help the church accomplish her mission. Again, the problem is almost always a problem with pronouns: "*I* don't like" or "**WE** don't like". The question is never what we like or don't like. The question is ALWAYS "What is God saying to us?" Once we see, hear, and understand what God is saying then we MUST conform ourselves to God and not the other way around.
- When a body of people as diverse as a church are in "one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel (1:27), then the we prove ourselves "blameless and innocent children of God."

- Jesus said in The Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:14) “You are the light of the world” and Paul here reiterates that idea. When we openly and publicly live as blameless and innocent children of God then we become “lights in the world”. The Greek word here for “lights” is the same word used to describe the sun and the moon in Genesis 1, illuminating the earth day and night.
- “Hold fast” was surely a catch phrase in the early church. It was the message to 3 of the 7 churches of the Revelation. The writer of Hebrews uses it 4 times. And Paul tell the Corinthian church to “hold fast the word which I preached to you” (1 Cor. 15:2). The Greek means to have an unbreakable grip. It was a common phrase among sailors who needed to hold fast to the lines on ancient sailing ships. We are then to hold on to the word of life with an unbreakable grip!
- If the Philippians can do this then Paul can die a happy man. Here Paul uses two vivid word pictures the Philippians would easily understand. First, he uses an athletic picture. Olympic style games didn’t just happen in Greece every four years. Smaller local or regional events were fairly constant. So everyone would be familiar with foot races and the way athletes worked/toiled to be in the best condition and form for the games. To work out poorly and prepare poorly would almost certainly lead to poor results. Therefore, if the Philippians lived as God’s lights in the world, that would be proof when Paul meets Christ face to face that he neither ran nor toiled in vain. Second, at every meal, pagan Greeks, which virtually all the Philippians had been, would offer a drink offering in the same way we might say the blessing. Here Paul gives us a hint as to what he really thinks his future may hold. “Even if I am being poured out as a drink offering...” Clearly Paul is thinking of his life as a sacrifice to Christ which he will gladly make, but it would be all the sweeter knowing of the Philippians’ sacrifice and faith.
- In verse 18 we have the difference between someone who truly **KNOWS** Christ and those who are lost. Here’s a guy facing death, and probably in his gut he knows this is what his imminent future holds. And though he’s

writing what he thinks may be a farewell letter, his response is JOY! We need to constantly remind ourselves that clinging to this life of flesh and blood is pointless. Our sin has seen to it that we are all under a death sentence. The only real questions are WHAT we are going to die for and HOW we will face that day. I heard a young man comment that he would never join the military because there was nothing worth dying for. Unless he undergoes a major change some day he will die for nothing. Paul knew that one day he would die for the cause of Christ and if his ministry produced new disciples like himself (3:17) then how he would face that day would be full of joy!

Verses 19-24

- Timothy was more than Paul's right-hand man. In 1 Cor. 4:17 he calls Timothy his "beloved and faithful son". If Paul could not go to Philippi to see for himself how the church was doing, he would send Timothy. The Apostle desperately wanted to know how his favorite congregation was faring. Paul had met Timothy halfway through the Second Missionary Journey and took the young man with him the rest of the way, including to Philippi, when the church there was founded. Timothy returned to Philippi on the Third Missionary Journey. Thus, the Philippian church knew Timothy well. They knew of his standing with Paul and with Christ, undoubtedly holding Timothy in great respect. And at this point, Timothy was the only one Paul had available whom he could really trust. All the others "seek after their own interest". Timothy would go to Philippi as soon as Paul saw how things were going to go for him, yet he hoped to go himself. If Paul was seeking to make the Philippian church feel better about his position with the Romans, they would not be feeling so reading between the lines.

Verses 25-30

- When the Philippians heard Paul was in prison in Rome, they sent his good friend Epaphroditus to Paul with a care package and with the intent that Epaphroditus would stay in Rome to support Paul. This alone was risky as it

was not unheard of that the family and servants of a condemned man may well be put to death as well.

- The main thing here is that evidently not long after Epaphroditus arrived he was stricken with an illness. Rome was a city with 4 million people and poor sanitation. “Roman fever” would sweep through the city from time to time killing thousands. Paul says his friend nearly died but God had mercy on him and he recovered. Paul adds that God’s mercy extended to himself because he would not have been able to stand another sorrow. Word had reached Paul and Epaphroditus that the Philippian church had become aware of their friend’s illness and were terribly worried. Perhaps Epaphroditus was still weakened by the illness. Perhaps there was extenuating circumstances Paul does not mention or perhaps Paul was afraid the Romans may very well put Epaphroditus to death with him. For whatever the reason, Paul is sending Epaphroditus back to Philippi with Timothy.
- To ensure that Epaphroditus returns with honor, so that his return would not signal a failure to stay and support Paul, the Apostle heaps praise upon praise upon Epaphroditus. He is Paul’s “brother, and fellow worker, and fellow soldier” who did indeed minister to Paul as the church had wanted. Paul calls him “your messenger”. The word he uses for messenger is “**Apostolos**” placing Epaphroditus in the highest echelon of Christ’s servants.
- Paul is making it easy for Epaphroditus to go home with honor, but he goes one step more. In verse 30 Paul tells the church to receive him with joy and hold men like him in high regard for “risking’ his life” for Christ and for the sake of his mission for the church. The word Paul uses there is a gambling word: **paraboleuesthai**, meaning to risk everything on one throw of the dice. There emerged early in the church a group of both men and women known as The Parabolani. These were people who were called to go into places no one else would go: prisons, homes and communities infected with plague, and minister to whom they could. Perhaps their most famous moment came in 252 AD when plague nearly wiped out the city of

Carthage. The pagans fled the city in hysteria leaving the dead and dying where they fell, filling the streets with corpses. The head of the church there, a man named Cyprian, had his congregation begin to bury the dead and nurse the sick. They knew what they would die for, and WHO they would die for, and made the decision to be found serving “the least of these” when they met Jesus. But they didn’t die. They saved the city. Few of the pagans returned and Carthage became one of the first truly Christian cities. Epaphroditus and the other Parabolani showed the same reckless courage Jesus spoke of in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, not considering personal risk in order to help those in need.