

Gospel Striving

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- [0 : 00] Let's turn to Philippians chapter 2, verse 12 to 18. Philippians chapter 2, verse 12 to 18. 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. 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 light in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that on the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.
- Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and I rejoice with you all.
- Likewise, you also should be glad and rejoice with me. Well, good morning, everyone. I'd like to try some group participation. If I say, Aussie, Aussie, Aussie.
- I mean, I'm sure they do it better at the Olympics, but we've been hearing that, haven't we? That's the classic Aussie sporting chant. There are many of us from all over the world and supporting different countries at the Olympics going on at the moment.
- [1 : 35] Unfortunately, I don't actually know any other chants from other countries, but besides doing funny things like that at the Olympics, what difference does our citizenship make to the way we live?
- Maybe we don't think about citizenship all that much, but imagine for a moment if we were an Australian community living in Mexico. How would our citizenship change the way we live?
- And that's the case for the Philippians and us also, like us, they're an outpost of their heavenly country, a little heavenly immigrant community. What does it look like to live as an outpost in a foreign country?
- We're citizens, but so what? We're justified by faith, therefore we have our citizenship. Is there anything more to it?
- Someone challenged us at college that if our view of salvation is that God only saves us from the penalty and guilt of sin, our view is far too weak.
- [2 : 47] If we end at justification, our view of the Christian life in this world will be weak. And this passage is the so what. In our passage, Paul gives us the so what of citizenship with three commands.
- You'll be able to see that on your outline. Today we're going to spend most of our time in the first command because it's the fundamental command behind the others. The following two commands are practical examples of that first command.
- So let's turn in verse 12 to 13 with the command. You'll see it there at the end. Work out your own salvation. Now, Paul wants the Philippians to live in light of their heavenly citizenship and produce their salvation.
- And that looks like putting our back into it day by day toward the goal. Living holy and gospel-driven lives, working hard with our eyes on the goal.

It's a bit like a friend of mine who I got to see win a medal at the Paris Olympics. For me, that was a particular joy because I was there for a lot of the hard work behind the race. I was training with them for years of early mornings and late nights, deathly training sessions, all to attain the goal.

[4 : 08] And now Olympians work hard day by day, don't they? Putting their backs into striving toward the goal. That's what Paul's commanding us to do here in verse 12.

To put our backs into living as worthy citizens. Working hard as we wait to come home. Putting sin to death and setting our eyes on our glorious King.

Preaching the gospel and suffering together for it. Especially while we live away from our heavenly homeland. Now, don't be alarmed.

This isn't saying that we're saved by good works. But often people want to qualify verse 12 and say that it doesn't mean produce your own salvation. Except that's exactly what the word means.

We need to avoid pulling back the punch of this verse. Contextually from earlier in Philippians and we'll see also in verse 13 of our passage, it's abundantly clear.

[5 : 05] Our salvation does not rely on us. And if we go away from today's passage thinking that our citizenship and salvation depend on anything we do, we've utterly failed to understand this passage and the rest of Philippians.

But Paul chose to command us that we work out our salvation. He wants in the strongest words possible to spur on his beloved Philippians.

So let's pay attention to what Paul is saying as we look at the rest of verse 12 and 13. The point of this whole passage is about putting our backs into it empowered by God.

Notice in verse 12, the therefore. Working out our salvation is an implication of what comes beforehand. It's the response or the so what.

That's what the therefore is indicating to us. Especially Paul has in mind what he mentioned in chapter 1 verse 27. So let's go there. Chapter 1 verse 27. Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit with one mind, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.

[6 : 20] Remember when we looked at that, there's a little note on worthy and it means live like citizens. It's really important to understand Philippians. But can you see the concern for Paul's absence in chapter 1 verse 27 and in our passage, he's worried about his absence for them.

Verse 27 of chapter 1 is Paul's chief desire for the Philippians. In chapter 2 verse 12, that looks like working out our citizenship. Working hard to live like citizens.

To live as citizens of where we belong. Taking advantage of all the privileges our eternal passport has to offer and our lives ought to resemble where we belong.

It's about holiness. Furthermore, the therefore in verse 12 not only refers to verse 27, but everything after that up to chapter 2 verse 11. As we heard last week about our glorious King and His humble preeminent service to others, remember Jesus' mind which obeyed the Father even to death.

that's the one mind where we are to have. And Paul's still on about that same thing. It's about striving side by side as citizens of heaven working together for the gospel.

[7 : 37] Having one mind. That's Christ's mind. It's about gospel partnership. Further, see the phrase in verse 12, therefore my beloved, as you have always obeyed.

The last time we heard about obedience was in chapter 2 verse 8 as Christ humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death. Remember that? Even death on a cross.

So the Philippians have always showed a Christ-like obedience in the past. As Paul commands them to work out their salvation, he isn't asking them to do anything new.

They've always done this. But it also indicates what kind of work Paul is on about. It's about obeying just like Christ in service of others.

Imitating Christ's mind is what it looks like to work out our salvation. And notice the last phrase of verse 12 with fear and trembling.

[8 : 37] This passage is an encouragement, but it's also really, really serious. Yes. To clarify, fear and trembling cannot mean with anxiety and uncertainty for Christians.

For those who don't know Christ, it will mean that. But Paul doesn't intend for Christians to doubt their salvation or citizenship. Verse 12 tells us that Paul is confident in the Philippians.

He isn't giving us whiplash going from confidence to uncertainty. Instead, I think there's something far more seriously that we need to take, something we often don't take seriously enough, rather.

It means, do this in right response to the works of a holy God. This follows on from last week. Remember where every knee shall bow before Christ, our great King who was exalted.

I think of Isaiah standing before the throne room of God, seeing the holy throne in the train of God's robe, so majestic. It fills the entire temple and his only response to the voice of God is, woe is me.

[9 : 46] If we belong to a new kingdom with this holy king at the center working in us, as Philippians 2, verse 9 to 11 tells us we do, how often do we think, woe, I need to take this really seriously.

Our God is holy. The way to work out our salvation is in correct response to a God's mighty, salvific work in Christ, fear and trembling.

The correct response to the works of a holy God then leads us to verse 13 where we see God the worker. Read verse 13 with me. For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

The 4 tells us that this verse is the why behind our command. The why for why we can do what that punchy command of verse 12 calls us to do. Because God is the one who does the work.

It all depends on Him. And He's the most dependable being in all existence, isn't He? See, if God wasn't at work in us, then verse 12 would be utterly impossible.

[11 : 02] We would not desire what is good. In fact, we would desire evil. Those who are not in Christ are hostile to God. They do not submit to God and indeed they cannot.

Those who are not in Christ cannot please God. And that's how Paul puts it in Romans 8. Rather, in verse 13, God works in us to will and to work.

He changes our evil desires and causes us to do good works. God gives us the will to love what God loves. That is, God gives us desires fitting for heavenly citizens.

And God causes us to work in ways that are pleasing to Him. God causes us to walk in the good works that He's prepared in advance for us.

We can only work out our salvation because God is at work in us. And Paul's clearly playing on the language of work to teach us how this works.

[12 : 03] God works, but so do we. God is sovereign over our works and it depends entirely on Him, but that gives us the ability and confidence to do them. These two things aren't at odds in our passage, are they?

God empowers our hard work. Now, it's important to see that God's work is not an excuse for passivity. Rather, it's a call to confident action.

This is putting our backs into it, putting blood, sweat, and tears for its completion as we see the day of salvation drawing near. It's all with certainty because it depends on God who works in us, not us.

Have we ever considered that we can flee sin because God is empowering us? do we realize that we can face suffering with confidence knowing that God is at work in us?

God being the one who works doesn't mean we slack off saying, oh, God will do it so I don't have to. We need to put our backs into it. God's action gives us the confidence to live lives worthy of the gospel.

[13 : 14] We can be confident that change is possible because of God. If we have faith, we can already see the beginning of God's work, can't we? If we have faith, we already trust in our King.

Faith is the first aspect of how God changes our will and work. Faith is unnatural to us. It's only a gift of God. And we saw this in chapter 1, verse 6.

You might like to turn to chapter 1, verse 6. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ. God began a good work by creating faith in us by which we're justified.

It's entirely a free gift that saves. But notice, that means that we already have our salvation. It's already ours. God gifted it to us. And that means, in verse 12, that we aren't to produce something we don't yet have.

Rather, we're to make this gracious gift fruitful with God's strength. By His strength, we will reach that final day. And God's work doesn't mean that we aren't responsible to put our backs into it, but rather, these verses point to the fact that God's work is the very reason for us to strive and live holy lives that glorify God, knowing that God will bring it to its final end.

[14 : 36] So, friend, let's work hard, put our backs into it, empowered by God. Now, in verse 14 to 18, we have worked examples of what that looks like in two aspects.

First, in holiness, from verses 14 to 16, in holiness. Our first example is that working out our salvation looks like living as a holy community. And the second is in partnership, in verses 17 to 18, in partnership.

Our second example is that working out our salvation looks like seeking the good of our kingdom together. And we're going to work through these much faster because we already have the key to unlock them in verse 12 to 13.

So, Paul gives our next command in verse 14. This is a practical example of what it looks like to work out our salvation empowered by God. Do all things in holiness.

So, let's read verse 14. Do all things without grumbling or disputing. Notice that it says all things. Let's take that seriously.

[15 : 44] It means absolutely everything. Grumbling and disputing alludes to the Israelites in the wilderness who upon their salvation from Egypt grumbled and disputed.

You can read about it in Numbers 11. Rather than working out their salvation given to them with fear and trembling, so they angered God. Now, to be clear, this isn't addressing potential concerns you might want to raise.

There can be a good place and reason and way to do that, but it's particularly referencing the grumbling and disputing like the Israelites. Israel complained to their leaders because of their suffering, and that was tantamount to grumbling and disputing against God himself because they wanted to return to Egypt in love with the world rather than live in light of their salvation and citizenship while they sojourned.

Let's not be like that. Rather see verse 15 that says that you may. Paul gives us the purpose for this command. The reason is holiness. Let's read verse 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 light in the world.

We belong as citizens of heaven. So we should live lives worthy of that citizenship. Grumbling and disputing is not working out our salvation.

[17 : 15] It would be living like the rest of the world. Now see, in verse 15, grumbling and disputing are the antithesis of holiness. Rather, we are to be different, working together side by side in unity, in so doing setting ourselves apart from the world, and we will be putting our citizenship to work as children of God without blemish.

That is what sets us apart. We are citizens of a different country wandering about on the earth. The Philippians and us are to be distinguished, shining lights amongst the world, as it says in verse 15, by striving side by side and enduring suffering together, like a little immigrant community among the world.

world. I wonder if you have ever been to Sydney. In Sydney, some suburbs that you walk down don't look like a typical Australian suburb. The streets are covered with foreign language and there is no English in sight because they are an immigrant community.

They shine as a light of brilliant Vietnamese food in the midst of a bland and boring generation. So we are to stand out as immigrants, not by the language we speak or the food we make, however delicious, but by doing all things without grumbling and disputing, by holiness, God will be visible to the world as he works in us.

And this is the first way that we are to live in light of the command of verse 12, in holiness. Brothers and sisters, let's squash any grumbling amongst us.

[18 : 53] It is all too easy to be a grumbler, to dispute with one another. It is very natural. And grumbling against God's people and against God's leaders, like the Israelites did, is actually grumbling against God himself, isn't it?

It is not holiness. Paul goes further to explain that we are to be set apart and holy, and how we are to do that in verse 16. He says, holding fast to the word of life.

Holding fast to the word of life is key to being spotless and blameless. See, our heavenly homeland is characterized by unity and holiness. We have free, untethered access to life in abundance, as God's holy, beloved children.

So while we live now away from that home, we hold fast to this word of life. We have to cherish God's word. We must hold fast to the gospel.

The gospel is the word of life, that Jesus is the resurrected king, and all its rich depth and implications. It's the means of salvation, the word that breathes life into dead sinners, and God begins that work in us by that word.

[20 : 06] And the word that continues to breathe life in us as we work out that salvation, it's the wellspring of life to cling to. Let's love the word of God and let it dwell richly amongst us.

But the Israelites, though they even had God's presence amongst them in visible fire and cloud, in Numbers chapter 11, they wanted to return to Egypt, grumbling and disputing, to enjoy cucumbers and melons of the world.

Is all we care for cucumbers and melons? Worldly success is a melon compared to Christ. Christ is the source of life, and how sweet is the gospel of our risen King Jesus.

We're to put away grumbling and disputing, holding fast to the word of life. Don't be desiring the life of this world. We don't belong there.

Rather, let's love God's word and be desired to be shaped by its life-giving power and hold fast to the gospel, conforming our minds day by day to the word of life, seeking eagerly to change our mind and align with life, rather than believing worldly lies of death, never letting go of that beautiful gospel.

[21 : 27] That's the hope of Paul's entire ministry, as he says in verse 16, the rest of it. He says, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

One day soon Christ will come and call us home, bring us to our heavenly homeland. And what will we be proud of in that day? Prestigious careers or idyllic families, nice cars or insights we gleam from our many travels?

These are just melons, friends. Don't go back to Egypt. Let's live like citizens of heaven, working out our salvation empowered by God as the word of life works in us.

Let's value what Paul values in verse 16, valuing the work of the word of life in others. You know, like Christ, striving to hold fast to the word of life together over morning tea.

And let's make sure that we're there each week for growth groups, investing in each other, spurring each other on to put our backs into living like citizens. And let's be bold in evangelism at work and at school gate.

[22 : 39] what things to boast about in the day of Christ? God bringing life through his word. However, the day of Christ will be a day of judgment for those who do not trust in the Lord Jesus.

For those who don't know Jesus, let me encourage you. Today is not too late. There is a day coming when Jesus will judge the world and those who don't trust in him will be punished forever.

But seek refuge in Christ. He is the only way. And friends, let's do all things without grumbling or disputing, living as a holy community. And this is the first example of what it looks like to work out our own salvation.

And this then leads to our final command. Our second example is that working out our salvation looks like seeking the good of our kingdom in partnership. This passage then turns to a serious note.

Yes, in a command to rejoice, it starts seriously. Paul is returning to the possibility that he will die for their sakes. Notice what it says in verse 17. Let's read it together.

[23 : 46] 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. What's the primary offering here?

Who's the primary offering? Read it again with me. Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith.

Did you notice that it's not Paul? Rather, it's the sacrificial offering of the Philippians faith. Paul's just the topper, as it were, the cherry on top, just the drink offering.

Our passage is about partnership because it's about their significant offering in partnership with Paul as they strive together for the gospel, suffering side by side, working out their salvation and seeking the good of their heavenly homeland.

That is, they're partnering in ministry to glorify God. And this is the second way that we are to work out our salvation. Rejoice in gospel partnership.

[24 : 52] What's with all the offering language? Well, two things. The first is it's about suffering. Like an offering being sacrificed, I suspect that's not a particularly pleasant experience for the offering.

And we can see that we've seen suffering and sacrifice language before in chapter 1, verse 29 to 30. It has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ, you should not only believe in him, but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

See, they're suffering the same things. It's been gifted to them that they would suffer. Suffering for Christ's sake. Paul and the Philippians are suffering together not only with each other, but with Christ.

Suffering for his sake. So Paul talks about their combination offering here as a partnership in suffering. And the second, it's about being a suffering servant.

Notice that Paul is the drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of their faith. It's for their sakes, which he mentions back in chapter 1. However, it isn't needless suffering.

[26 : 09] It's ministry in service of others. Their suffering comes as they selflessly serve and endure Christ's suffering. And remember, they have the mind of Christ being just like him, obeying just like Christ.

And that's why it's an offering to God. It's in service of the Father. And that's why Paul rejoices. And we can see that in our command in verse 18. Likewise, you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

We don't rejoice because we like suffering. But because firstly, we get to share in Christ's sufferings. And secondly, like Christ, our suffering is for the glory of our Father.

Through our offering, people are saved by the gospel of life. And we will suffer if we build up those around us. We will suffer. And what better way to work out our salvation than suffer for the good of our fellow citizens in partnership with our suffering king?

So rejoice. Having the mind of Christ that through our offering, people are saved. Our brothers and sisters are built up in Christ. Rejoice in this partnership, not only with each other, but with Christ as we see the heavenly kingdom built up, together suffering side by side for the good of our heavenly homeland.

[27 : 35] If we set our eyes on our eternal goal, on seeking the good of that heavenly homeland, how much more can we rejoice in the midst of persecution, knowing that it's of eternal value?

Well, to wrap up, friends, do you see how significant our citizenship is? So what? It leads to real change, to be more like our Savior, empowered by God himself.

And let's work hard putting our backs into it, striving to live as citizens as we see the day of Christ approaching. Now remember, we started at the beginning this question that was posed to me.

If our view of salvation is only that Christ saves us from the punishment and guilt of sin, our view is far too weak. Christ doesn't just save us from the punishment of sin, but from sinning as well.

And that's what's happening here. Not only are we justified by faith so that one day we will be saved, but right here and now, that justification is the basis of a present rescuing from the muck of sin.

[28 : 45] And sin's disgusting and it ruins everything. One day when Christ returns, sin will no longer mar our lives. And while we'll never have total freedom from sin in this life, our sin isn't, salvation isn't just future or even just past.

But God is working now to save us. As he works in us to will and to work as heavenly citizens. Transforming us to strengthen us to strive as holy people for the gospel together.

So let's keep putting our backs into it. Empowered by God to live in holiness and rejoice in gospel partnership. Let's pray that God would help us to do that. Lord, please continue to work in us.

Change our desires and actions that we might act like citizens of heaven, which you have made us to be. Thank you for saving us. Continue to change us to be more like Christ.

And Lord, please may Christ come soon. Amen.