

“Real Obedience” Philippians 2:12-18

Big Idea: The call to obedience in the Christian life involves awe-filled discipline, a right attitude and sacrificing with joy.

Introduction:

Outline:

- 1) Obey with awe-filled discipline vs 12-13
- 2) Obey with a right attitude vs 14-16
- 3) Obey with joyful sacrifice vs 17-18

Conclusion:

Christ’s sacrificial obedience.

Manuscript

Good morning.

We’ve been studying the book of Philippians and we come to our passage this morning after a marvelous look at the humility of Jesus Christ. Jesus humbled himself by becoming a human, a servant and a sacrifice.

When we get to verse 12, Paul calls back to mind what he initially said in verse 2, “complete my joy by being of the same mind”. Once again, he goes back to his call for unity. The passage flows something like this:

Be unified by being humble just as your Savior was humble, he obeyed, so you obey by being unified. The more I study Philippians, the more I see unity throughout this whole book. I’ve titled the series: “Joy in the Journey.” We, the church, are on a Christian journey and the only way we are going to get to a place of joy- individual joy and corporate joy- is to strive for unity.

Last week I challenged you to strive for unity through humility, this week I’m challenging you to strive for unity through obedience.

Here’s your first point: Obey with awe-filled discipline

Please follow along as I read:

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.

Let me remind you we are still under Paul's initial imperative from chapter 1 verse 27: "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the Gospel of Christ"

Paul challenged the Philippian church to stand firm in opposition, then last week we saw him challenge them to strive for unity through humility. Today we'll see him challenge them to strive for unity through obedience.

12 Therefore, because of how Christ obeyed the Father, **my beloved,** that's a callback to the affection Paul feels for this church you might remember chapter 1 verse 8 "For God is my witness how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus", **as you have always obeyed,** now this implies a pattern of faithfulness among the church. **so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence,** What Paul is saying here is you are faithful, you have been obedient, but now it's even more important that you obey though I'm not with you.

It's one thing to behave a certain way when certain people are present. You've felt the pressure. The boss is around so look busy. I used to work with a guy- years ago- he was the laziest worker. He'd just sit in front of the computer all day long surfing the internet. But when the boss was around, he was up, doing his work, being the dutiful employee. It was sick. Paul says here, and this points back to chapter 1 verse 27: "so that whether I come and see you or am absent I may hear of you that you are standing firm..."

What Paul is driving at here is a desire to see them being responsible on their own. For those of you who have or are raising kids, what do you hope to see? That one day, they can care for themselves without your constant prodding. In fact, part of our job as parents is to slowly get them to a self-sustaining place. Spiritually, that's what Paul wants here. He's like a spiritual father goading the Philippians along with the hope to hear that they are taking personal responsibility for their own spiritual walk. So he says:

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,

I read a commentary this week that said: "A great deal of unnecessary ink has been spilt over this passage..." Our problem is, we often approach this verse with an individualistic, western eye and think: "My salvation is up to me! I earn it!" That would be bad news. This is the problem with yanking verses out of context, we draw erroneous conclusions. If you've studied Pauline theology, you know Paul's view of salvation. Maybe I should clarify and say our justification, our standing before God, is by grace through faith. Ephesians 2:9 "For by grace you have been saved through faith." The Gospel is grace through faith. We are justified by grace. God's gracious gift of salvation can only be accepted by faith. We cannot do anything to earn it. If we could, Christ's sacrifice would have been unnecessary. So that can't be what he means here. He's not talking justification, salvation by grace through faith.

So, what does it mean? Well, it has to relate to our sanctification. That is, the working out of our salvation while on earth. Now, this is still a little tricky, because you might walk away from this verse thinking: "So my justification is all God, by grace through faith, but my sanctification is on

me.” In other words: “I trust God to be saved, but then I rely on my effort to grow as a Christian.” Nothing could be further from the truth. Look at the very next verse:

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

So, which is it? Is my sanctification, my spiritual growth, based on me or God? Answer: yes.

I have a personal responsibility to do the things God has called me to do. I have a personal responsibility to set in my life personal disciplines, such as reading the Word, prayer, Small Group, church attendance, in order to make sure I am growing as a disciple of Jesus Christ. However, it takes the work of the Holy Spirit in my life to grow me spiritually. This is a thin needle to thread. I do have a responsibility to do the things that result in spiritual growth in my life, but I must have God working in me at the same time. You can't expect to sit back, do nothing and grow spiritually. At the same time, you can't rely on your own efforts to grow you spiritually. It takes me being disciplined *and* relying on the work of God to result in my sanctification.

Now, there is a personal element to this, we “work out our own salvation” personally in our journey through this Christian life, however, this is a corporate element here as well. In fact, I would add that the context is pointing to the corporate working out of our salvation. In other words, Paul is addressing the Philippian church, as a whole, and encouraging them to work out their salvation.

What does that look like? Think back to 1:27, what was Paul calling them to do? “live in a manner worthy of the Gospel. How? By striving for unity. We've seen all through this book a drive toward unity. We've talked about it almost every week. Why?

The Philippian church was a good church, it was a church close to Paul's heart, we've looked at that, but every church has issues. There were areas within this church that were disunited. As you read this book, you can't help but see the push for unity. 1:27 “standing firm in one spirit, with one mind,” 2:2 being of the same mind”, 2:5 “have this mind among yourselves”... what's he driving at? Unity. Why? Because there were divisions. We actually see one when we get to chapter 4. Turn real quick to chapter 4:2 “I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.” We don't know what was happening between these two women, but there was a division. And Paul has been driving at unity all through this letter, perhaps because of this sole instance or perhaps because of many.

Flip back to 2:12

work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,

Strive for unity. Strive for corporate sanctification through be unified as a church. How do we do that? We say last week it takes humility, this week it takes obedience. Work it out, but work it out with an attitude of awe.

Fear and Trembling: Fear and trembling harkens back to Isaiah 66:2 “But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.” Proverbs 1:7 “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.”

Now, you’ve probably heard it said we shouldn’t be afraid of the Lord, rather, be in awe of the Lord. And I would agree with that, but these words in the text actually do communicate fear. So how should we understand this?

If you look back to verses 9-11 which read: “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.” We serve the Lord with a view of who He is. No, we shouldn’t be terrified of God in the sense that we are doomed- because we’re not doomed, not under Christ’s blood. Yet, we should revere Him with a sense of holy awe and wonder. In other words, work out your salvation always keeping in mind the awesome God we serve.

Coming back to verse 13

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

Take responsibility for your spiritual growth, as an individual and as a corporate body, in reverence to God and recognition that He is working in you and in us.

Obey with awe-filled discipline.

Secondly, obey with a right attitude.

14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing, 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 labor in vain.

Again, Paul gets real practical: do all things without grumbling or disputing. Now this, harkens back to the Israelites in the wilderness. Moses writes in Exodus 16:1-2 reads:

“They set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the people of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. 2 And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness,”

All through the wilderness journey, the Israelites grumbled.

Grumbling refers to the utterances made behind the scenes. It’s the sneaky talk. “I can’t believe so-in-so did that, what are they thinking.” “That’s a stupid policy, why do we have that?” Disputing, on the other hand, is being argumentative. Do you get what he’s saying? Don’t grumble amongst yourselves but don’t outright argue about things either.

Obeys what God has commanded you with a right attitude. Why?

15 that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish

Blameless and innocent by the way, isn't something we aspire to, it's something we are. We are blameless, we are innocent, we are children of God- act like your identity. Be who you are in Christ. Don't grumble and dispute, be who you are children of God, **without blemish-** that's without fault. Act like the children of God you are.

Now, last week, we talked about striving for unity through humility, with an emphasis on serving one-another. Remember that, we talked about looking to each other's interests?

Check this out:

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,

Another reason we strive for unity is for our witness. Why would anybody want to become a Christ-follower if the church is ravaged with disunity? Be the children of God you are because you are in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation. Now crooked refers here to being morally bent. Immoral in other words. Twisted is the idea of distorted or departing from what is moral. Both these terms capture the immoral world we live in.

You and I are to shine as lights in this immoral world. Now that word for lights is the same as stars. Shine like a star. What are stars surrounded by? Darkness. Let me challenge you, why should you act like the child of God you are? Because you are to be a star shining brightly surrounded by the darkness of our world. If you look up into space at night, the darkness is immense, but it can't hide the light of the stars. Even from millions of light years away, we see the radiance of the stars. Be like that. Don't grumble amongst each other. Don't argue because the world is watching. Let your light shine.

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 labor in vain.

The term, word of life, is a reference to Paul's teaching while he was with them- essentially, the Gospel. Hold on to the Gospel, why? **so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.**

The day of Christ. Sound similar to the Day of the Lord which is a term meaning the judgment God will render on unbelievers at the end of time. That will be a terrible day. But the day of Christ is different. We, as Christians, will stand before God for judgement, but not for punishment, rather for reward.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 3:11-15

“11 For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— 13 each

one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. 14 If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire."

I don't know what this looks like. Some cosmic scene where everything you've ever done and said and thought in this life is put on display. Anything done with wrong attitudes will be burned up. But everything you've done in humble submission to Jesus will survive the fire and reward will follow. Paul writes in Philippians as if he'll be there, watching the Philippian church, like a proud father, as they are rewarded. Because that means his work among them was not in vain. 3 John 4 "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth." Any parent would identify with that.

All of this from one imperative don't grumble or dispute. We might be tempted to think: "those aren't big sins." But from these few verses, our attitude affects so much. Did you realize that your grumbling and disputing is causing disunity, poor witness and loss of heavenly reward? Put into perspective, guarding our attitudes is essential. Obey with a right attitude.

Lastly, Obey with joyful sacrifice.

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.

It would be tempting to think Paul is reflecting back to chapter 1 verses 19-26 where he contemplates the possibility that his imprisonment might lead to his death. However, he's already expressed that he's convinced this imprisonment won't lead to death. The drink offering is a reference to a ritual familiar to many ancient people. Levitical priests would sometimes offer a drink offering along with a burnt offering. It was sometimes wine or could water or even honey. It was either poured out on the sacrifice or just in front of the altar. It symbolized a pleasing aroma rising up the Lord.

What Paul is saying here is, I pour my life out like a drink offering upon the sacrificial altar of your faith. Remember from chapter 1 the partnership between Paul and the Philippian church. They were striving to be faithful and suffering for it. Paul is pouring his life out, himself sacrificing for the Gospel. Remember the end of chapter 1 Paul writes: "For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have." We're in this together. I'm going to stand proud on the day of Christ for your rewards because we were in this together.

We sacrifice together we rejoice together. Sacrifice should lead us to rejoicing. We tend to think, we'll rejoice in spite of sacrificing, but that's not scriptural. We rejoice *because* we have the opportunity to be a sacrifice for Jesus.

John MacArthur writes: “Believers’ greatest joy comes at the point of greatest sacrifice, because serving God is the supreme purpose of their existence.”

Obey with joyful sacrifice.

Jesus says in John 6:38 “For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.”

When our Savior prayed in the garden, was it His will to do to the cross? Absolutely not. What did He pray: “If it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will but as you will.”

He didn’t want to go to the cross, He didn’t want face the shame, the pain, the wrath of God. But He chose to obey and, as we saw last week, He was greatly rewarded. How can we be obedient? By looking to the sacrificial obedience of our Savior. The more we take in the sacrificial obedience of Jesus, the more we will want to be sacrificially obedient ourselves and that will bring us joy, shape our attitudes, brighten our witness, energize our spiritual disciplines and unite this church.