

## **Philippians 2 pt. 2 v.12-18**

v.12-13 - Paul refers to the Philippians as his “beloved” - they have a special place in his heart. This is more than just flattery. This is intentional and demonstrates the very real, substantial affection that Paul has for the churches.

This is as it should be - our relationships with one another are to be framed in our mutual love and admiration for one another because of all that Jesus has done.

In fact, we begin v.12 with a “Therefore...” which is Paul’s way of calling to mind all that has already been set forth - namely the example of Christ’s humility and obedience as He humbled Himself, “to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” (v.8)

And we see that Paul is calling the church to that same position!

Paul’s remarks here, extending from the beginning of the chapter, call the Philippians to join with the example of Christ.

He has called the Philippians to a unity of mind and spirit; to a unity of love; to a unity of purpose.

He now calls them to a unity of obedience based on Christ's own example.

The question must be asked - who are the Philippians to obey? While some may read this as Paul asking them to obey himself, I would contend that the imperative issued by Paul here is an obedience to God.

While Paul's influence was certainly very formative for the early church and he didn't hold back any form of correction he also did not presume to take the Lord's rightful place as both foundation and head of the church. (Eph 1:22-23; 2:20)

As they are seeking to obey the Lord, what are they supposed to be obedient in? What is the action they are called to?

They are called to "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling..." Well...just exactly what does that mean!?

By the way, Paul's language here (second-person plural) indicates that this is directed to the congregation at Philippi and could also be read, "[you all] work out your own salvation with fear and trembling..."

AGAIN, they are called to share in the example of Jesus!

“...as He obeyed and won His exaltation, so...you obey and carry out your own salvation...which is begun with justification by faith, but must be carried out...by sanctification of the Spirit—a life of holy obedience and advance to Christian perfection.”<sup>1</sup>

“...Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear.” (Phil 2:12, NLT)

We must be careful not to undermine grace in our reading or to present the idea that we are the ones who earn our salvation by our works. Rather our work proceeds from our shared salvation. We are naturally displaying the salvation that has been wrought in us and we are to do so with “deep reverence and fear.”

FEAR AND TREMBLING doesn't mean being cowardly, or conditioned by pain to operate out from a position of learned helplessness. The fear and trembling that we demonstrate isn't an emotionally based fear born out of pain but a holy awe that we get to be in the company of the Living God.

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Alford, *Alford's Greek Testament: An Exegetical and Critical Commentary*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Guardian Press, 1976), 170.

God is not some cosmic child-abuser who demands our grovelling so He can pump up His universe sized ego!

God calls His saints to do all kinds of wild things that cowardice won't support; things that require a deep faith in who He is and a deeply ingrained boldness and courage that is implanted within the believer by the Holy Spirit.

It takes courage to go where God calls and to carry out those expressions of salvation that we are meant to as a faith community.

Rather than cowardice, the the biblical concept of fear and trembling as a characteristic of the saints is one of seriousness - that this all matters in the most profound, impactful sense.

A missed or squandered opportunity to carry out that holy work that God has called us to may have eternal consequences!

Your work, my work, matters in the kingdom - not because God is dependent upon us but because it pleases Him to work IN us!

(v.13)

Ultimately, any courage we stir up in our deep respect for our Lord is placed within us by His Spirit.

What we find then is that the saints collectively are to be working out those holy things that God has worked in us with all seriousness for His glory and good pleasure.

Now, one of the hallmarks of our movement is that we don't take ourselves too seriously but we do take God's word, and God's work seriously.

While we are casual in almost everything else we wouldn't want to be characterized as being overly casual in our assessment of who God is and our relationship with Him.

We agree with the Psalmist as our hearts cry: [Psa 2:10-11 NKJV]  
10 Now therefore, be wise, O kings; Be instructed, you judges of the earth. 11 Serve the LORD with fear, And rejoice with trembling.

When we take a moment to consider the mystery of Christ, the mystery of the triune God, the mystery of grace; that moves us to

consider that what we are doing as believers is more than merely a hobby. This is more than just a way of life. This IS LIFE!

The God we serve spoke creation into existence by His word. He called us to life by His word.

Though we grasp only a little of His nature, we are blown away by His majesty. The fact that God concerns Himself mercifully in our affairs is nearly incomprehensible to me.

[Psa 89:5-7 NKJV] 5 And the heavens will praise Your wonders, O LORD; Your faithfulness also in the assembly of the saints. 6 For who in the heavens can be compared to the LORD? [Who] among the sons of the mighty can be likened to the LORD? 7 God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, And to be held in reverence by all [those] around Him.

It is that sense that frames our obedience to Him regardless of who is watching and regardless of who approves or disapproves of our obedience. This carries us to the next imperative in the text, the next command.

v.14 - Do all things without complaining and disputing - or arguing.

This addresses the attitude of the faithful. It isn't enough just to obey with a cold dead heart and an obedience born out of guilt or compulsion.

It is quite impossible for anyone to fully know our motives if we don't want to reveal them; but the heart of the believer is to be far from complaining and disputing with one another as we work together for the gospel's sake.

“...one must sometimes translate the relation between doing and complaining as ‘whenever you do anything you must not complain,’...Since the complaining or arguing probably refers to the relationship between believers in Philippi, it may be best to translate ‘you should not complain to one another or argue with one another.’”<sup>2</sup>

How many Christians need to hear that!?

Complaining is insidious - it's poison! The purpose of complaining is never to build up but to undermine and subvert.

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<sup>2</sup> I-Jin Loh and Eugene Albert Nida, A Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Philippians, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1995), 70.

Mark Twain once said, "Don't complain and talk about all your problems--80 percent of people don't care; the other 20 percent will think you deserve them."

"A heavy wagon was being dragged along a country lane by a team of oxen. The axles groaned and creaked terribly, when the oxen turning around thus addressed the wheels, "Hey there, why do you make so much noise? We bear all the labor, and we -- not you -- ought to cry out!" Those complain first in our churches who have the least to do. The gift of grumbling is largely dispensed among those who have no other talents, or who keep what they have wrapped up in a napkin." -Charles Spurgeon in *The Quotable Spurgeon*.

Remember - complaining was that affliction so prevalent among the nation of Israel as they wandered in Sinai! God had delivered them from slavery - but it still wasn't good enough to banish that pervasive human tendency toward complaining - to their detriment!

Christian, God has delivered us from the grave, from being slaves to sin -- let us not adopt that ancient sin of complaining as we travel through this Sinai toward eternity!

Nor let us pick up that worn out tool of arguing with one another to advance our own interests - remembering that we are to esteem others as better than ourselves and have the humble mind of Christ, deferring to one another, being gracious to one another, finding unity in the shared hope of Jesus.

Bear in mind though that this isn't something to be conjured up by our own will power.

Remember what dear old Mom used to say? "If you don't have anything nice to say don't say anything at all." That's good advice but it doesn't address the issue of the heart that gives way to such complaining and arguing.

The reality is that by submitting to God's Word and adopting Christ's example of humility and servanthood we are to cast those tools of vile speech we once used (complaining and arguing) away from us and adopt His nature instead.

Jesus didn't go to the cross (our example from v.5-8) -- huffing, and puffing, and rolling His eyes and saying, "ugh, this is so

dumb...this isn't how I would have done it." He set His face like flint to what the Father had set before Him. (Isa 50:7)

[Isa 53:7 NKJV] 7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.

v.15-16 - Paul Answers why we are to throw complaining and arguing away, because the world is watching AND we are BECOMING something else - children of God.

We have heard over and over again in our lives that we need to grow up! Into what? A cynical, insufferable smarty-pants that knows how to do everything better than everybody else? One who only sees the faults and errors of their brothers and sisters and must make them known?

No, we are becoming children of God who are blameless, and harmless regardless of the wretched generation around us.

Bear in mind that Paul wrote this to the Philippians nearly two thousand years ago! Their own generation, that of the first century church, was no beacon of moral superiority!

That generation was characterized as perverse, distorted, deformed. And YET, they were called to be different. When the world adopts a position of negativity, complaining, and disputing we are called to be different, to be light in a dark place as we cling to the gospel, the word of life.

By doing so we offer something that is in short supply - light.

There's enough darkness. We don't need to add to it by complaining and arguing among ourselves. Rather we are to BE LIGHT -- that bright spot in the dark.

Paul's word usage here is really unique. He uses the word: "φωστήρα [*phostera*]...any light-producing object in the sky, such as the sun, moon, and other planets and stars—'light, luminary, star....'you shine among them like stars in the sky' (literally '... universe') Php 2:15. Though φωστήρα may refer to any light-producing object, it is used especially of the heavenly bodies and more specifically of stars, as in Php 2:15, the one NT context

in which φωστήρα occurs. A focal component of this meaning is the light-giving characteristic.”<sup>3</sup>

Consider now that what makes the stars so brilliant in the night sky is the stark contrast of their brilliance against the backdrop of inky black space. The same holds true for us. The brilliance of Christ passed on to His saints, the church, is not snuffed out by the darkness but only serves to amplify the brightness.

As any person who has viewed a rural night sky can attest, the darker it gets, the more stars one can see!

Know also that you don't have to conjure up your own light. By Christ you ARE light. Your very substance has been changed from darkness to light, you have a new shine.

[Eph 5:8 NKJV] 8 For you were once darkness, but now [you are] light in the Lord. Walk as children of light”

Even as Jesus declared, “I am the Light of the World...” (John 8:12) He also declared, “You are the light of the world...” (Matt 5:14)

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<sup>3</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 7.

You must see how all of this fits together! This has very little to do with our own character (prerogative or restraint) and everything to do with joining in the likeness of Christ.

We see that there is also a result in Paul's own personal life as he witnesses the continued obedience and faithfulness of the saints - rejoicing that his labor was not in vain.

Let's be plain - ministry is marked with much disappointment and discouragement along the way. Sometimes we wonder if our service matters at all or if it's all been in vain.

Don't our hearts jump with joy when we see other believers shining so brightly? Mine does!

Each day I hear of the continued efforts of the saints my heart rejoices. Take joy in others. That is completely opposite to our tendency toward complaining and arguing isn't it!? And it is important to point out that Jesus graciously takes joy in us too!

V.17-18 Paul shares a moment of self-reflection with the church.

It's as if he is taking the time to consider what they've gone through together and where he now finds himself - in the hands of a not so friendly Roman government.

It's quite a somber, serious moment. He realizes that he may in fact die for the faith. As Christ "emptied Himself" (2:7 ESV, NASB) that is a very real possibility in his own life.

Of course, we must come to some understanding of what exactly Paul is talking about here since he references something that many modern readers would be unfamiliar with - "being poured out."

Many translations include the added phrase, "*as a drink offering*," or something similar to give the reader clues to what exactly Paul is writing about.

This is related to the Old Testament requirement to pour out a drink offering along with certain types of sacrifices. More specifically, a drink offering was also called a libation.

“Libation: A drink offering of water or wine poured out as a ritualistic act of worship (e.g., Exod 29:40–41; 30:9; 37:16; Hos 9:4). Libations often accompanied other types of offerings...”<sup>4</sup>

Christ was described in part by the prophet Isaiah as giving Himself in this manner... “[Isa 53:12 NKJV] “...He poured out His soul unto death...”

Similarly, Paul is committed to sharing in this sacrificial service exemplified by Jesus for the Philippians. He willingly gives all of himself to the ministry of the saints. BUT, far from being a moment of self-pity he revives the call to rejoice in this act of service.

There is a joy in the giving up of ourselves to the work of the kingdom even when it comes at great cost.

The picture that Paul is presenting here is clear -- be like Jesus. That seems overly simple - but to begin down that simple path involves the difficult task of emptying ourselves so that we may be filled with and moved by His Spirit.

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<sup>4</sup> John D. Barry et al., eds., “Libation,” *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

By emptying ourselves and joining with Christ we allow that holy work to continue whereby we are changed from miserable dark, black holes of selfishness, into brilliant bright stars in God's firmament providing light and warmth in the vacuum of the fallen human existence. THAT is a joyful prospect! Empty us of ourselves oh Lord and refill us with that substance we cannot contain - You.