

Community Group Guide



the Church at Martinsburg

Paradox: An Unnatural Response to Natural Circumstances
“Temptation”

Philippians 2:12-30

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Introducing the Sermon Series

A *paradox* is a statement or proposition that seems self-contradictory or absurd but, in reality, expresses a possible truth. The book of Philippians communicates a series of paradoxes: joy in the midst of suffering, unity in the midst of diversity, freedom in the midst of imprisonment, contentment in the midst of turmoil. These are only a few.

The apostle Paul wrote this epistle to the church at Philippi while he was in prison. The Philippians had sent one of their own, Epaphroditus, to take support to Paul. In turn, Paul supports them through this joy-filled letter.

Sermon Overview and Outline

Believers often find themselves in a tug of war between what we know to be pure and godly and what our flesh is allured by, and even craves at times. Paul described it well in his letter to the Romans: “I do not understand my own actions... I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate” (Romans 7:15). When we find ourselves in that place, we have reached the epicenter of Paul’s subject in this passage: temptation.

Outline:

- Temptation is Overcome with Obedience (v. 12a)
- Temptation is Resisted with Proper Focus (vs. 12b-13)
- Temptation is Real and Potentially Costly (vs. 14-17)
- Examples of Overcoming Temptation

Scripture Passage

Have a volunteer read the following scripture passage(s).

Philippians 2:12-30

[12] Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, [13] for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

[14] Do all things without grumbling or disputing, [15] that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation,

among whom you shine as lights in the world, [16] holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. [17] Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. [18] Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

[19] I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. [20] For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. [21] For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. [22] But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. [23] I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, [24] and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.

[25] I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, [26] for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. [27] Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. [28] I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. [29] So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, [30] for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.

Discussion Questions

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means.

1. What insight, principle, or observation from this weekend's message did you find most helpful, eye-opening, troubling?
2. Have you ever been guilty of grumbling or complaining? Looking back how could you have handled the situation in light of today's passage.
3. Read Philippians 2:12-13. How does the instruction to work out your salvation coincide with the work that God is doing in you for his purpose?
4. Complaints, arguments, and disunity have been the marker of many Christian churches. What steps can we take to ensure that the church we are part of is marked by charity, unity, mission, and the gospel?
5. Verse 20 speaks of a Christian taking a genuine interest in the welfare of others. What or how are you intentionally focused on the welfare of others? Who can you be praying and encouraging regularly for the sake of the Gospel?

Prayer

As you pray with your group, consider praying for the following things:

- Any personal requests. Pray for the personal requests that may have been shared in your group.

- A desire to have the Word of Christ dwelling richly in the hearts of your fellow group members (Col. 3:16).
- Ask the Lord to help you keep your mind set on Christ so you may experience the paradoxes of life with Christ.

Weekly Scriptures

Encourage your group members to consistently read Scripture. The daily Scripture reading plan from the church is be a helpful place to start.

Monday - Philippians 1

Tuesday - Philippians 2

Wednesday - Philippians 3

Thursday - Philippians 4

Friday – Colossians 2:16

Saturday – Philippians 1:6

Weekly Update

Remind your group of some of the important things coming up for the church.

Upcoming events:

One-Day Preaching Workshop

On Saturday, June 27, Dr. Mark Johnson will be teaching a one-day preaching workshop at 50 Monroe Street. This even is open to all men interested in teaching the Bible.

Baptism Celebration

We will be celebrating with baptisms on July 19th! If you have members in your group who have yet to be baptized, encourage them to follow through in obedience. They can register to be baptized at baptism.martinsburgchurch.org.

Follow-up

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email, text, etc. to your group with some or all of the following:

- A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.
- Encourage individual members of your group with specific passages of scripture that deal with something they might be experiencing.
- Challenge your group members to read through the entire book of Philippians this week.
- A reminder to pray for the requests made during your group time.

Commentary

**This commentary has been taking from the Philippians: An Unnatural Response to Natural Circumstances Study Guide. You can pick up a physical copy at the Guest Services table.*

“In a certain sense, the salvation of every person who believes in Christ is complete, and complete without any working out on his part, seeing that ‘it is finished,’ and we are complete in Jesus. Observe that there are two parts of our salvation: the one complete, the other as yet incomplete – though guaranteed to be brought to perfection. The first part of our salvation consists of a work for us; the second, of a work in us. The work for us is perfect – none can add to it. Jesus Christ our Lord has offered a complete Atonement for all the offenses of His people; He took His people into union with Himself, and by that union they became entitled to all the merit of His righteousness; they became partakers of His Everlasting Life, and inheritors of His Glory. Saints are therefore saved completely as far as substitutionary work is concerned. Such was the meaning of those majestic death words of our Lord, ‘It is finished!’ He had finished transgression, made an end of sin, and brought in Everlasting Righteousness. Thus He perfected forever them who are set apart. Now with the work of Christ we cannot intermeddle; we are never told to work that out, but to receive it by faith. The blessing comes ‘to him who works not, but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly.’ Justification is not at all by human effort, but by the free gift of God.

The second part of salvation consists of a work in us – this is the operation of God the Holy Spirit. As many as were redeemed by the blood of Jesus, are also in due time renewed in the spirit of their minds. The Holy Spirit, in regeneration, descends into a man and creates in him a new nature. he does not destroy the old, that remains still to be battled with, and to be overcome. Though the nature which the Spirit implants is perfect in its kind and in its degree, yet it is not perfect in its development. It is a seed which needs to work itself out into a tree, it is an infant which requires to grow into the stature of a perfect man. The new nature has in it all the elements of entire perfection, but it needs to be expanded, brought out, to use the words of the text, worked out with fear and trembling. God, having first worked it in, it becomes the business of the Christian life to work out the secret inner principle till it permeates the entire system, till it overcomes the old nature, till it in fact utterly destroys inbred corruption, and reigns supreme in the man’s every part – as it shall do when the Lord takes us to dwell with Himself forever. Understand then, it is not at all to the mediatorial work of Christ, it is not at all with regard to the pardon of our sins, or the justification of our persons that Paul speaks, but only with regard to our inner spiritual life. He says of that, ‘Work it out with fear and trembling. For it is God that works in you.’” **Charles Spurgeon, *Working Out What Is Worked In, Sermon #820***

Temptation Is Overcome With Obedience and Resisted by Proper Focus

2:12-13 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Paul uses *therefore* to refer back to the previous phenomenal verses that exemplify humility in the person of Jesus Christ. This example is the benchmark of humility and obedience for every believer. With that in mind, Paul recognizes that the believers at Philippi, despite their flaws, are still living obedient lives. He calls them to live out this obedience not only in his presence, but in his absence. We are to be careful to obey out of a pure motive of genuine love for Jesus rather than the approval of earthly leaders. The Greek word for *obeyed* (*hupakouo*) means to place oneself under what has been heard and then submit and obey. We could infer from this that Paul is exhorting them to continue to remain faithful in the study and practice of the word of God.

Paul then commands them to *work out* (*katergazomai*) their salvation. It's important to stipulate that Paul is NOT saying *work for* your salvation. Neither is he speaking only to the individual. "In the flow of thought, these verses introduce the conclusion of an appeal for unity that began in 1:27 and runs through 2:18. *So then* (2:12) in Greek indicates a conclusion from what precedes. Also, all of the words used here are plurals in Greek. Paul is not telling individual Christians to individually work out their personal salvation, as is often taught. Rather, he is appealing to the church, based on the example of humility seen in Jesus Christ, to work out the practical implications of their salvation in their relationships with one another. Because God Himself is at work in their midst as a church, they need to lay aside personal rights and humbly serve one another, putting others ahead of self. In so doing, they will stand out as lights in this dark, selfish world (2:15)."¹ While it is true that each of us is to work out our own salvation, Paul is calling upon the church as a whole to work out her salvation.

Work out is translated from *katergazesthe* – "the same word the Roman historian, Strabo, used when he gave an account of the once famous silver mines of Spain. Strabo wrote of working out these mines, meaning that the owners were to operate the mines in a manner that would garner the utmost value from them. Understand – the mine's owners already had the mines in their possession. But now they were to derive the full benefit of their ownership by working out all of the ore from the various shafts and tunnels."² This imperative is a call to the believer to continue to obediently work out their salvation to its ultimate completion. We could say that we are to bring our salvation to its practical expression, expressing the full benefit of the gospel in our daily lives. And we are to do this with *fear and trembling*, maintaining a seriousness or reverential fear compelled from a devotion and love for the Lord. Paul stresses the weight of our own responsibility, which could seem impossible, but in the next breath, assures us of the glorious promise that God has supplied in Himself all the power needed for such obedience.

Verse 13 tells us that *it is God who is at work in us both to will and to work for His good pleasure*. He calls us to obey and by His own power enables that obedience for we can do nothing righteous in our own might or by our own resources. John MacArthur states that this phrase "is best interpreted as referring not to God's will and work but to that of believers. The will to do what is right before God must precede any

¹ Cole, Steven. "Philippians" on-line series. www.fcfonline.org/content/1/sermons. 1995.

² Adams, Mark. "Philippians" on-line series. www.redlandbaptist.org/sermons/sermon20010107.php. 2008.

effective work that is done toward that end. A genuine desire to do God's will, as well as the power to obey it, originates with Him."³ He suggests that God uses "holy discontent" and "holy aspiration", two sides of the same coin, to move the will of each believer. "Holy discontent" comes in our recognition that we are ever falling short of God's standards of righteous living, and "Holy aspiration" in that after God instills in us a true hatred for our sin, He then grows in us a true desire for holiness. "After He makes believers discontent with what they are, He gives them the aspiration to greater holiness." And a godly will then produces a godly work. We are saved by God's grace working through our faith, and so it is with our sanctification. "Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him. (Colossians 2:16)"

Spurgeon's words on these two verses are notable:

³ MacArthur, John. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Phillipians*. Moody Publishers: Chicago, IL. 2001. 171

“You have faith, work it out, then – act like a Believer, trust God in daily life. You possess the incorruptible seed – bring it out then – let your whole conduct be incorruptibly pure and heavenly. You profess that the Holy Spirit dwells in you, and He does so if you are a Christian. Well then, let your whole conduct be saturated with the sacred influence – let it be yours to lead the heavenly life of one in whom dwells the Lord from heaven! Be you Christ-like, inasmuch as the Spirit of Christ dwells in you. This is the matter to be attended to, then – the bringing out, the working out, and developing the mine of Divine Grace which God has worked in us.”

And

“Here is help in an exercise beyond your power! Here is help all-sufficient for every emergency! Here is help which ennobles you to receive! Divine help; help which – if Satan shall put on his utmost force, and if your corruptions shall arrive at their utmost power – shall yet be more than equal to the day! Grace all-sufficient dwells in you, Believer! There is a living well springing up within you! Use the bucket, then! Keep on drawing! You will never exhaust it! There is a living source within. Continue to struggle – you will not exhaust the life-force which God has placed within you. There is a growing mine of gold. Spend it! Keep on scattering right and left. Inexhaustible. Divine wealth is yours, therefore cease not to work it out! Observe what God works in us – He works in us to will – the desire after holiness, the resolution to put down sin, the pang of grief because we have sinned, the stern resolve that we will not fall into that sin again – all, all is of God. And He who gave the desire will surely fulfill it! But He that gave you the will does not leave you there – He works in you the power to do. The power to achieve the victory! The power to smite down the loftiest plume of pride shall come from Him. God is equal to all emergencies, therefore fear not. Though your inner life shall be subject to 10,000 dangers, He will give you power to do the right, the just, the lovely, and the true. He works gloriously in you. That which He works in you is pleasing in His sight. Note the words, ‘according to His good pleasure.’ It gives God pleasure to see you holy! It is His delight to see you self-denying – if you conquer yourself it will give Him pleasure.”⁴

Temptation is Real and Potentially Costly

2:14-16 Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God, without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

In times of trial and temptation, it is easy for us to become discontented. In our dissatisfaction with circumstances, we often succumb to the desire to grumble and complain. *Grumbling* (gongusmos) is an onomatopoeic word that sounds like the guttural mutterings that people make when something disappointing occurs that they think might be undeserved. It’s the “poor, poor, pitiful me” moan. Disputing is when we question or doubt the truth of a matter. “A person who continues to murmur and grumble against God will eventually argue and dispute with Him...There should never be either

⁴ Spurgeon, C. H. *“The C.H. Spurgeon Collection – Working Out What Is Worked In”*. www.spurgeongems.org.

emotional grumbling or intellectual disputing. It is always sinful for believers to complain about anything the Lord calls them to do or about any circumstance which He sovereignly allows.”⁵

When we choose not to grumble or dispute we prove ourselves to be blameless, innocent and above reproach in the evil world around us. This word for *blameless* (from *amemptos*) has the nuance of moral integrity as seen by others, whereas *innocent* (*akeraios*) is an inward moral integrity. The term was used to describe pure wine that was unmixed with water. Believers are to live lives that are unmixed with the sin of this world. *Above reproach* is very much like *blameless*, or being without blemish or imperfection. In greek, the letter “a” negates something. So the word means the opposite of ‘moma’. ‘Moma’ was a carping Greek god who did nothing himself and found fault with everybody and everything. So those who gripe and find fault came to be called “moma”.

As we prove ourselves to be blameless, innocent and above reproach, Paul shows us that we will shine in the midst of a crooked and perverse world. Paul is of course referring to unsaved, corrupt humanity. *Crooked* is from *skolios*. This is the word we get the term *scoliosis* from, the medical condition that involves a curvature of the spine. *Skolios* refers to what is bent, curved or twisted and is often used metaphorically of anything that deviates from the moral or spiritual standard. *Perverse* carries the same basic idea only in a more active sense. In this context of being lights that shine in this dark world, *holding fast the word of life* is best rendered *holding forth the word of life*, or more explicitly, the gospel.

Examples of Overcoming Temptation

2:17-18 Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

The final verses in this passage of Scripture puts the spotlight on three different men with exceptional testimonies of faithful, godly living: Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus. For brevity’s sake, we may pin-point specific personal and spiritual characteristics that serve as examples for us. [Abbreviated from John MacArthur’s work previously cited.]

Paul is the sacrificial rejoice (v. 17-18). *Even if I am being poured out as a drink offering* is better rendered *because I am being poured out*. Paul is not speaking of his eventual death, but is speaking of his current imprisonment and suffering. His life exemplifies a love for the Lord, His work, and His people and compels him to serve unreservedly and sacrificially. In following Christ’s example, he serves humbly, rejoicing in the privilege of serving the Lord in this way.

2:19-24 I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know timothy’s proven worth, how as a son with a father he has

⁵ MacArthur.

served with me in the gospel. I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.

Timothy is the single-minded sympathizer (v. 19-24). Paul describes Timothy as having a *kindred spirit* which literally means to be *equal-souled or one-souled*". Timothy was similar to Paul in his passions and goals. He showed genuine concern for the believers at Philippi, possibly to the point of burden. Timothy's single-mindedness is inferred by the contrast with the self-serving Romans of verse 21. He was Paul's last reliable partner. We also see that the Philippians knew him to be a seasoned leader, a man of proven worth. His faith had been tested many times just like Paul and he had proven his faith and devotion to Christ to be genuine. We also see that Timothy was a submissive man, willing to serve the Lord while serving Paul as his spiritual father and mentor. And finally, implied in all of these virtues, we see that Timothy was available, willing to do anything that Paul in Christ might ask of him.

2:25-30 I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.

Epaphroditus is the loving gambler. *Epaphroditus* means *belonging to or favored by Aphrodite*. He was probably born and educated in the Greek culture. He is given five titles by Paul that clearly identify the kind of man he was. The first three are indicative of Epaphroditus' relationship with Paul. He is called brother [a fellow child of God], fellow worker [common spiritual effort and spiritual life] and fellow soldier [having common spiritual enemies]. In addition, the last two titles indicate his relationship to the believers at Philippi. He is called their messenger and their minister to Paul's need. Epaphroditus risked his life for Paul's sake. The word *risking* translates a form of *paraboleuomai*, literally meaning *to throw aside*. "It speaks of voluntarily hazarding one's welfare and thereby exposing oneself to danger. It was sometimes used of gambling..." Epaphroditus put his own life on the line for the sake of the gospel. "Perhaps Paul was here playing on the name Epaphroditus, which, as noted above, means *favored of Aphrodite*. Because she was the goddess of gambling as well as of love, men would often cry out "Epaphroditus" as they cast the dice, hoping to be favored by her. In stark contrast to those men, Paul's beloved brother, fellow workman, and fellow soldier was risking his life for something immeasurably more valuable than money. His life entailed much risk; but it was no gamble."