

PHILIPPIANS

LESSON SEVEN JOY IN OBEDIENCE (2:12-18)

Overview

- I. The Context
 - A. Paul is in prison for preaching the Gospel of Christ
 - B. He has written to them of the joy that comes from being in Christ
 - C. He has reminded them of the things that are truly important in life
 1. Joy in Christ
 2. Joy in the preaching of the Gospel
 3. Joy even in death
 4. Joy in unity
 5. Joy in imitating Jesus
 - D. This passage builds upon his teaching concerning the humility of Jesus
- II. Obey Always
 - A. If Paul is present among them
 - B. If they are separated from him
 - C. Obedience leads to salvation
 - D. Obedience allows God to work through us
- III. Obey Happily
 - A. No murmuring or complaining
 - B. Joyful obedience sets a good example before the world
 - C. Joyful obedience encourages the faithful
 - D. Joyful obedience is essential to following the Word of God

2:12 **Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence**

- A. The word “wherefore” ties the submissive humility manifested by Jesus to the obedience necessary in the Philippians.
- B. Obedience is essential.
 - 1. It was crucial for Jesus – even to the point of death (cf. Hebrews 5:8-9).
 - 2. It is vital for all Christians (cf. Acts 5:29, 32; Romans 2:8; 6:17-18; 10:16; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9; 3:14; Hebrews 11:8; 1 Peter 4:17).
- C. Their obedience had been “always” – literally, at all times – whether Paul was present with them or away from them (cf. 1:5).
 - 1. The Christian’s faithfulness must not be dependent upon his associations or location.
 - 2. We must be just as faithful in the world as we are when assembled with the saints.

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling

- A. Vincent places the phrase concerning Paul’s presence and absence with “work out” instead of with “obeyed.”
- B. Notice that the Philippians had a part to play in their salvation – there was work to do.
 - 1. This word literally means “work fully, accomplish, finish; perform, achieve, bring about.”
 - 2. Thayer defines it: “to do that from which something results.”
 - 3. Vincent says that it means “carry out to the goal.”
 - 4. Robertson writes: “work on to the finish.”
- C. In the salvation of a soul, God has a part to play.
 - 1. God’s grace provided the plan (Acts 14:3; 20:24, 32; Romans 3:24; 2 Corinthians 8:9; Galatians 1:6).
 - 2. God’s love paid the price (John 3:16; 2 Corinthians 5:21).
- D. Yet, man also has a role in his soul’s salvation.
 - 1. He must comply with God’s plan by obedience.
 - 2. This is how salvation is by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-10; James 2:14-26).
- E. Notice that each person must work out his or her “own” salvation.
 - 1. No one can be saved for another.
 - 2. All men have a personal responsibility before God.
 - 3. All men will give an account of themselves before God (Acts 17:30-31; Romans 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10).
- F. Salvation is a matter of “fear and trembling.”
 - 1. We must have an attitude of seriousness and soberness when it comes to our soul’s eternal destiny.
 - 2. We must have a fear and reverence of God and His authority – *He means what He says in His Word* (Isaiah 66:2). (Cf. 1 Corinthians 2:3; 2 Corinthians 7:15; Ephesians 6:5)
 - 3. We must fear falling away (Hebrews 2:1-3; 2 Peter 2:20-22).

Five Reasons for Man to Work Out His Own Salvation

1. Man has a part to play in the salvation of his soul
2. No one else may be saved for him
3. The saving of one's soul does not happen on its own
4. There is no greater need in any man
5. There is no opportunity for salvation after death

2:13 **For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure**

- A. While verse 12 emphasizes man's role in his salvation, verse 13 reminds us that God is active as well.
- B. Literally, it is God who "effectually works" in the Christian.
 1. This word is *energeo* – from which we get words like energy or energize (cf. James 5:16).
 2. When a person works out his own salvation by submitting to the will of God, God works in that person to accomplish His will (cf. 2 Peter 3:9).
- C. David Lipscomb wrote: "When a man with reverence and awe does the will of God, it is God in and through him working to will and to do after his good pleasure. ...When a man gives himself up to God to walk as God directs, God works through him to do his own good pleasure. If a man refuses the obedience, God may overrule his rebellion to accomplish his purposes; but he does not work in or through him or bless him."
- D. Robert Taylor wrote: "The drama of salvation is divine and human. ...The Greek construction here refers to God as supplying the energizing or effectually working power in them. God's role in our redemption is vastly more important than is ours but redemption never reaches rich reality for any person without complying with the terms of pardon – how to attain it and how to maintain it."
- E. Thus, when a person obeys the Gospel, he does not "save himself" apart from the effectual working of God.

2:14 **Do all things without murmurings and disputings**

- A. When one obeys God, he is to do so without murmuring or disputing.
- B. Murmuring means to mutter or grumble against another.
 1. The Greek word is *goggusmos* (γογγυσμος).
 2. It constitutes a moral rebellion against God (1 Cor. 10:10).
- C. Disputing means "questioning or doubting."
 1. It is the word used for a person having an internal discussion with himself.
 2. It constitutes an intellectual rebellion against God.
- D. So, while obedience is essential to our salvation and fellowship with God, it must be done with a proper attitude and disposition.
 1. It does no good to obey while complaining all the while.
 2. There is no benefit to obedience that comes from a heart filled with doubt and a lack of trust in God.
 3. Remember, it is he that believeth and is baptized that will be saved (Mark 16:16).
- E. Jesus did not murmur or doubt. Paul was not complaining or questioning God. The Philippians must live the same way.

2:15 That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world

- A. The goal of their faithful attitudes and loyal obedience was to show themselves to be the children of God (cf. Luke 1:6).
 - 1. Blameless means “free from fault, without reproach, unable to be blamed” – in the sight of others they would be free from rebuke.
 - 2. Harmless means “unmixed; without a mixture of evil, free from guile; innocent” – in the sight of others they would be sincere and pure.
 - 3. Without rebuke means “without spot or blemish; free from anything that would bring the censure of others.”
 - 4. All of this would demonstrate that they were the “sons of God.”
- B. Not only does the Christian’s obedience affect his relationship with God, but it also determines his influence in the world.
- C. Paul describes the world as “crooked and perverse.”
 - 1. The Greek word for crooked is *skolios*, from which we get our word scoliosis – a curved or crooked back.
 - 2. It literally means “warped, winding, curved or crooked.”
 - 3. Figuratively, it refers to something that morally or ethically is twisted from the straight or norm.
 - 4. The word “perverse” refers to that which is distorted, corrupted or (literally) turned aside from the right path.
- D. Christians live in a twisted world that follows a path that leads to destruction.
 - 1. In other words, the child of God is always swimming against the stream of the world in which we live.
 - 2. We must never let “them” dictate or influence how “we” think, act or live.
- E. Yet, as we live in this world, we are to shine as lights by obeying our God.
 - 1. We are to be seen as that which illuminates the darkness of the world.
 - 2. How can we show them the light of truth if we are just like them?

2:16 Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither labored in vain

- A. The way we shine in the world is by holding forth the Word of life.
 - 1. Literally, it means to hold upon – “to retain, pay attention to, attend to, to apply, to fix one’s attention on.”
 - 2. See Luke 14:7; Acts 3:5; 1 Timothy 4:16
 - 3. Thus, the Christian must obey in his or her own life if we want others to be led by our example.
 - 4. In classical Greek, this word also meant “to present or offer.”
 - 5. So, after applying the Word to ourselves, we must present it to others.
 - 6. Only by remaining true to the Word of God can we be a light in a world of darkness.
- B. If the Philippians lived this way, it would be a cause for glory in Paul.
- C. He would rejoice in their faithfulness and in the fact that his work among them had been fruitful.
- D. Notice the connection to the Day of Judgment...

2:17 **Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all**

- A. Literally, Paul wrote of being “poured out as a libation (or, drink offering).”
 - 1. Thayer writes that this word is used figuratively “of one whose blood is poured out in a violent death for the cause of God.”
 - 2. Paul uses the same word in 2 Timothy 4:6 as he approached the time of his death.
- B. He called this the sacrifice and service of their faith.
 - 1. Under the Old Testament, a drink offering was brought to the altar and poured out as a sacrifice.
 - 2. This was a demonstration of the faith of the one who offered it.
 - 3. In like manner, Paul was willing to give his life (as a sacrifice) if it meant the Philippians could practice their faith in Jesus.
- C. In fact, Paul stated that he would find joy in making such a sacrifice because it would mean mutual rejoicing with his brethren in Christ.
 - 1. Again, notice the things that brought joy to the Apostle Paul.
 - a. The Philippians being able to know the truth
 - b. Their being able to practice the Gospel
 - c. Sacrificing whatever was necessary for their benefit
 - 2. To have true joy, we must be willing to give all – even our lives – for the cause of Christ.

2:18 **For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me**

- A. There is mutual sacrifice and joy among Christians.
- B. If Paul were to be killed for the faith, the Philippians should find the joy in such a sacrifice and rejoice with Paul.
- C. Also, Paul seems to be saying that they were also sacrificing much to serve the Lord faithfully.
- D. Thus, they could rejoice over Paul’s situation for they were facing similar circumstances.
- E. Christians are ready to suffer and die in order to remain faithful to the Lord (Revelation 2:10).