

Work Out Your Salvation Philippians 2:12-18

All who have trusted in Jesus are called to grow in righteousness. But why should we, and how can we? Discover the answers to both questions in this short but profoundly significant passage.

Not a surprise: I've always loved those books titled "The-Way-Things-Work"

- Remember seeing these as a kid at the library or the book store?
- Full of diagrams that explain how complex things work – a lock & key, motor in a can opener
- I love that moment when it suddenly dawns on you, "So that's how they do it!"
- If I understand how something works, then I know how to use it and take care of it
- That's not just true of locks and motors, true in every area of life including my marriage, my finances, my body, even my spiritual life
- I want to know how things work so I can appreciate them and know what to do with them

That's why I love the passage I get to share with you this morning! – a "Way-Things-Work"

Read v12

So what is this passage about? It's right there at the beginning:

"work out your salvation"

- What does that mean?
 - o Most people hear "salvation" in church and think: get to heaven!
 - o But if that's correct then you have to WORK for heaven. That's not true!
 - o We must remember: the meaning of a word in the Bible is determined by the CONTEXT
 - Ex. If I say the word "trunk" to you, what do I mean?
 - Elephant's nose? Base of a tree? Back of a car? Box to store cloths?
 - All of those are possible meanings
 - You need the context around the word to know which meaning I have in mind
- **So what are the possible meanings of the word "salvation" in the Bible? There are many!**
 - o recovering from sickness – Mt 9:22
 - o deliverance from enemies – Ac 7:25
 - o rescue from physical danger – Ac 27:20
 - o forgiveness of sins (what we associate with justification) – Eph 2:8
 - o spiritual growth (= sanctification) – 1 Pet 2:2
 - o glorification in next life – Rom 13:11
 - o whole package of justification, sanctification, and glorification together – Rom 11:11
- **In short: "salvation" in the Bible simply means deliverance**
 - o You have to use context to figure out what kind of deliverance is meant in a passage
- **So what is meant in this verse?**
 - o There's no mention in this passage of them facing illness, enemies, or physical danger
 - o They have already been forgiven by God – called "saints" at beginning – so not justification
 - o Glorification – not something you work for, and not something you can have in this life
 - o **So only possible answer = spiritual growth = sanctification = growth in victory over sin**
 - o If you've trusted in Jesus, you are already forgiven and guaranteed heaven
 - o Now God wants you to grow up in righteousness to be more and more like His Son

So I said earlier: this passage is a Way-Things-Work kind of passage

To be specific: this passage will show us plainly HOW TO GROW IN RIGHTEOUSNESS

Paul begins with our part = obedience

- Read v12 again
- **Obey what? unspecified - he leaves it broad**
 - o We are to obey every command Jesus has given us – in the gospels, in the epistles
- **And we are to obey at all times**
 - o Note: “as you have always obeyed” – in public and private – at church, work, home
- **And here’s the kicker... our obedience must flow out of an attitude of “fear and trembling”**
 - o Confusing phrase – why would Paul want us to have that attitude?! Contrary to other
 - o When we think of fear and trembling, we think of terror – new Halloween Movie
 - o But in Bible: usually not terror... usually about reverence / awe / worship
 - o Mark 16: women go to Jesus’ tomb... meet an angel... tells them Jesus rose
 - it says “trembling and astonishment gripped them” – not terror... awe!
 - o Luke: Jesus heals a paralytic and the crowds were...
 - “struck with astonishment and filled with fear” – awe of Jesus’ power
 - o Revelation: When John sees resurrected Jesus at beginning of book
 - “I fell at His feet like a dead man”
 - Not terror – John loved Jesus and knew Jesus loved him
 - John is overcome with awe at Jesus’ glory and power
 - o So Phil 2 = “obey out of reverence and humility towards God”
 - o **Point: there’s a way to obey that pleases God, and a way that doesn’t please God**
 - o **Obedience that doesn’t please God = LEGALISM = obedience motivated by pride**
 - Obey to make earn God’s approval and make yourself better than others
 - = obedience of Pharisees – obedience displeased God because corrupted with pride
 - Legalism is doing the right thing for the wrong reason
 - o **When we obey God our attitude matters – must obey in humility and reverence**
- **Practical: how do I make sure my attitude is right when I try to obey God?**
 - o How do I root out that prideful spirit that is so natural to the human heart?
 - o Answer: through the spiritual disciplines of prayer, worship, and gratitude
 - o **Prayer**: asking God to help me do the right thing for the right reason
 - o **Worship**: declaring that God is infinitely greater and better than me
 - o **Gratitude**: remembering that God is the cause of everything good in my life
 - o These disciplines practiced regularly protect the heart from pride
- **Our part in sanctification = continual obedience motivated by reverence for God that we foster through the disciplines of prayer, worship, and gratitude**

But if this is where the passage ended, this would be hopeless

Read Rom 7:18-19 (NIV)

I know exactly what Paul’s talking about – I have experienced that so many times!

- I want to do the right thing, but in the heat of the moment I fail
- I don’t have enough willpower – I just keep giving in to sin – I need help!

Thank God Phil 2 didn’t end with v12! In v13 we find out that we’re not alone... God has a part, too!

God’s part – read v13

- **As we humbly obey God does 2 things in us – described by 2 verbs: “to will and to work”**
- **1] “to work” → God empowers your obedience today**
 - o word-play – God “works” in you so that you “work” what pleases Him!
 - o He supernaturally gives you strength to obey what He has commanded
 - o True for all believers no matter how far we’ve fallen into sinful habits and addictions
 - o Read 1 Cor 10:13 – sin is never inevitable for a believer

- Now if sin has become a habit or addiction you'll need to use every tool God gives to fight
 - Includes accountability, counseling, life changes, may include medical help, rehab
 - I covered that in a sermon last semester on overcoming addiction – listen to it
- But point of 1 Cor 10 – there is ALWAYS HOPE for victory no matter how far you've fallen
- God has promised to empower you if you will commit to humbly obey
 - He will not leave you alone in your struggle... He will not abandon you
 - He is in you and He can give you the strength to obey
- But that's not all God will do! As you humbly obey... what's the other verb?
- **2] "to will" = "to desire" → God transforms our desires so we WANT to obey more tomorrow**
 - As we obey He gradually transforms our desires so obedience becomes more desirable
 - That's a great source of hope for us!
 - Most people think Christianity = lots of rules to keep you from doing what you want
 - NO! Christianity = transforming you so you want the things that are best!
 - God doesn't want a boring life of obligation for you
 - He wants to transform you so that you love to do what He loves!
 - **That transformation happens through a process we talked about last semester: HABITS**
 - As you turn from sin and begin to obey over and over
 - Old neural pathways in your brain that led to sin begin to fade
 - New pathways leading to righteous behavior grow stronger & more inevitable
 - That is mechanism God designed into your brain that His Spirit uses as you obey
 - **Remember the forest illustration**
 - forming new habits like cutting trail through forest – hard at first; then gets easier
 - as new path grows, old sinful path begins to fade!
- **Choose obedience and God will give you the strength today & the desire tomorrow!**
 - This is how sanctification works – how we grow in righteousness
 - Our part is humble, consistent obedience in every area of life
 - His part is to both empower our obedience and transform our desires so we want to obey
 - It takes time – it rarely happens overnight
 - But if you will practice that humble obedience over a lifetime, the results will be stunning!

Having given us this model of sanctification, Paul immediately moves to a specific application

- to a particular sin the Philippians were really struggling with... a sin I know I struggle with a lot!

read v14

Sanctification applied: Do not grumble or argue

- **"grumbling" = complaining in a quiet voice**
 - When a person frustrates you... you don't go talk to them to work through issue
 - You privately complain to other people spreading your bitterness / discontent
 - Grumbling doesn't look for solutions to problems; it simply seeks company in misery
 - The word is used a lot in Exodus
 - the Israelites faced many difficulties in the wilderness
 - rather than talk to God or Moses about how to work through those difficulties
 - they simply grumbled to one another – complained – spread their discontentment
 - Grumbling like an infection spreading discontentment from one person to the next
 - As it grows it destroys trust, unity, love... incredibly destructive
 - So God tells us not to do that anymore
 - Think back over last couple months – when you were frustrated by someone...
 - did you go to the person who was frustrating you and look for a solution?
 - or did you go to other people and grumble?
 - Be clear: it is ok to talk to other people when we need prayer and advice
 - I'll talk to my wife or my accountability partners or my parents

- because I need their comfort and advice – I need help to process
 - Key: I'm only going to a few trusted, safe people to find encouragement and guidance – that's ok
 - Not ok to go broadly to complain or spread discontent/anger
- **“disputing” = arguing or quarreling with others**
 - Be clear – not all arguments are bad!
 - It's good to have well-formed opinions about important things & stand for them
 - It's good to argue and even fight for people who are being mistreated or hurt
 - What Paul is talking is something else – something we talked about earlier this semester
 - = arguing over secondary issues in a way that destroys our unity over primary things
 - e.g. when we let our political opinions divide us from other believers
 - we should stand united around sharing gospel and showing sacrificial love of Jesus
 - We can't let quarrels over secondary issues destroy our harmony around the gospel
 - Jesus' love and gospel come first – don't let arguments get in the way of that

Now so far, only half way through the passage!

Rest of passage = MOTIVATION to pursue sanctification

Paul tells us 2 GOOD RESULTS that will come from growing to be more like Jesus...

Result #1: WITNESS – read v15

- Grow in obedience (especially by not grumbling or arguing) – you will become a witness of Jesus to the world
- When Paul says “blameless and innocent... above reproach” = a person whose entire life is so upright that no one could level a legitimate charge against him or her
 - Their life is so gracious and righteous that if anyone did publicly accuse them of some evil, the rest of the town would not believe the accusation
- If we live “above reproach” in the midst of this evil world, the result = we appear as lights
 - better translated: we shine like stars in the heavens
 - remember: this was written long before electric lights!
 - I remember camping in a national forest in the Rocky Mountains – one of the only times I've been totally outside any cone of man-made light
 - The stars were radiant – stunning! You couldn't help but look – the night sky grabbed your attention and wouldn't let go
- I've seen that prove true in my own life especially in this particular area of complaining
 - When I was in college, I often did poorly
 - Complained about my professors or some university policy I hated
 - Result: to my non-Christian friends, I was just like them! Nothing unique about me
 - But over time God chipped away at that sinful area of my life and helped me grow
 - After graduating I worked at a small company that was chronically mismanaged
 - My non-believing coworkers found much to grumble about
 - But with God's help, I didn't join in
 - I wasn't perfect, but often I succeeded at staying positive when things were bad
 - That led my coworkers – on in particular – to ask, “What's up with you? Why are you so positive?”
 - What a great question! Made it easy to share the gospel and talk about Jesus!
- As we obey and grow in righteousness it will open doors to share the gospel with those who don't know Jesus

Result #2: WORSHIP – read v16-18

- Our growth in radical obedience is an act of worship that pleases God
- That's the point of Paul's odd language in v17

- He pictures his own eventual death as a drink offering poured out as a sacrifice to God
 - o The drink offering was the final touch, the icing-on-the-cake of an Old Testament offering to God
 - o Paul had learned to obey God in every area of life... even in suffering... even in prison
 - o And that incredible obedience was, itself, an offering of worship to God
- So when you wonder: what can I do to please my Creator, to worship Him and declare how wonderful He is?
- A: Obey!
 - o Obedience... growing to be more like Jesus... that is more powerful worship than any words you sing in church on Sunday morning.
 - o Now, to be clear, it is good for us to sing in worship on Sunday mornings! That's very good.
 - o And yet we are wrong if we think that's the ultimate expression of worship
 - o It's easy to sing songs at church – costs us very little – it's not much of a sacrifice – and worship is defined by sacrifice
 - o And so as important as it is to worship through song it is even more important to worship through obedience – because obedience is costly and does require sacrifice
 - You have to sacrifice what you want to do to do what you should do
 - Most of the time that will mean sacrificing your rights and desires to serve and bless others
 - Sometimes, like in Paul's case, obedience will require literal sacrifice – you'll lose money, career, freedom for the sake of obeying Jesus
 - o When we do the hard work of humbly obeying God, we are offering Him a sacrifice of worship that pleases Him

Sanctification is hard

- It's much easier to stay immature, to keep giving in to sin
- But that life only leads to pain for you and those you care about
 - o You've seen that. You know that. Sin and selfishness always leads to pain.
- It's so much wiser and better to choose obedience
 - o God will fill your life with His strength and power if you will commit to humbly obey Him in every area, every day. He'll give you the ability to obey and, gradually, He'll make obedience more desirable so it becomes a good habit in your life
- And as obedience grows as your habit in life, your life will become an incredible witness of God's goodness to the world and a beautiful offering of worship to God Himself – your choice to humbly obey will delight the heart of God.

So today I want you to ask yourself: Is there any area of my life where I'm choosing disobedience?