

Fellowship of Joy: A Study in Philippians, 2:12-20,

Preached @ Harambee Church by Pastor Michael Gunn on August 24th, 2008

Intro:

We have been looking at the humility that was in Christ Jesus, and how His humility sent Him to us and killed Him on a cross. In a rights-filled culture, Philippians 2:1-11 can be daunting and even ridiculous to many. It is; however, our motivation to go ahead and “Work” that salvation out on an every day basis. This is what our passage reminds us to do today: “*Work **out** our salvation.*” What does this mean? Is it a horrid contradiction to much of the other teaching we find in Paul’s writings, or is it something different?

We have just finished a fantastic passage on the humility of Jesus, which relates to the issue of disharmony that the Philippian church is having, and which Paul started to address in **Philippians 1:27-28**. Paul began speaking about salvation, but took a brief hiatus to demonstrate the foundation of our salvation (**Philippians 2:1-11**) so that he could pick up and talk about fleshing out this salvation in life together (Biblical Community).

From the Head...

We take a further look at how the gospel works its way out into mission, and how it gives Paul great joy when it does. It would help to review some theological truths in order to understand this passage before us.

Justification is solely an act of God, where He justly places our sins/guilt on Christ, and He in turn places Christ’s righteousness on us (See **2 Corinthians 5:21**). This is done completely by God’s grace, through faith (See **Ephesians 2:8, 9; Romans 4:5; 5:1**).

Sanctification, on the other hand, is an act of God in our lives that enables us to grow in the “*Grace and knowledge*” of our Lord Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives (See **2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2** cf. **Philippians 1:19**).

Salvation is something that is spoken of in the past tense (**Romans 8:24; Ephesians 2:5, 8; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:5**), as well as in the future tense (**1 Corinthians 5:5** cf. **3:15; Romans 13:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:9**). We see this distinction between justification (which is a past tense legal move accomplished by the cross of Christ) and salvation (which is accomplished on the final day - see **Philippians 1:6**) in Romans 5:9, which says, “*Since we have been **justified** by Jesus blood...how much more shall we be **saved** from God’s wrath through Him!*” Salvation is a process, whereas justification is a past tense event. We have been saved (**Justification**), we are being saved (**Sanctification**) and we will be saved (**Glorification**). This is a process that is complete in Christ, and gives us hope that what God began, He will finish (**Philippians 1:6**).

Confusing these theological realities can be dangerous when we interpret our sanctification as our justification, since the latter is something that God does for us in Christ, while the former is something that is being done to us, as we live according to the Spirit. We can’t in any way work “**For**” our salvation (Justification), but we can and need to work “**Out**” our salvation in mission. Christ’s life and subsequent humility as demonstrated on the cross (See **Philippians 2:8**) is our power and our example. Salvation here is not about people getting “Saved,” but about how “Saved” people live out the gospel in community. This shows the reality of the future kingdom in real time!

Our Salvation “Worked” Out (Philippians 2:12-13)

Here we are picking up from **1:28**, which reminds us that our salvation is “*from God*,” which is important in the context of a fairly difficult set of verses. We need to connect this set of verses to the reality that there is a problem with strife and disunity in the church, and that Christ died to secure the church’s unity. It is important here to realize that we are not told to work “For” our salvation, but we are told clearly to “*Work it out!*” We are to work this out as an act of obedience to the gospel.

The next verse (**v.13**) is interesting, and explanatory. We work out our salvation in “*fear and trembling.*” What could this mean? First the word to “work out” is the Greek word “*Katergazomai*,” which is in the middle voice and Imperative mode. The Imperative reminds us that it is commanded of us to obey. The middle voice has the idea that the subject is involved in the action of the sentence. It seems that the context would verify that, but verse thirteen reminds us that it is God who works in us, nullifying the idea that this “Working Out” is entirely the work of the individual (See **1 Corinthians 6:11**). It is also interesting to note the “*why*” here. God is working to “*His good pleasure.*” (See **Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14**). Paul is arguing that they have obeyed (**Philippians 1:5** cf. **2:12**) and that they need to continue in obedience by not just proclaiming the gospel, but living it out in community!

Now why “*fear and trembling?*” This is an expansion of Philippians 1:27, “*Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.*” When we are living out the gospel, with the proper respect for God, we will live that out in community in respect and honor for one another. This leads us to our second point, which reminds us how to “work out” our salvation.

Our Salvation Worked Out In Community (Philippians 2:14-18)

The only way we can truly work “Out” (Outward) our salvation, is to do so in community. We cannot love without the other! We cannot forgive and ask forgiveness without the other. We cannot work through disputes and grumbling without the other. We have our families, church communities, work-space, etc. to work this mess out. Our faith is never about us and God alone. It is connected to our life! This does two things:

1. It lifts up the glory of the Lord in front of a crooked generation. It creates purity in us that only God can create; making us blameless before the world. We can only do that as we “*Hold fast to the word of life*” (v. 16). This is clinging to Christ and to His word (as seen in 2:1-11) and to His love that can allow us to forgive and reconcile and show ourselves blameless in a world that is in competition with one another. All other worldviews and religions are enslaved to earning salvation/enlightenment. We can show ourselves blameless because of Jesus’ work in us.
2. It brings gladness and joy, reminding us that it is God working in us to create a love that only He can give. We can know that our labor (proclaiming the gospel and serving the culture) here on earth is not without vain because God is at work in the lives of His people. This is made visible to Paul when he sees God doing that in the midst of a church he has helped plant. Paul’s joy comes in the fruit of his labor; a labor that has a very purposeful, meaningful direction, because it is eternal.

...to the Heart

Paul ends in verse 20 reminding the Philippian church that Timothy is coming to them, and that he is “*genuinely concerned for your welfare.*” Can you say that? Are you personally concerned about the welfare of others? Is the heart of Christ in you? Do you love people as Christ loves you? We will never perfectly display the love of Christ, but we are being transformed with the resurrection power of God, and His love is being perfected in us on a daily basis. It is our response to exercise these new found spiritual muscles in our everyday lives.

Our faith in Christ has practical applications for our life. We are called to live out the reality of our faith in the midst of our relationships in community. Division in the church is a reality and it affects the proclamation of the gospel in a “*crooked and perverse generation.*” In America, division is often between the so-called liberals and conservatives; those who are really preaching the gospel and those who aren’t. We must stay true to the gospel story: God entered humanity to take on our sins so that creation could be redeemed to His glory. However, we must stop shooting at one another in regards to how that story plays out in any given context. Christian love and maturity must allow us to boldly proclaim Christ and boldly love and serve the communities we live in, which means that some of us may be in bars and some of us may be in the choir.

This passage also has a lot to say about our relationship with those who aren’t like us. Can we truly reconcile with those we don’t like, with those that don’t look like us, and with those who, in our minds, are in sin? I pray that as a church, we can let love cover a “multitude of sins,” so that we can serve our communities with an overflow of gratitude and love that only the cross of Jesus can create!!

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