

Notes from Pastor Tim Gamston's am sermon on Sunday 9th October 2022

Series from Philippians "To Live is Christ" – Part Two "Co-workers with God"

Scripture references from the ESV

Philippians 2: 5-16 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,[a] 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant,[b] being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

12 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, 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

14 Do all things without grumbling or questioning, 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 lights in the world, 16 holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labour in vain.

NB see p4 for the full reading

As Christians, we are called to a life of obedience to God. The grace of God that brings salvation is a grace that trains us to say no to things that displease God and to say yes to things that God wants us to do. Some of those commands seem incredibly hard.

- **Humility (Phil 2:2 ff see p4).** Paul gives this command from Jesus Christ to the church. We are to consider others more important than ourselves and to be more concerned to see their needs met than to have our own needs met. This cuts right across today's culture, which is all about me, myself and I. If we are to be truly followers of Jesus then this attitude of humility is vital. We cannot say we are disciples of Christ unless we are living it out because, as Paul shows, this was the mind of Christ (vv 5-8 above). Humility does not come naturally to us. What is more, we are to obey the command to humility without grumbling or complaining (vv14-15 above).
- **Agreeing in the Lord.** We are to exercise forgiveness and grace towards one another – even when we think we're right and the other person is wrong! (4:2 see p4)
- **Rejoice in the Lord always (4:4 see p4).** 'Always' includes when there is a financial crisis, the cost of living is going up, family and work life are stressful, friends turn against us and life in general is full of disappointments. We are to rejoice even when the world turns against us because of our faith.

Humanly, these commands (and these are only a few examples) are impossible to keep.

The Christian life is a life of obedience to the commands of God. Those commands cut across our sinful, natural desire to rule our own lives, so how do we do it?

God always gives what he commands

This truth (vv12-13 above) gives hope to those of us who want to live obedient lives, but find it hard. The text shows that there are two workers in this process.

- One is utterly dependent on the other, and can only work because the other is working
- One is the primary worker and the other is a dependant worker

Who are these two? One is the believer and the other is God.

Paul writes to believers and says '**Work out your own salvation**' (v12 above). He goes on to say '**God works in you**'

We work and God works, but the reason we work is because God is working.

- a) **God is the primary worker.** Paul wants us to see that

Unless God works first, we shall never be able to do our work.

To **work out** means to put into effect something that we possess. What we possess is our salvation. Paul is **not** saying that we must work **for** our salvation. In **Phil Ch 3** (please read in your Bible), he defends the truth that the righteousness we need to come into God's presence is:

- the righteousness of Christ alone
- given to us as a gift of God's grace alone
- received through faith alone.

We are never put right with God through our own works (**Ephesians 2:8-9** see p4), but only through the work of Jesus Christ who took our sin on himself and paid the punishment our sins deserved. He lived a perfect life of righteousness that is credited to us when we put our trust in him.

We are to **work out** in our lives the salvation that we have received from God as a free gift of his grace.

The only reason we can work it out is because we have received it! Unless you have received Christ as

your Saviour, you will never be able to obey the commands of the Bible in the way Christ expects.

God is the primary worker in our lives, in that he saves us from sin with a salvation that changes us from the inside out. He works in us in two ways, giving us both the **will to obey** and the **strength to obey** (v13 above).

That is really good news for us. If you have a desire to obey Christ, it is **because** God is at work in you. Sanctification is a process, so we may not obey Christ perfectly in this life (**see Martin Luther quote** p4). We are thankful for the grace of God that abounds in our sinfulness.

Alongside the will to obey him, God gives us the strength to obey him.

God enables us to say no to sin and yes to obedience

He has placed us in Christ, giving us salvation, and he is the one who encourages and empowers us to keep going when it all seems too much. It is only when we grasp the goodness of God in all of this that we will begin to change and live right. Because of this goodness, he is the one who gets the glory for anything good we do. We still have our part to play, however.

- b) **We are dependant workers.** God saved us, not for a life of passivity, but so that we

could actively obey him and serve him. We have a responsibility to live right, according to the commands in the New Testament. The Christian life is a life of repentance, a continual turning away from a life of sin and turning to the Lord Jesus Christ to ask for help. Paul calls us to play our part (**2:12** above, **1:27** see p4). Obedience to the commands of Christ is not optional but is a necessary part of what it means to be saved.

The Puritans taught that where there was no desire for obedience and no change, however gradual, then that person could not rest in the assurance of salvation. They understood the teaching of the New Testament that someone who has received salvation, and has God at work in them, will inevitably live a life that is very different from how they lived before they confessed Christ.

The grace of God that saves is a grace that transforms

If we have received this gift of God's grace, then what we have received needs to be worked out. We need to heed the call to take our Christian lives seriously.

What does it mean to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling?

1) Christlike obedience (v12 above). This church had lived in obedience to Christ in the past, and Paul uses this past obedience to help them see that working out their salvation means to continue to live obedient lives to Christ. Paul has already flagged up the obedience of Jesus (**v8** above). Jesus came to live a life of obedience, even though it would mean being crucified on a Roman cross. Jesus did more than just set an example. He came to give us life so that we would increasingly live a life of obedience to the commands of God. If he had only set an example, we would be crushed, because we could not ever live up to that example.

God's purpose in our salvation is to make us more and more like Christ, but we do this in the strength he supplies by his Spirit at work in us.

2) Personal responsibility (v12 above). Christians can be very good at telling others how they should live, but not so good at looking at their own sin and seeking God's help to change. If we are believers, we have the responsibility to work out what it means for ourselves to obey Christ and to seek God's help to do it. We can be thankful for those who point out our failings when we are blind to them, but ultimately, we are responsible for our own obedience.

- Each of us should be examining our heart, motives, actions, responses to situations and our speech to see if they align with how Jesus lived.
- Where they don't align, each of us should be confessing our failure, seeking Christ's forgiveness and asking the Holy Spirit for help to change.

Each believer has a personal responsibility before God to work out his/her own salvation

3) An attitude of loving fear (v12 above, 1:27 see p4). Paul wants the believers to obey even when he is absent from them, working out their salvation **with fear and trembling**. We are not just to be obedient around other Christians, but also when we are on our own or out in the world. This is not from fear of punishment, but from fear of dishonouring such a worthy, loving Saviour. Our love for the Lord Jesus Christ should hold us back from doing anything that grieves him or brings his name into disrepute.

We live our lives with the awareness that, though others may not see us, the Lord Jesus Christ

does. Because we love him, we want to obey him.

4) A lifelong commitment (v12 above). Paul uses a present tense when he says 'work out'. It is something we are always to be doing, with no sense that we have ever completed it, or will complete it, no matter how old we are.

**Until God completes his work in us at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ,
we shall have to continue to fight sin.**

You can work out our salvation because it is **God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure** (v13 above). You work out what he has worked in you, what he is working in you and what he will complete in you.

**God commands Christlike obedience, and at the same time
God always gives what he commands**

**24 Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless
before the presence of his glory with great joy,
25 to the only God, our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord,
be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and for ever. Amen.
(Jude 24-25)**

Philippians 1:27 – 2:30 So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,[a] 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant,[b] being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

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14 Do all things without grumbling or questioning, 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 lights in the world, 16 holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labour in vain. 17 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. 18 Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

19 I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. 20 For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. 21 For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. 22 But you know Timothy's[c] proven worth, how as a son[d] with a father he has served with me in the gospel. 23 I hope therefore to

send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, 24 and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.

25 I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, 26 for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. 27 Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. 28 I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. 29 So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honour such men, 30 for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.

Phil 4:2 2 I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.

Phil 4:4 4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Martin Luther:

This life, therefore, is: not righteousness but growth in righteousness, not health but healing, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not yet what we shall be but we are growing toward it. The process is not yet finished but it is going on. This is not the end but it is the road. All does not yet gleam in glory but all is being purified.