



THE LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS – STUDY GUIDE

LESSON 6 WORK OUT YOUR SALVATION CHAPTER 2:12-18

Paul exhorts (or encourages) the Philippians to show the same spirit of obedience to God as did the Lord Jesus. Then God can work through them. Arguments will only distract from the effectiveness of their witness to the Truth. When Christ returns, Paul hopes to rejoice that his efforts in preaching to the Philippians have not been wasted. Even if he is sentenced to death for his preaching, there is still cause for rejoicing in the opportunity to witness for Christ.

12: Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence...

In the light of what Paul has written about the complete obedience of Christ, his followers must also submit to God in all things, whether Paul is with them or not. Most of us find it easier to be on our best behaviour on special occasions. It is not so easy to keep up the standard of Christ when you are on your own!

work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

Throughout his life Jesus had to wrestle against the inclination to please himself and to conform to people's expectations of what he should do. The strain was at its most intense as the cross drew near. "Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42).

God strengthened Jesus with the help of the angels and he was able to go through the suffering which led to his death (see Hebrews 5:7-9). "Fear and trembling" indicates the spirit of total reverence and submission to Almighty God. There is no place for the casual here. That is why the way we dress, the way we behave and the way we speak are all important. When we meet together with brethren and sisters we assemble with the ecclesia to worship the King of creation. We should feel sufficiently in awe to want to put on our best clothes and to be on our best behaviour. When we talk to God in prayer we are in a position of great privilege, one which we do not deserve. It is not appropriate to be casual or to use the kind of slang or bad talk so popular around us.

Faith and Work

So in every aspect of our lives we must work out our salvation. Of course we are saved by faith. We cannot earn forgiveness of sins by works. But our faith is not genuine if we do not try to please God in lives of obedience. It is not enough to say, "I believe in baptism"; we must be baptised. It is not enough to say, "I believe that Christ will come again"; we must get ready. It is not enough to say, "I believe in the judgement seat of Christ"; for "each man's work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done" (1 Corinthians 3:13). James tells us that "faith without works is dead" (James 2:26). The whole relationship between faith and works is admirably summed up in Ephesians 2:8-10:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

13: for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Again there is the emphasis on God's will being done. It is not doing what we think is good, or what others say is good. It is what God requires. Only from His word can we find that out. The Greek word "to work" is literally "to energise". Our faith in God and relationship with Him through Jesus provides the power for action.

14: Do all things without grumbling or questioning:

But it is action together. No arguments or fuss! Over and over again Paul emphasises the need to work as a team. If you have ever seen a good football team playing together you have seen an excellent example of

teamwork. The team is only successful when all eleven players work together, supporting each other. If one player is "off form" or lacks motivation, then it affects the whole team.

15: that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world;

They should be sincere, beyond criticism, innocent of bad intentions. Argument, criticism, insisting on your own way will undermine the effectiveness of the ecclesia. For we are "in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation". The standards of the world around us are not helpful to maintaining the standards of Christ. We need to help each other, not get at each other, for we must "shine as lights". Do people notice the difference? We may not be aware of the effect. But in a totally dark place, even the tiniest light can be seen everywhere.

16: holding fast the word of life...

Notice again the stress placed on the connection between effective witness and the word of God. "Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path", writes the Psalmist (Psalm 119:105). We must be true and loyal to the word of God, as was Christ. He was "the word made flesh" and "the light of the world".

so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labour in vain.

Paul hopes that as a result of the continued faithfulness of the Philippians, he will be able to rejoice when Christ returns, for he will see the fruits of his work with them. They will be rewarded with eternal life (see Matthew 25:23).

17-18: Even if I am to be poured as a libation upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

Paul thinks of the possibility of having to die in Rome for his faith. He reflects that this will be like pouring out (a libation) his blood over the sacrifice which the Philippians are making in offering themselves completely to the service of God. Under the Law of Moses, animals, food and drink were offered to God as tokens of repentance from sin and dedication to God. These rituals were like shadows of the true offering of a perfect life, that seen in the Lord Jesus Christ (see Hebrews 10:1-10). The joy in such a sacrifice, which Paul invites the Philippians to share with him, is because it is a means to an end. In the Book of Revelation we read: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth...that they may rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them!" (Revelation 14:13)

NEWS ABOUT TIMOTHY AND EPAPHRODITUS AND THEIR PLANS CHAPTER 2:19-30

Paul hopes to send Timothy from Rome to Philippi soon. Timothy is a fine example of Christian faith. Paul trusts he too may be able to come to see them. He intends to send Epaphroditus home to Philippi. Epaphroditus came to give Paul as much help as possible, but he has been seriously ill and worried about the folk back home. Paul will be happy for him to get home safely. After all he has gone through, Epaphroditus deserves the warmest welcome in Philippi.

19: I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I may be cheered by news of you.

Paul is constantly concerned for the well being of his converts. Although it will take months to get news back, he is still really keen to send Timothy to find out how things are in Philippi.

20: For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely anxious for your welfare.

Nobody is so close to his own thinking, about the welfare of Philippi as Timothy, and it is second nature to him to be genuinely concerned about them.

21: They all look after their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

So many are only interested in themselves, not the work of the Lord. Here is a challenge indeed to us! Which category are we in? Are we concerned about the problems of brethren and sisters in other countries? We can learn about them through the pages of our magazines such as The Bible Missionary or The Christadelphian.

What are we really interested in? Do we listen to radio or read a newspaper to learn what is happening in our country or do we read about our family in Christ?

All of us should seek to build up our ecclesial family world-wide. There are always those who need our help. We can write letters, pray for them, help them practically in many ways. In our own countries we will find ecclesias in need that deserve our help. Do we care for their state?

22-23: But Timothy's worth you know, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me;

You know Timothy's worth. Often in societies like that of the First Century, a son followed in his father's footsteps, learning the same trade or continuing in the same job. He learnt from and alongside his father. So Timothy has learnt the work of a missionary from Paul. Paul implies here that he will soon know if he is to be released from imprisonment or not.

24-25: and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself shall come also. 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,

What a tribute he now pays to Epaphroditus; he describes him as:

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| 1. | brother, that is a brother in the Lord |
| 2. | companion in labour, that is a fellow worker |
| 3. | fellow soldier – he has fought a good fight for the gospel alongside me (see Ephesians 6:10-17; 2 Timothy 4:7) |
| 4. | your messenger (Greek apostle) sent to Paul by them at Philippi |
| 5. | he that ministered to my wants (needs). He came to Paul bringing a gift from the ecclesia at Philippi (4:1 8) and with the intention of cheering Paul in his imprisonment. |

26: for he has been longing for you all, and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill.

Epaphroditus has missed the Philippians back home, especially as he has suffered a serious illness. Note that his concern was more for the effect that news of his illness might have on the Philippians! We are again reminded of the importance of consideration for others, especially those who are likely to be anxious about us.

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.

God showed mercy to Epaphroditus for he was spared from death. Paul was spared the sorrow such a tragedy would have caused.

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.

This implies that he has not yet left. Paul will be glad in the happiness of Epaphroditus and the Philippians when they are together.

29,30: So receive him in the Lord with all joy; and honour such men, for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete your service to me.

“Welcome him in the Lord (almost as though he were the Lord!) and be appreciative of the sacrifice he has made in making such a journey in the service of others, and in the course of it nearly losing his life.” They should hold him in honour (in reputation). Paul is anxious they should not feel Epaphroditus has failed in his mission to Paul.

“To complete your service to me” does not mean they were at fault, but that Epaphroditus did what distance prevented them all from doing, and he risked his life in the process.

Throughout this chapter there has been an emphasis on service. Christ is the supreme example, but Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus have all likewise been seeking the well-being of the household of faith, God’s family, above their own comfort.

This is a very high standard to follow. In our ecclesias today there are some who seem all the time to give to the service of the Truth. Others seem always to be missing when help is needed. How do we each serve our brethren and sisters in the ecclesia?

Questions

1. How can we “work out” our own salvation?
2. When Paul says, “do all things without grumbling or questioning”, what did he mean?
3. When all the ecclesia works together as a team, what does this show the outside world?
4. What will give Paul great pleasure in the day of Christ?
5. Why did Paul select Timothy to visit Philippi? You should find three reasons.
6. Give examples to show how well Paul thought about Epaphroditus.
7. Give examples of how well Epaphroditus thought about the Philippians.
8. How far was Epaphroditus prepared to go in his service to Christ?
9. What lessons have you learned from this about your own service in the ecclesia? Make a list of how you can help others.