

PHILIPPIANS

JOY ON THE JOURNEY

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Philippians 2.12-18
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I. Connecting With One Another

Have you ever experienced a power outage wherein you needed to rely upon candlelight?

What was your initial reaction when the power went out? And how did you feel relying upon candlelight until it came back? Did the candle provide enough light in the midst of the darkness?

II. Introduction to this Study

Philippians 2.12-18 concludes a section begun at 1.27, where Paul writes, "Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ." This emphasis on worthy conduct has prompted Paul to emphasize the importance of unity in the Philippian congregation and to reflect upon the incarnation of Jesus.

Now, the Apostle to the Gentiles reminds his "beloved" that their unity and self-sacrificial conduct are not meant to separate them from the world in a sort of holy enclave. On the contrary, the Philippian Christians are to "shine like stars" in the dark world they inhabit (Paul even calls his a "crooked and depraved generation"!).

They are to do so by "working out their salvation with fear and trembling," to "do everything without complaining or arguing" and "hold onto/hold out the Word of Life." If they do so, Paul says, "I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing."

III. Study the Text

- a. Begin at Philippians 1.27 and read all the way through to 2.18, thinking back to previous studies and messages on these texts. What jumps out at you? What questions do you have? What connections do you see in these verses?
- b. Read again verses 12 and 13. It seems, at first, that Paul is encouraging them to continue the ways they have obeyed him and his teaching. That is clarified at the outset of verse 13: "for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."

Have you ever seen a leader connect their teaching or understanding of a particular passage with God's will in an unhealthy or unscriptural way? How? (Notice, if you're interested, Paul's careful differentiation in 1st Corinthians 7.10-14, where he discusses marriage: "To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord).")

- c. In Philippians 2.12, we read, "continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling." How have you heard this verse explained before?

At times, this verse has been misunderstood by those who think it calls us to earn our salvation, which would negate the doctrine of salvation by faith alone. This could not be further from the truth! Notice, Paul writes, "work out your salvation," not "work in," or "work at," or "work for." How would each of those words, "in," "at" or "for" change the meaning of this verse?

Simply put, "working out" means God has already worked "in" by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, worked "at" (or better yet, accomplished!) by Jesus' death on the cross, and worked "for" by the Apostle Paul declaring the message to the Philippians. Once salvation has been accepted, we get to work it out by putting our faith into action. See James 2.14-26 to see how faith and works work together.

- d. In verse 14, Paul gives specific ways the Philippians need to “work out” their salvation (you won’t be surprised to know the “you” in this passage is plural: the congregation together, as a whole, is to work out their salvation). They are to “do everything without complaining or arguing.”

This is of great importance for the Philippian congregation, since two missionaries who have worked alongside Paul are at each other’s throats! See Philippians 4.1-3 to read these women’s names (what a bummer to have your name in Scripture for arguing!). How does Philippians 4.1-3 help clarify 2.14?

- e. Reread Philippians 2.14-16. Notice the connection between “work out your salvation” to “without complaining or arguing” to “blameless and pure” to “hold out the Word of Life”?

If your group is meeting *before* hearing this weekend’s message, how do you see these connected? If your group is meeting *after* hearing this weekend’s message, what did you think of Curtis’ connection with Eastern Orthodoxy and Marshall McLuhan?

- f. Scholars point out (and your Bible may have a footnote) that Paul’s phrase “crooked and depraved generation” is taken from Deuteronomy 32.5 (read from 31.30 for the larger context). Moses says – or rather, sings! – these words, chastising God’s people for “complaining” and “arguing” as they’ve traveled through the wilderness toward the Promised Land. And, at this point, Moses knows he will not enter the Holy Land with them.

Why do you think the Apostle Paul, with his mind full of vast biblical knowledge, thinks of this passage? (For a hint, think through what Paul meant by his metaphorical language in verses 17-18)

IV. Reflect and Respond

- a. In what ways do you “work out” your salvation with “fear and trembling”? Do you ever mistakenly fall into the thinking that you have to “work in,” “work at” or “work for” for your salvation? That is a common (and rather American) way of thinking about grace. But it’s completely unbiblical!

Read Ephesians 2.1-10. Notice especially verse 8. What does that mean to you? Have you accepted this grace by faith?

Then, notice verse 10, the “working out”!

- b. Are there ways Good Shepherd needs to hear the call to “do everything without complaining or arguing”? What other ways do we – as a community – need to do or not do, so that we “may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation.”

What does your family need to do or not do? What do you need to do or not do?

Verse 16 states “as you hold out the word of life...” “Hold out” could also be rendered hold “onto.” How do we, as a congregation, “hold out/onto the word of life”? Is there anything else we “hold out/onto”? How does that holding out/onto shaping us?

How do you “hold out/onto the word of life”? Is there anything else you “hold out/onto”? How does that holding out/onto shaping you?

- c. In what ways do you “shine like [a] star” in our congregation? In your workplace? In your neighborhood? In your family? Does our “crooked and depraved” world ever keep you from shining as brightly as you should? How so? Why?

V. Pray

Spend some time in prayer:

- Lift up the vision of Good Shepherd, that we would continue to make disciples of Jesus Christ who connect with God, grow in faith and serve in love,
- Pray for our pastors, staff, elders, deacons and ministry leaders to help guide us as a community to ways we can effectively “hold out the Word of Life” in our “crooked and depraved” world,
- Ask God to strengthen families of faith and friendships of faith not only for their own benefit, but for the purpose of spreading the good news of God’s salvation.