

# CITIZENS OF HEAVEN

THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

Sermon-Based Study Guide  
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church  
Philippians 2.12-18 | October 11, 2020

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## I. Introduction to this Study

This week we continue our fall series Citizens of Heaven, engaging Paul's letter to the saints in Philippi.

Philippians 2.12-18 concludes the section beginning in 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.

Paul reminds the church in Philippi 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 around them. 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."

## II. Connecting with One Another

Have you ever experienced a power outage having only to rely upon a single candle to light your way? What was your initial reaction when the power went out? And how did you feel relying on a single candle? Did the single candle provide enough light?

## III. Study the Text

- a. Take a few minutes and read from Philippians 1.27 all the way through to 2.18. What jumps out at you? What questions do you have? What connections do you see in these verses?
- b. In Philippians 2.12, we read, "continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling."

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. We work out by putting our faith into action. (See James 2.14-26 to see how faith and works work together.)

In verse 14, Paul gives specific ways the Philippians need to “work out” their salvation (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 (what a bummer to have your name in Scripture for arguing!). How does Philippians 4.1-3 help clarify 2.14?

- b. Reread Philippians 2.14-16. Notice the connection between the phrases – “work out your salvation”, “without complaining or arguing”, “blameless and pure” and “hold out the Word of Life”?
  
- d. Scholars point out (and your Bible may have a footnote) that Paul’s phrase “crooked and depraved generation” is taken from Deuteronomy 32.5 (*start reading from Deut. 31.30 for the larger context*). Moses says (*or rather, sings!*) 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.
  
- e. 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)
  
- f. 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?

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



- g. Are there ways Good Shepherd needs to hear the call to “do everything without complaining or arguing”? What do we complain about the most? What do we need to stop complaining about?
  - a. 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*” can also be translated “*hold onto*”. How do we, as a congregation, “*hold onto* the word of life”? Is there anything else we *hold onto*? How does that *holding onto* shape us?

How do you “*hold onto* the word of life”? Is there anything else you “*hold onto*”? How does that holding onto shape 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?

g. Pray

- a. Lift up the vision and mission of Good Shepherd, that we would continue to invite all people into a Christ-centered life in God’s family, as a faith community and as front yard missionaries in our various communities.
- b. Pray for God’s grace and wisdom to abound as we all navigate a polarized political landscape, a worldwide pandemic and an upcoming presidential election.
- c. 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.

