

<b>Series:</b> The Fellowship of the Gospel	<b>Reference:</b> <i>Philippians 2:12-18</i>	<b>Title:</b> Fear & Trembling	<b>Date:</b> 10.25.2020
<b>Website Writeup:</b>			
If you can do nothing to earn your salvation, and it's absolutely a work of Grace by Jesus, then why work out your faith with fear & trembling? And, what does it mean to 'work out' your salvation anyway? Good questions which we seek to address today.			

We've been listening to Paul writing to friends in Philippi from prison. A familiar intimate letter reminding & encouraging them to be devoted in the face of persecution & suffering, for the sake of the Gospel message to others.

Paul's heart & urging to '*live a life worthy of the Gospel*' was always to the goal of Jesus last command, which becomes the Christians first concern, found in **Matthew 28:18-20**, the Great commission, in which Jesus says... "*All authority in heaven & on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Therefore go & make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father & of the Son & of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*"

Pauls, the Philippians, and likewise, our central purpose, is to be about God's Glory in living out His mission of taking the message of salvation to all peoples. This is lived in tension, sometimes bringing persecution & suffering for the sake of it, as it often flies in the face of the cultural narrative within which we live.

This message encompasses, as Paul indicates, going beyond words, to the interior life of the Believer. We're not only saved by grace through faith, but begin a journey of transformation into the likeness of Christ - taking on His mind. We participate with Jesus in the building of His kingdom on earth now, as God calls us upwards, reflecting His character in a way of life which overflows into proper moral choices, reflective of His heart & commitment to us. A transformed life filled with integrity & strong witness as a result.

If you want to follow along in your pew bibles, we're on p802 in Philippians 2:12-18, as Paul both encourages & presses further in this thinking. He says...  
*<sup>12</sup>Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed - not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence - continue to work out your salvation with fear & trembling, <sup>13</sup>for it is God who works in you to will & to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.*

Let's stop there for a moment & ask, why would you have to work out your salvation with fear & trembling if salvation's by grace through faith & a total work of Christ in us? If you can do nothing to earn your salvation, and it's absolutely a work of Grace by Jesus, then why the fear & trembling? And, what does it mean to 'work out' your salvation anyway? Good questions which I hope we can shed light on today...

If I were a billionaire & came to you saying, “I’ll give you everything you need to live. You’ll never be in want. So, go live, be free, do whatever you will & want!” What would you do? Would you work? Would you become a healthy contributing member of society? Probably not. Most likely, without the influence of the Holy Spirit, God’s Word, and the local church, an unhealthy lifestyle would develop. You’d overindulge, and squander what you have on desire. Travel would eventually become burdensome & boring. Food & drink would lose their taste. Sex would increase in deviance until it lost appeal altogether. Relationships would be strained. Health would decline. In short, you’d do things which actually don’t bring you life, even good things would become sinful & harmful, you’d slowly kill yourself emotionally, spiritually & maybe even physically. It’s a recipe for misery, which would affect everyone around you, since we all know misery loves company, darkness is infectious & licentiousness kills.

The sad fact is that many Christians choose exactly this - maybe not to that extreme, but in their complacency & small ways of constant disobedience to the call of Christ they don’t share in His suffering & glory. Salvation’s welcomed, but suffering for Christ isn’t. It becomes a selfish pursuit of a religious nature, instead of a life-giving relationship with the Living God. Losing sight of the purpose of which we’ve been saved, to reflect God’s glory, bringing others into relationship with Him. So, the question arises & is naturally posed, is that a truly saved soul? A question which brings with it a little fear & trembling. Where’s the evidence, the change, the transformation - the fruit of the Vine?

Scripture teaches, we’re adopted as children of God with *full* rights as a son or daughter - all that’s His, is ours. *As it says in Galatians 3:26... “So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith...”* In the following chapter, we’re called *heirs*, children with full rights to all the Father owns & when dad owns the mansion, you’re free to explore every room. Ephesians 2 teaches salvation’s by grace through faith & a total work of God in us. But our relationship’s maturely complex, we aren’t only children bearing the family name, but also subjects & citizens of His kingdom, called to live within the standards of that kingdom, reflecting the glory of our King. God calls his subjects to mature healthy life-giving ways.

Ephesians 2:4-10 says...“...because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup> made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved.” And Paul tells us to what end in vv7-10...“...in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - <sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Notice, vv1-9 lead to v10. We’re saved to an end, a purpose, as useful tools in the hand of God, reflecting Him in attitude, speech & action, but the point on that arrow is Mt 28:18-20, the Great Commission. We must share the gospel, baptize & teach what God has commanded. So, it’s not just being a good person, but includes being devoted to God’s glory through God’s mission.

To be on point in our calling, God makes us free & unfettered. Scripture doesn't define freedom as anarchy, or the absence of rule & order. Rather, it's defined as freedom from the things which bring spiritual & physical death. This is why God's Law is good. When God says 'do this', it's not control. He's saying do this which brings life for yourself & others. Conversely, when he says 'don't do that', it's also not control. He says don't do these things which bring death to you & others (physically, emotionally, or spiritually). Don't do these things which take you out of your life-giving purpose, since we're *created in Christ Jesus to do good works*. A Gardner doesn't let the weeds grow up & choke the life out of their plants, neither do they plant things too closely - it's orderly, and as a result, full of life. God's calling us to unity under the umbrella of His grace, standards & purpose so that His life will reign!

Rightly so, Paul says work out your salvation with fear & trembling, and uses the very important word, *obey*. They've *obeyed* thus far, but the risk is, in light of persecution & suffering, they'd be knocked off center. Remember Francis Chan's eternity rope we spoke of 2 weeks ago in which he had a long rope signifying our eternal life, with only an inch at one end painted red representing our life now. Pointing out, we often live for our desires in that red zone, instead of thinking of our purpose in relation to eternity. Instead of keeping their eyes on the prize, people often seek escape in comfort, to feed personal desire which grows into sin. Placing their gaze on what they think they need (their personal kingdom - the red zone), instead of what they truly need (Jesus, His kingdom - the entire rope).

*As Paul said in Galatians 5:25... "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." Think about backpacking in a remote wilderness with a professional guide. If you didn't pay attention, went off trail & didn't keep in step with the guide you may lose your way, get lost & even die. Paul's saying keep your eyes locked on the Spirits leading.*

Also in Galatians 5:16 he says... "*So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.*" Notice the way in which that's written. It doesn't say 'don't gratify the desires of the flesh, and you will be walking in the Spirit.' It's the reverse. In other words, our central purpose isn't even to avoid sin, it's to follow Christ! *Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer & perfecter of faith.* (Heb 12:2) Keeping in step with the Spirit, being transformed by the renewing of our minds to understand & know God's good & perfect will for life. (Rm 12:1-2). That we don't get lost on the trail & eaten by a bear!

We live in a tension of working out our salvation & having been saved by grace through faith. Working out our salvation is to keep our eyes on Jesus, pressing us towards maturity, never to be arrogant & complacent in faith. The mature Christian's always asking themselves the questions, "Am I walking with Jesus? Where am I not being obedient - am I following Jesus well?" That's not self-doubt, it's healthy self-evaluation. The ability to ask these questions without feeling guilt or shame in failure comes out of our assurance of salvation. Six:Eight believes in the assurance of salvation so strongly that we put it in writing in our *Statement of Faith*. Here are two statements from that foundational document each with scriptural references...

*We believe that SALVATION is a gift of grace from God, received by faith and yielding new, abundant, and eternal life. Romans 6:23, Ephesians 2:8-9, John 14:6; 1:12, Titus 3:5, Galatians 3:26, Romans 5:1; 10:9-10*

*We believe in **Eternal Security**. It is grace and the keeping power of God that gives this security. Salvation is affected and maintained by the grace and power of God, not by the self-effort of the Christian. John 10:29, 2 Timothy 1:12, Hebrews 7:25, 10:10-14, 1 Peter 1:3-5*

It's maturity to be concerned about my walk & witness while rooted in my eternal position with Jesus. That's the healthy tension of the Christian life. Notice, Paul follows this statement in Philippians with, *'it is God who works in you to will & to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.'* God working in me for God's will to be lived out through me in character & action. This gives us pause to consider how important our lives & choices are as we're given over for His purposes, not our own. This reality occupies the frontal lobe of the Christian life in all that we think, say & do. How I treat others, justice issues, and if I'm sharing Christ with others in word & deed. In short, Jesus reigns.

Scripture communicates, we're fully saved & also being saved. The latter meaning, we're being transformed into Christ-likeness as time goes on. It means restoration over time into the original image we were supposed to own in the first place. We're made perfect by Christ's record, yes...when God looks at me in Christ, He sees Jesus' perfect moral record. I'm legally covered by His righteousness, my debt paid, Jesus took my place before the judge. But, as I walk out my life, I'm being made perfect by the renewing of my mind (Rm 12:1-2). This happens in a transformative way over time through the loving confrontation of wrong attitudes & behavior through the Word, the conviction & direction of the Holy Spirit, and through the sharpening of my character by other mature Christians in my local church. So, fellowship is the third element in the transformational trinity of Word, Spirit & Church.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:1-2...*"Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you - unless you believed in vain."* We can't fully understand the human heart, but we can experience the effects of a person's heart. For instance, once I had a guy in a bad situation asking for help. He made passionate statements of faith in Jesus & grand promises of coming to church. In the end, he did none of it. He was simply manipulating the system to get what he wanted. But I know, from Scripture & experience in my life, I'm saved, and being saved at the same time & I can see the effects of this in other growing Christians as well. Typically there are signs in a person's life which we refer to as the Fruits of the Spirit.

It also states in Hebrews 3:14...*"We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end."* Which means, the mature growing Christian, doesn't just desire salvation from Jesus, they desire to serve Jesus as well! They keep the purity of the message, stay close to Jesus & share Him with others.

At birthday parties children get a slice of cake, 15 minutes later there are plates strewn around the room with all the icing eaten off, but the cake lays untouched. Adults plates are often the opposite, healthier people cut a small piece, then eat the cake, but leave the icing. You could fit the adult cake into the kids icing & serve them to some unsuspecting person as an untouched piece! Mature Christians consume the whole message, the icing of salvation, and the cake of suffering along with it.

Having said all this, Paul continues his thoughts in vv14-18...<sup>14</sup>*Do everything without grumbling or arguing, <sup>15</sup>so that you may become blameless & pure, “children of God without fault in a warped & crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky <sup>16</sup>as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. <sup>17</sup>But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice & service coming from your faith, I am glad & rejoice with all of you. <sup>18</sup>So you too should be glad & rejoice with me.*

When grumbling & arguing are evident, disbelief & distrust are in place driven by pride. One reason people aren't transformed, is pride in their distrust & disbelief. We don't really trust God can & will transform us for the better. If we could look out on a room of prisoners, we may think, “I wish you knew how God could transform you! This whole facility would change. No longer would you live in fear & have to establish yourself through violence & manipulation.”

True transforming faith's practiced in a sea of cultural contradiction. Although, in some ways, humanity still reflects God, since it must, as if looking into a broken mirror. But when you look at a broken mirror, what do you notice? You notice the cracks & distortion, you don't notice the good, rather the bad, and certainly can't imagine the cracks to be repaired. Better to throw it out & start over it seems.

Ever been driving down the highway & a rock cracks your windshield? The windshield repairman doesn't throw the windshield out, rather he puts a suction cup over the crack, injecting some sort of glue & it disappears. Christ, by His work on the cross & power of His Spirit, repairs the image of God in us! Jesus does for us what a windshield repairman does, the cracks disappear, and we're reflective of God once again!

The Scriptures teach, we're a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come. A theological reality in Christ. We're saved by grace through faith, something which can never be taken away. Positionally, we're legally declared righteous in Christ. This isn't self-righteousness, meaning I earned my salvation with God. Rather it's Christ-righteousness - he took on our sin, becoming cursed & experienced a separation from the Father in death for us. He suffered all things to bridge the gap for us with God the Father once again - then left us with the task of taking up what was left of His suffering for this purpose in the world. Due to His perfect moral & righteous record, he was the only sufficient sacrifice for salvation! The perfect Lamb, without blemish signified in the sacrificial system of the Temple before Christ came & no longer practiced, since it doesn't have to be - the final sacrificial lamb has come in Jesus. That system was all a foreshadowing of the Messiahs work on behalf of humankind.

So, as Dallas Willard would say, God isn't against *effort*, He's against *earning*. You can't *earn* your place/salvation with God, but you can make *effort* to grow in His likeness & to live for His glory & mission in this world. Which takes devotion, thought, effort & work.

My daughter Senah texted this week that, with a total stranger, she did her first 'Can I pray for you, right now?' She got into a conversation on the street, provided for the guys needs in a practical way, then said, "Can I pray for you right now?" And did, on the spot. Something she learned in this church, a tool in being a witness & opening someone's eyes to see the in-breaking kingdom of God in their life! It's one simple way to be a witness for Christ.

### **So, here's some practical advice...**

1. No matter what happens, hold firmly to the Word of life.
2. Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.
3. Fix your eyes on Jesus the Author & Perfecter of your faith, run as to win the prize, although your prize is promised & sealed in Him already. Abide in the Vine, allowing Jesus as the Gardener to prune & prepare you to bear fruit (Word, Spirit, Church).
4. Strive in all you do to share in the sufferings of Christ, don't just eat the icing, take Him all in.
5. Do what God dictates as good, because it gives life to you & others.
6. Don't do what He prohibits, because it brings death to your life & others.
7. Work out your salvation with fear & trembling, not because you can lose it, but because you want to serve your King well.
8. Be about Jesus' last command, our first concern, because due to His obedience in going to the cross & His resurrection from the dead, Jesus has all authority in heaven & on earth given to Him. Calling us to go & make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father & of the Son & of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything He's commanded. And surely He's with us always, to the very end of the age.

### **So, here's some practical challenge for this week...**

1. Pray the Holy Spirit convicts you as to where you're not being a strong witness & to identify those things which hinder you in running the race well.
2. If you are not already, get into a Community Group this week either by Zoom or in person.
3. If you are not in the habit, begin to have a simple quiet time daily.
4. Pray the Holy Spirit opens the door for you both to share the gospel with someone, and to pray over them & do it on the spot.