

Message #13**Philippians 2:12-18**

We live in a religious world that promotes the idea that if you duck into a “praise service” once a week and hear the “praise band” and listen to a little praise uplifting sermonette challenge about how God loves everybody and wants to bless you, and you are good. The prevailing idea is just come as you are and enjoy the show. Most want you to feel good about the religious experience and drive away happy.

But there is something that is very troubling about this. When Jesus was teaching His disciples just before sending them out, one of the things He said was you don’t need to fear any man, but the one you need to fear is God (Matthew 10:1, 5, 28). He said that to His own disciples. He told disciples already committed to Him that you need to fear God.

When the Apostle Peter wrote his first epistle, which he addressed to all believers, he told them to “fear God” (I Pet. 2:17). He wrote that years after Jesus had been to the cross and he said that specifically to all believers living everywhere.

Both Jesus and Peter used the very same verb. It is the verb phobeo (φοβέω). The word is strong. We get our English word “phobia” from this word. It means to have a frightened fear that is very reverential. It is a fear that not only is very intimidated, but in many ways terrified (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, pp. 472).

The year was A.D. 62 when Paul was writing this letter to the Philippians. It was a great church. This was a church for which Paul could thank God for every remembrance. Now when you have a great church like this one, most today would say lighten up, loosen up, laugh it up. But that is not what the Apostle Paul said to this church. He calls these people “my beloved” (v. 12), which means they were very special to Paul. Paul loved these people and he wanted the best for them.

Verse 12 begins with a conjunction “so then” and that is a conjunction that expresses “result.” This conjunction points us right back to Jesus Christ and the fact that one day we will all bow before Him. What Paul wanted to communicate to this church was this:

IN VIEW OF THE FACT THAT EVERY BELIEVER WILL BOW BEFORE JESUS CHRIST, EVERY BELIEVER IS COMMANDED TO WORK OUT HIS/HER OWN SALVATION IN AN ATTITUDE OF FEAR AND TREMBLING.

What is it that you really fear? What is it that makes your heart pound, your pulse race, your muscles tighten and the adrenaline flow? What do you fear that makes your throat go dry and puts butterflies in your stomach and causes you to nervously perspire? **Paul said if you are a God-honoring believer in a church, it better be the thought of facing God.**

He didn’t expect unbelievers to have any fear of the God of the Bible, but he sure challenged believers to have it.

He wanted believers at church to reverently and fearfully govern their lives with the attitude that we will face God and give an account. We will see Jesus Christ. We will bow before Jesus Christ and we will be judged by Jesus Christ. Wise are those who think very seriously and reverently about this. There is to be a seriousness and a reverence for how we govern ourselves.

There are four very clear personal instructions about this reverence in this part of Paul's letter:

PERSONAL INSTRUCTION #1 – Paul commands believers to work out their salvation with fear and trembling. **2:12**

We are certainly not saved by works in any way. Paul will really develop the theology of that in chapter 3 (3:8-9). But once we are saved and have believed on Jesus Christ, we need to get to work on developing a reverent life and testimony that shows we are in fact believers.

The verb “work out” is present, middle, imperative. What this means is it is a command of God that believers continually work out and work on their own salvation in and of themselves.

The actual verb “work out” is one that means to achieve something or to bring about something by labor (*Ibid.*, p. 240). So each believer is to fear God by carefully working on his or her own life in view of Scripture.

Now there are three ways we do this:

Way #1 - We are to reverently work out our own salvation individually. **2:12**

The Greek text stresses that every believer has his or her own responsibility. We have a responsibility in and of ourselves to develop. It does not matter what the age or gender. It does not matter what the former sins or struggles. We all have a responsibility to reverently and fearfully work out our own salvation in view of the fact we will face Jesus Christ. If that thought does not intimidate you, I don't know what will. When we get before Jesus Christ, we will not be able to blame someone else.

Way #2 - We are to reverently work out our own salvation obediently. **2:12a**

The way we work out our salvation with a reverent fear is by obeying Scripture. The Philippians had a good track record in this. They were known as a church that “always obeyed.” If you showed the people of this church what God's Word said, they did not question it or debate it; they obeyed it.

Paul wanted that same spirit in the life and mind of every believer in the church. That word “obey” means to attend to and submit to what is heard (*Ibid.*, p. 456). Plato used this word to mean you hear a knock at the door and you respond to it.

That is how we are to respond to God's Word. We hear it; it knocks at our heart and we respond to it.

Way #3 - We are to reverently work out our own salvation privately. **2:12b**

We are to reverently work out our salvation not just when we are in the presence of godly people, but in their absence. **The truth is real progress in a reverent spirituality is made when one is alone.** We need to be concerned about our spiritual life consistently; when with people and when alone. The 1800's Greek scholar of Cambridge, J. B. Lightfoot, said there ought to be a nervous and trembling anxiety in the believer to do what is right before God (*Philippians*, p. 130). This is true not just in public moments, but also private moments.

People can put on a good show before others at church, but when one gets before Jesus Christ, He will analyze whether or not we truly did fear Him and were faithful to Him.

PERSONAL INSTRUCTION #2 – Paul gives the reason why believers should work out their salvation with fear and trembling. **2:13**

Here is the crux of this. **We need to work out our salvation with a fear of God because God is working in us by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to work out His will in order to accomplish His good pleasure.**

Our salvation was no afterthought. We were saved by Almighty God and when He saved us, He took up residency in us and He wants to develop us so we accomplish His will according to what pleases Him.

Here is a major key to working out salvation with fear and trembling—realize God lives in us and He wants to develop us and use us to accomplish His work and will.

Think for a moment of what is stated here. God is in us. Whether or not you ever develop right for God, God has lived in you. God is the One working “in you.” That point is stressed that God is in us. This is why we need to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling.

We will never get more of God than we do the moment we are saved; but God can get more of us. As we go to work on fearing Him and obeying His Word, He will develop us and use us at His maximum level.

Now based on what is stated here, we may conclude that when God is powerfully working in a believer's life or in a church, that believer or church will have a tremendous fear and reverence, to the point of even trembling before God. Those who don't have this attitude toward God really don't have God doing much of anything in them.

PERSONAL INSTRUCTION #3 – Paul gives one key way believers do work out their salvation with fear and trembling. **2:14**

Now **verse 14** is called an asyndeton construction which simply means Paul does not use a conjunction between coordinating thoughts. When this type of construction is used, it adds weight to the words. By using this kind of construction, Paul is solemnly challenging believers to work out their salvation by doing “all things without grumbling or disputing.”

This one key way to work out our salvation has to do with our mouth. As we have said there are some even in the church who are ego driven. They will do or say anything to anyone. They will criticize and because of selfish ambition they can cause problems and divide the church.

Paul knew about these kinds of people. He knew about the whiners and complainers. They are negative downers. There are some people who constantly complain and argue. They are talkers and nothing positive comes out of their mouths. They have no fear of the fact they will face Jesus Christ and give an account and Paul says, “knock it off.”

Those who are continually grumbling and disputing all the time do not fear God and they are not reflecting God’s will. Paul loved this Philippian church but in that church were sinful people who can grumble and argue. Paul says do everything without grumbling or arguing. The Greek “all things” covers everything. It covers all meetings, all services, all responsibilities, all decisions and all situations and even hardships. God does not want us to be a bunch of whiners and complainers and arguers. He wants us quiet people who fear Him.

PERSONAL INSTRUCTION #4 – Paul gives the results of believers who do work out their salvation with fear and trembling. **2:15-18**

The world does not operate by a fear of the Lord mentality. This world does not operate by a do all things without murmuring or arguing philosophy. If we go to work on our own lives to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, there will be some wonderful results. Paul lists six results:

Result #1 - We will be blameless and innocent. **2:15a**

The word “blameless” is not sinless. This particular word means that we will be free from people being able to point at us and legitimately blame us or find fault in us (*Ibid.*, p. 24). The word “innocent” means we are pure and unmixed (*Ibid.*, p. 17). We are not full of guile in our faith. We have a pure faith that strives to understand and apply Scriptures.

When we do things without murmuring or arguing, we stand out to this world. We do not hurt others.

Result #2 - We will be above reproach as a child of God. **2:15b**

The word “above reproach” is a different word and it means “without blemish” (*Ibid.*, p. 26). When we purpose to work out our salvation by reverently obeying Scriptures, we make a statement that we are a child of God, getting rid of blemishes.

It is interesting to me that God does not say His child is without sin; he is developing without blemishes.

Result #3 - We will appear as lights in a crooked and perverse world. **2:15c**

This world is crooked and perverse and we are right in the midst of it. Our job is to appear as lights for God. In the midst of this “crooked” (curved and bent) world and in the midst of this “perverse” (twisted, distorted and perverted) world we are to shine forth as people who have believed on Jesus Christ and are doing our best to govern ourselves in view of Scripture.

We are not perfect, but we are working at it.

Result #4 - We will demonstrate that we hold fast to the Word of God. **2:16a**

The thing to cling to in this world is the Word of God. Those words “hold fast” mean hold tight and hold up. The church is to be a place that is dedicated to the Word of God. Notice it is called “the word of life.” It is the Word of God that produces salvific life in unbelievers and it is the Word of God that produces sanctified life in those who are believers. When people come to church they should know, see and sense that these people are very serious about the Word of God.

As we are taking in God’s Word and applying it to our lives, we are making a tremendous statement to this world.

Result #5 - We will prove that we were worth the investment. **2:16b**

There will be accountability in the day of Christ. Paul wanted to show that his labor to the Philippian church was a valuable investment.

If the believers would work out their salvation with fear and trembling, then when they get before the Lord, they will bring glory to God and that will prove that Paul’s investment paid dividends.

Paul says I am not interested in killing time in a church; I am interested in investing in a church and if a church will develop and hold tight to the Scriptures, it proves that my investment was not in vain.

Result #6 - We will be joy producers. **2:17-18**

At this point, Paul did not know whether or not he would live or die, but he could have joy if he knew these believers in Philippi were developing in their lives in a reverent obedience. Paul could have joy and so could they.

Listen, we will all face Jesus Christ. For all of us that should be the most intimidating fear we may have. We should have a fear and reverence about that moment and that should prompt us to know the world and obey the Word.