

Philippians (2:12-30)

Exhortation & Imitation

This section concludes the series of three exhortations intended to correct some misunderstanding on the nature and purpose of suffering (1:27-30), encourage unity through humility (2:1-11), and motivate godly, Christian living (2:12-18) by offering the examples of Timothy and Epaphroditus (2:19-30).

I. Exhortation to Faithful Christian Living (2:12-18)

A. General Appeal (2:12-13)

1. Paul refers to the Philippians as “dear friends,” literally “my beloved ones” (*ἀγαπητοί μου*). After commending their obedient walk up to this point, Paul encourages them to continue the Christian faith in the same way they began: Obedience.
2. “Therefore” indicates a logical connection with what came before (following through with the idea of “obedience” from 2:8). The connection goes something like this: “Since Christ demonstrated such extreme obedience for your sakes, you ought also to follow in his steps.”
3. Lest we think that obedience (typically characterized by works) is unrelated to entrance into the kingdom (typically characterized by faith), it is important to remember that “for Paul faith in Christ is ultimately expressed as obedience to Christ, not in the sense of following the rules, but of coming totally under his lordship” (Fee, *Philippians*, p. 233). Obedience characterizes true faith (see esp., Rom. 1:5; 15:18; 2 Thess. 1:8; Jm. 2:14-17).
4. The entire command/exhortation in v. 12 hinges on our understanding of the term “salvation.”
 - a) Contextually, this passage has nothing to say about “getting/becoming saved.” Rather, it speaks to us who are saved and how we should walk in our salvation, particularly in the church and in the world (see, vv. 16-18 for the latter).
 - b) The “working out your salvation” complements “as you have always obeyed.” In other words, God exhorts us to grow in obedience (“salvation” is tantamount to obedience).
5. Paul has the entire Christian community in mind here, not necessarily individuals. This is a corporate command (so too with 4:19. See also, 1 Cor. 3:16-17). Although the assumption is that it applies at an individual level, the import of this passage is on the Church’s reflection of Christ to secular society (cf., 2:15).
6. The manner in which the Philippians are to grow in obedience is “with fear and trembling.” This has both horizontal and vertical implications.
 - a) Horizontally, we are to have a sense of awe and respect for the mighty working of God in our churches. Put differently, we must take seriously our walk with the Lord as it relates to others in our fellowship. What others think does matter!
 - b) Vertically, since every creature will someday bow to Jesus as Lord, the Church must mirror a degree of reverent submission and humility before her Master (see 2 Cor. 7:15; Eph. 6:5 where the same expression is used).

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7. "For it is God . . ." is better translated "because it is God . . ." (see Rom. 6:14 for the same use of the word "γὰρ" translated "because" NIV).
 - a) In effect Paul is telling the Philippians that they are not left to their own resources. All of God's gracious activity in salvation, from first to last, is accomplished by Him who will "carry it on to completion" (1:6).
 - b) This activity of God is dynamic and ongoing (*ὁ ἐνεργῶν ἐν ὑμῖν*). Paul sees no tension with exhorting us to do something on the one hand, and showing confidence that it is accomplished by God on the other (see, Rom. 8:12-14 vis-à-vis Rom. 8:4; 1 Cor. 6:11-16; Col. 3:3 vis-à-vis Col. 3:5).
 - c) Obedience is always "good" for us and part of God's "purpose" for us, though we don't always know what His purpose is (cf., Gen. 22:1-18).
 8. Philippians 2:12-13 illustrates the relationship between God's sovereignty and our responsibility.
 - a) The text does not say "Work to gain salvation, because God has done his part." Or, "Perseverance depends entirely on you." Nor does it say, "Relax! You're one of the frozen, chosen." Still, it does not say that God is doing the "work" for believers, since the command is to us to do something.
 - b) God works at the level of our wills and provides the inspiration and determination to obey as well as the power to carry out His "good purpose." The work of sanctification (the process of becoming holy) is ultimately accomplished by God and in accordance with our cooperation but not in dependency upon it (1:6)! That we do occasionally obey demonstrates God's will to "act" in us.
 - c) Hence, the ability to "work out" our salvation is in us, but not from us. A will inclined toward God is always a product of God and never the result of sheer self-determination (Jn. 15:1-5; Col. 1:29). Coming to grips with the reality that God is mightily at work in us is anything but a disincentive. The profound significance that God's sovereign rule over the universe will never be made contingent by the "free" choices of humans should not only inspire us at the intellectual level, but ignite in us a firm resolve to live every waking moment for Him at the practical level.
- B. Specific Application (2:14-16a)
1. The specific path we are urged to take in obedience has to do our attitude toward others. We must do "everything without complaining or arguing."
 - a) Presumably, it is those outside the church being impacted by our critical and argumentative posture, since Paul indicates that the effect is upon the "crooked and depraved generation."
 - b) Alternatively, it could be a further call to unity from the previous context (2:1-4). The effect upon the world, then, would be the shining testimony of a people who, despite differences, work together for the common cause of the Gospel.
 - c) Or, it is possible that what Paul had in mind is a combination of both. Believers are to do "everything without complaining or arguing," whether in the church or the world.

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2. The "word of life" is none other than the word that brings life, viz., the Gospel (*λόγον ζωῆς*, genitive of source/origin).
 - a) God's people are to be clearly distinguishable from the world around them. Criticizing and arguing with others does nothing to make us shine!
 - b) In essence, as "children of God" we must live lives that are ethically bright (not dark), hypocrisy is far removed, and our integrity is evident making the Gospel attractive. Positive evangelistic influence upon the communities in which we live is paramount!

C. Motivation (2:16b-18)

1. Paul always saw his entire life's efforts in terms of Christ and the Gospel. He had a keen awareness of accountability before God (cf., 1 Cor. 9:24-27).
2. The metaphors of hard labor/training of an athlete ("running") and the liturgy of sacrificial death are intense. The point is simply that there are no limits for Paul when it comes to expending one's self for the progress of the Gospel.
3. Note that it is the "sacrifice and service coming from your faith" to which Paul's life or possible death was devoted. The Philippians' faith in the Gospel is Paul's true sacrifice to God. In many respects, the measure of our ministry effectiveness is seen in the impact we have on others. Ministry is not only God-centered but others-centered.
4. Whether by his life or death, Paul implores the Philippians to join him in rejoicing that God would use him for their sakes. Such focus and resolve to love and serve others!

II. Paul's Messengers Demonstrate Sacrifice and We Should Imitate Them (2:19-30)

A. **Imitate Timothy** who shows more interest in others than himself (2:19-24)

1. Timothy's character:
 - a) He was young (1 Tim. 4:12), physically weak from frequent illnesses (1 Tim. 5:23), and generally aloof and reserved with others (1 Cor. 16:10; 2 Tim. 1:6-8).
 - b) Yet Timothy was sincerely more concerned for others than himself (2:20). Although Paul had many others with him during his imprisonment (4:21-22), Timothy was truly outstanding.
2. Paul did not necessarily see himself over Timothy in any organizational sense.
 - a) Part of Timothy's service to Paul included a mentoring relationship as student to teacher ("no one else like him," literally "of like soul," v. 20).
 - b) Though he served Paul as a son does a father both were on equal footing in relationship to the Lord's service (1:1). It was not Paul whom Timothy served ultimately, but the "work of the gospel" (2:22).
3. Just as we grow up imitating, to a large extent, those around us, so too Timothy is a grand illustration of the value of gleaning Christian character from others (see 1 Cor. 11:1).

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B. **Imitate Epaphroditus** who has been proven in hardships (2:25-30)

1. Epaphroditus was from Philippi and most likely delivered the material support to Paul in Rome (2:25).
2. Paul describes him as a "brother," "fellow worker," and "fellow soldier." Epaphroditus was a devoted companion and comrade.
3. Note: Epaphroditus was not distressed from being ill, but his anxiety was from knowing that others in Philippi would be distressed from hearing of his condition. Such selfless concern for and devotion to others!
4. His illness was directly related to "the work of Christ" (2:30). Paul does not indicate the precise circumstances surrounding the illness nor his healing, but does state that suffering hardship is worthy of "honor."
5. Thus, Timothy and Epaphroditus both display the character that Paul longs to see in the Philippians: Tireless devotion to others for the sake of unity and progress of the Gospel.