



## Philippians: Week 3

### Week 3, Day 1 - Philippians 2:12-13

*<sup>12</sup> Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence but much more now in my absence, work on your own salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup> for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*

#### Understanding the Passage:

This short passage is packed with wisdom and complex theological concepts, but there are two main things that stand out that we will dig a bit deeper into – integrity and sanctification.

Paul founded the church at Philippi at least 10 years ago. That’s a long time to be gone and to expect that people will still obey instructions. Imagine how many other church leaders have been with them. Because a common issue during the days of early Christianity was dealing with false teachers, we know there were likely some who came and taught things contrary to Paul’s teachings. And yet, Paul notes that they have “always” obeyed him in the past and are still “now” doing it. This kind of integrity – having one’s inner character match their outer profession, and doing the same thing whether people are watching or not – is rare and Paul rightly commends them for it.

The thing about which Paul is commending them is sanctification, the ongoing process of salvation. Paul’s theology (nor John Wesley’s, for that matter) does not align with the idea of “once saved, always saved.” For Paul, sanctification is an ongoing process that involves both humans and God.

Of course, the sole mover in the act of salvation is God. In Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, he outlined the whole formula for salvation in two short verses: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

We are saved by God. Full stop. We can’t work to achieve salvation on our own – it comes as a free gift from God. But salvation isn’t the end. For the rest of our lives, we are sanctified so that we become more and more like Christ. This is the “working on your salvation” to which Paul refers.

The Greek word that is translated as “work” in this passage means “produce or bring about.” Wait, what?? If we are not the authors of our own salvation, how can we produce it or bring it about?

The next verse answers that question: by God’s power. God is working in us. We have a responsibility to practice our faith, to attend to it, and to serve others so that we might grow more like Jesus. But we are enabled to do all of those things by God’s power in us. We’d be right to be filled with fear and dread if we were responsible for our own salvation, but this verse is a comforting reminder that God will help us.

#### Questions for Reflection:

1. Why is it essential that we read and understand verses 12 and 13 together? What could be the consequence of separating things?
2. What are some ways that Christ followers work out their salvation?
3. What is your plan for growing in your faith?

### **Week 3, Day 2 - Philippians 2:14-16**

*<sup>14</sup> Do all things without murmuring and arguing, <sup>15</sup> so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world, <sup>16</sup> holding forth the word of life so that I can boast on the day of Christ that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.*

#### **Understanding the Passage:**

As a reminder, these verses follow just after the kenotic hymn that we studied last week. In the passages that we are looking at this week, Paul connects the example of Christ emptying himself with the way that Christ followers in Philippi (and, for that matter, everywhere and in every time) should live.

The first way that Paul tells them to distinguish themselves is by doing all things without murmuring or arguing. The word that is translated as “murmur” is closely aligned with the idea of complaining or grumbling. If we put our minds to it, we could probably all cut back on our grumbling, but you will notice that Paul doesn’t tell them to just try to cut back on murmuring and arguing; he tells them to do *all things* without murmuring or arguing.

What are the things you’ve complained about just today? If you’re reading this as a morning devotional, maybe it was that you didn’t get enough sleep last night. Or that your kids are already acting wild. If it’s later in the day, it’s likely you can’t even remember all of the things you’ve complained about because it comes as second nature to many of us to issue complaints.

Paul tells them to cut out the complaining and fighting so that they can be blameless and so that they will shine like stars in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. He’s drawing a contrast between the Israelites and what he hopes for the Philippians. When the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness with Moses, even though God rescued them from slavery in Egypt and met their needs for food and sustenance, they still constantly grumbled and complained. They were described as a crooked and perverse generation in Deuteronomy 32.

Paul wants the Philippians to be markedly different as a testament to trusting in the goodness and provision of God. In that way, they will be like shining stars, or as the gospel of Matthew describes, the light of the world and a city on a hill that cannot be hidden.

When folks around you hear you complaining or arguing, what kind of witness is it to your faith in God? Does it indicate to them that you trust God to care for you or that you value your brothers and sisters in Christ enough to not argue with them? Do other people sense the presence of the Holy Spirit among you when all they hear from you is complaints?

#### **Questions for Reflection:**

1. Why do you think that grumbling was a risk to the church at Philippi? Is it still a risk for us today? Why or why not?
2. What do you need to do this week without complaining or arguing?
3. Which of the ways that Paul lists that you can shine like a star is the most difficult for you? Why?

### **Week 3, Day 3 - Philippians 2:17-18**

*<sup>17</sup> But even if I am being poured out as a libation over the sacrifice and the service of your faith, I rejoice, and I rejoice together with all of you; <sup>18</sup> in the same way also you should rejoice and rejoice together with me.*

### **Understanding the Passage:**

Paul did end up getting out of the imprisonment from which he wrote this letter, but he didn't know that would happen. This passage shows us that he expects that his life will soon end. But even in the face of impending death, he rejoices.

He describes the way he spent his life (well, his later years after his conversion) as a drink offering. This is language from the Levitical Law in which wine was poured on the altar after an animal sacrifice was made. It was symbolic of giving oneself fully to God. The wine doesn't get to fulfill its original purpose of pleasure and drinking, so it symbolizes "wasting" the personal use of it and spending it on God. Paul uses this metaphor to make a point about spending your life in service to God.

Further, Paul is essentially saying, "I am rejoicing because I am glad I spent my life this way. No regrets." He knew that he couldn't have it both ways - there is no way to drink a little of the wine and use the rest as a sacrifice to God. In the same way, we can't reserve just part of our lives for ourselves and part for God.

It may seem overwhelming to think about pouring our lives out for God, but the reality is that we will all pour our lives out - it's just a matter of what it is poured out to or for. At the end of our days, we'll look back and realize that we gave our lives to something, whether it's our careers, our pursuit of wealth, our families, sports, and so on.

Later in this letter to the Philippians, Paul says we should practice the things we've seen in him (4:9). His example of pouring himself out for the Lord is an example to each of us. It is a call to examine our own lives and the things we're spending ourselves on to see if they truly align with the good news of Jesus.

### **Questions for Reflection:**

1. What sacrifices can you make for others this week?
2. Looking back on your life and faith, can you rejoice in the way you've spent it?
3. If not, what might you change?

### **Week 3, Day 4 - Philippians 2:19-24**

*<sup>19</sup> I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I, too, may be consoled by news of you. <sup>20</sup> I have no one so like myself who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. <sup>21</sup> All of them are seeking their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. <sup>22</sup> But Timothy's worth you know, how like a son with a father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. <sup>23</sup> I hope therefore to send him as soon as I see how things go with me, <sup>24</sup> and I trust in the Lord that I will also come soon.*

### **Understanding the Passage:**

In the next two passages, Paul shares with the Philippians his desire to send two of his co-workers in ministry to them. One is Timothy, who we know was with Paul and assisting in the writing of this letter (per Philippians 1:1). Paul, fearing he may not get out of prison, wants to send Timothy on a round trip to visit the Philippians. He says that he wants to get news of them and be consoled by it, which implies that Timothy would be checking on them and then returning to Paul.

Paul loves the Philippians and cares deeply about them and since he can't go to them, he wants to send someone who feels just as deeply for them. He knows Timothy is genuinely concerned for their welfare. Timothy reflects the kenotic hymn just a few short verses ago by his sacrificial love.

Remember that Timothy was really young - just a teenager. Paul names him as a leader because he is genuine. He is not self-absorbed. He doesn't have a secret agenda. Paul contrasts him with others

who are seeking their own interests. Most folks have an interest in what they're going to get out of any interaction or relationship. They keep people around because they are angling for something or because they expect to be paid back in kind. Timothy, on the other hand, loves them so much that he is able to push his own desires to the side.

It is uncommon today to think of people who are looking out more for your interests than theirs. When you come across someone who genuinely loves and cares for you, it makes a big impact. It stands out because it's so rare to have more than a surface-level friendship.

### **Questions for Reflection:**

1. Does your life causes those around you to conclude that your love for Jesus and them is genuine?
2. Who has come alongside you to teach you like Paul did with Timothy?
3. What do you think the difference is between serving Jesus as a "slave" and serving him as one of many priorities?

### **Week 3, Day 5 - Philippians 2:25-30**

*<sup>25</sup> Still, I think it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus—my brother and coworker and fellow soldier, your messenger and minister to my need, <sup>26</sup> for he has been longing for all of you and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. <sup>27</sup> He was indeed so ill that he nearly died. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, so that I would not have one sorrow after another. <sup>28</sup> I am the more eager to send him, therefore, in order that you may rejoice at seeing him again and that I may be less anxious. <sup>29</sup> Welcome him, then, in the Lord with all joy, and honor such people, <sup>30</sup> because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for those services that you could not give me.*

### **Understanding the Passage:**

Verse 23 (in yesterday's reading) said that as much as Paul wanted to send Timothy, he needed to wait to "see how things go with me." Timothy is clearly a help to Paul in his imprisonment and Paul seems to be concerned about letting him go at this point. First century prisoners were dependent on their friends and family members to take care of them as the prison system didn't provide for things our modern penal system acknowledges as necessities, including food and clothing.

Even though he isn't ready to let Timothy go, Paul still wants to send someone to check on the Philippians. He also wants to thank them for supporting him while he has been imprisoned. The man that carried the financial support from the Philippians to Paul was Epaphroditus.

We don't have a full picture of what happened to Epaphroditus after he journeyed to Paul, but we know that he was struck with some kind of illness and was close to death. The Philippians heard how sick he was and they were deeply worried. This, in turn, deeply distressed Epaphroditus (v. 26). So part of Paul's motivation in sending this letter and sending Epaphroditus to the Philippians is to reassure them.

You can see deep friendship and partnership in the gospel here. Clearly Epaphroditus is deeply loved by these folks. Their ministry together isn't just a business arrangement – it is rooted in deep friendship.

**Questions for Reflection:**

1. Who are the friends that help hold you up?
2. Paul's character reference of Epaphroditus is strong: "brother, coworker, fellow soldier, messenger and minister." If someone gave a character reference of you, what do you think they would say?
3. How can you be a model of humility and service for others this week?

**Video Questions**

1. Looking back on your life, can you see times when you were touched by God's prevenient grace?
2. Paul says we have to "work out our salvation." What part of this is God's role versus our role?
3. Tom talked about doing something with the grace that God works into our lives. What are some practical things that we do to work out our salvation?
4. We are always witnesses for Christ. As God sanctifies us, how does that change or impact our witness?
5. Think about groups or communities (not related to the church) you're a part of that are really attractational. What is it about them that is attractive? Is there anything there for us as Christ followers to learn?
6. Why do you think it's important to (metaphorically) hold each other's arms up? How can you take that outside of the church and hold up the arms of people who don't know Jesus? What difference do you think it might make in their lives?

**Prayer requests and other notes.**