

Philippians 2 12-18, Work out, don't grumble, hold on

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[0 : 00] And we are back in the book of Philippians and Philippians chapter 2 and we're in verses 12 to 18. So if you have a church Bible, it's 1179. Page 1179.

Let me pray and ask for the Lord's help and then we'll read the passage and consider it together. Let me pray. Father, we thank you like Mike prayed as we opened our meeting together this evening.

We thank you that you, by your spirit, speak through your word to us. Lord, we want to pray that you might make us attentive, that you might give us tender hearts, eager ears to listen.

Pray that the words of my mouth might be pleasing to you. Pray, Lord, that you would help me to speak clearly and faithfully and for all of us to listen for the sake of your glory. Amen.

Okay, verse 12 of Philippians chapter 2. I just flicked into the ESV then in my brain.

[1 : 19] Do everything without grumbling or arguing so that you may become blameless and pure children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.

Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life. Then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain.

But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

Now my experience is that these Sunday evenings go quicker than I anticipate and we get through much less material than I hope we would. And so I'm trying this evening to try and keep it simple for us.

And I want to pull out for you three instructions in the passage and three reasons that Paul gives those instructions. And so we're just going to get straight into it. There's no amusing story or anything to generate your interest.

[2 : 25] We're just going to dive straight into the passage. So the first instruction is this. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

It's there at the end of verse 12. Now the context to this is obviously the stuff that we were looking at last week. So the idea in verses 6 to 11 of chapter 2 that God the Son left the glories of heaven, humbled himself by becoming a man, and by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross, and therefore has been given the name that is above every name, a name that which we must bow.

So, verse 12, or therefore, work out your salvation with fear and trembling. In other words, we live our Christian lives in the presence of one who is to be feared and trembled at.

You and I live our Christian lives in the presence of one who has a name that is above every name, at whose name every knee will bow and every tongue acknowledge that he is Christ the Lord.

In other words, this is Paul's sort of highlighter pen. Take this very seriously. It matters. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

[3 : 43] Now, to their encouragement, this is what they have already been doing. It's something they are to continue doing. They have done it in Paul's presence, and even more so in his absence, demonstrating the reality of their faith in Christ.

But here his point is that what you do in the Christian life matters. How you live matters. What you do with your time matters. What you do with your gifts, your energy, your hopes, and your aspirations, all of that matters, and should be worked out with fear and trembling in the presence of God.

Now, I discovered, I think this is because one of my children pointed it out to me, but I can't remember which one, but that you can go on YouTube, and you can watch videos of people studying.

Do you know this? So that if you're struggling to concentrate at your desk, what you can do is you can go onto YouTube, and you can have a video of someone for a couple of hours or an hour, depending on how long you want to do study, of them just working on their books and doing their study.

And the idea is that doing your homework in the presence of somebody else doing their homework will inspire you not to be distracted or to get off and do something else.

[4 : 53] I don't know whether you think that might work, but if you think it might work for you, you can Google on YouTube or whatever, study with me or something, I think it is, and you can see these videos.

But in a sense, the Christian life is not quite like that, is it? But we are living our Christian lives in the presence of one who we are to be fearful of and tremble at.

Not in a sense of be afraid at, but one who is awesome in glory and power and exaltation. We live our lives in the presence of the exalted King Jesus.

And he's not on a YouTube channel, but he is in the heavenly places, and he is eternally aware of what we're doing. And that should make us take Christian living seriously, with fear and trembling.

But there's actually more to it than that, isn't there? If Paul left it there, we might think that Christian living was done in our own strength, as if the acknowledgement of the presence of Jesus was enough to drive us in our own strength to live the Christian life, as if God had saved us through Christ.

[5 : 55] And you guys, you better get on with it then. You better get on with living the Christian life. But it's not like that at all, is it? Instead, look at verse 13. We're to work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

Why? For it is God who is at work to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. This is incredible. It's Bible logic, because it makes no sense in any other way.

It's a logical Bible logic, if you like. We work hard, but actually it is God who is not only changing what we desire, but also giving us the power to do it.

He is at work, not only just on our wills and our desires, but also in our actions. For it is God is at work in you to will and to act according to, or in order to fulfill his good purposes.

So that working out our salvation is something that we really, really want to do because God really, really wants us to do it. And it's something we work really, really hard to do because God is working really, really hard for us to do it.

[7 : 01] It's the same in 1 Corinthians 15, verse 10. Did I actually put the verse on your handout or did I type it out? So yeah, here you go. 1 Corinthians 15, verse 10. Paul says, But by the grace of God, I am what I am.

And his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them. He experiences the grace of God and he works harder than all the other apostles.

Yet not I, he says, but the grace of God that was with me. In other words, he is working hard by the grace of God, whether then it is I or they. This is what we preach and this is what you believed.

I was thinking about this. I think it's impossible to illustrate this. I think you might think that we are like the engine of a car and God gives us the fuel.

But actually, that's not right, is it? Because he is both the fuel and the engine. But if you say that God is both the fuel and the engine, that might make me feel like you're just a passenger in your Christian life and you just sit back and let God do it all.

[8 : 03] But of course, that's not right either, is it? No, it's more like, I suppose, if you... I don't know whether this works, but it's like God has done a complete nut and bolt restoration of the engine of our lives and has swapped the gearbox around so that it's going in the opposite direction to what it was going in before.

So he is doing the work and he is giving us the fuel. He has given us new passions and new energy and so that we are going in the opposite direction than we were going before, full of the fuel of the spirit.

But we are driving hard in the Christian life, working out our salvation. So what I want you to think about just with the person next to you in just for a few minutes and then you can feed back to me is why is it important that we understand God is at work within us?

How does this help us avoid these two errors? One is legalism and the other is laziness. Okay, how does this prevent us from legalism or from laziness?

Why is it important that we understand God is at work within us? How does this help us avoid legalism and laziness? Speak to the person next to you for a couple of moments. If you're online, you can speak in your little group or you can think on your own.

[9 : 17] Okay, sorry if I'm interrupting your conversations, but let's share some of our thoughts. How does this prevent us from falling into legalism or laziness?

Anyone want to help us out? Yeah, yeah. Yes, if I understand salvation properly, I'm going to want to work hard.

What else do you say then, Ray? Sorry, finish that off for me. It's just that if God is working in us, if we understand it correctly, because you can understand it in a 40 way, if God is working within us and we understand that, we won't want to be lazy.

We will be wanting to honour what God is doing. Yes, yes. We will want to honour what God is doing. Yes. There is a sense in which God has given us something great and brilliant in the gospel, isn't it?

Regeneration gives us a whole new life and a whole new motive. And so we're going to want to use that, right? We're going to want to live that out. Like, how crazy to be given a whole new set of desires and a whole new set of energy and not want to do it.

[10 : 32] That'd be nuts, wouldn't it? It'd be like me handing you the keys of a sports car and you going, oh yeah, very interesting, and then just walking off and not driving it. Like, the Lord has given us a desire to love him that we never had before and the Spirit's power to do it.

Oh, wow, what an amazing way to live. Let's get on and do that. I don't want to be lazy about that. Yeah, I want to get on and do that. What about legalism? Go on, Elise.

We're not earning our way. Yeah. Yeah. We're not doing it because, you know, our thoughts are going to actually do it. Yeah. We say, it's the idea of actually going to be a saving me and becoming believers, the Spirit works in us to give these desires to do those things in accordance with God's will.

Yeah. So it's like, it's not because we really want to because we just have to do it. Yeah. It's like we have this desire that we really want to do it to serve the Lord and to the glory of him.

Yeah. So the desire to do it comes not from ourselves. So it can't be legalism because we're not earning anything with something that we've been given. Yeah. Yeah, that's right. Yeah.

[11 : 45] This is the offense of legalism, right? It tries to take what God has given us and pay him off with it. Right?

See, which is just such a stupid thing to do, isn't it? If God has given us new desires and new energy to live for him, the idea that then we could pay him with that when we've received it is utter nonsense, isn't it?

So this defends us against legalism because actually God gets the glory. You see that, don't you, in the 1 Corinthians 15 passage that I mentioned, that Paul is not afraid to say that you work really hard and lots of really brilliant things happen, but he's saying, no, that was grace at work in me.

It wasn't actually for my glory or for me. Okay, let's move on. Verse 14, the second instruction, do everything without grumbling or arguing.

Now, I think you could make a very good case for this being the instruction that is at the center of the whole passage. I'm not sure, but I think it's probably the only one in the imperative that we were talking about last week.

[12 : 46] All of those are more passive. And it comes with a reason as well, doesn't it? So that, verse 15, you may become blameless and pure children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.

Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky. I think this is utterly astonishing, okay? If I was to be mean and play a trick on you, I'm not going to do this, but if I was to be mean and play a trick on you, and I say to you, I want you to speak to the person next to you, and I want you, no context, just to define what it is to be pure and blameless as a Christian, what you might come up with.

I think you might come up with all sorts of different things. You might come up with something relating to humility, or to commitment to the life and ministry of a local church, or to reading your Bible, or to having pure thoughts, or to not watching too much television, or whatever it is.

And then I would say, ha ha, I got you. No, because being pure and blameless is not about any of those things. Paul's description of the blameless and pure life has one instruction to it, and it's this, stop grumbling and stop arguing.

Now, of course, that's not because Paul thinks that grumbling and arguing are the only sins in the Christian life. That would be completely illogical. Rather, I think it is because in the context of Philippians, Paul is concerned that grumbling and arguing are, get this, tolerated sins within the Christian community.

[14 : 12] That's, I think, the point. This, if you like, is the blind spot of the Corinthian church. The Corinthian church, which are so committed to gospel partnership, that take Christian ministry and mission so seriously, that is massively committed to the faithfulness of gospel ministry.

Right? So they are hugely committed to faithfulness. There's no doctrinal corrections here. Yet, they have this blind spot that they tolerate moaning, grumbling.

I think probably the two things, the grumbling and arguing, one, I think, is the internalization of moaning. It's what we do under our breath or on our own. And arguing is the externalization of it when we moan to others and we disagree and discuss with them about it.

I suggest to you this evening that there's not a more challenging verse in the Bible for us on a Sunday evening. We're the church keynos here.

I don't know whether you know that, but you are the church keynos. Yeah, you're the Twicers, right? Most of you. And yet, here, I think, is a blind spot for all of us. Here is what we might not have noticed, but which is a blemish on our walk with the Lord, which is that we grumble, we complain, we moan, we gripe, we argue.

[15 : 30] And that means, verse 15, that if we're like that, we fail to stand out in a warped and crooked generation that we live in. And we don't shine like stars in the sky.

In other words, I think the point is, if you grumble and argue, you are just like the world. I mean, they grumble and argue about different things, right?

They're not grumbling and arguing about the things that we're arguing about because they're not interested in those things. They're grumbling about other things. But actually, we just blend in. It's interesting, isn't it?

It's like this in 1 Corinthians 10. Turn, actually, to 1 Corinthians 10 because we're going to spend a little bit of time just there explaining this. Page 1151. 1 Corinthians chapter 10.

This is brilliant from Paul. For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under a cloud and that they passed through the sea.

[16 : 30] It's really fascinating here. Paul, writing to the Corinthian church, wants to invite them into the Old Testament as if it were their ancestors. Listen, I know not all of them are from Jewish backgrounds, but I want you to read the Old Testament as being the story of your story, of your ancestors.

They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.

Wow. Okay, your mind is now blown. How can the rock in the desert be Christ? How can walking through the Red Sea be baptism? Anyway, you can ask those questions to Nick at the end.

Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them and their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. So you know that, don't you, from your Old Testament story, that actually, despite all these great experiences of the saving power of God, rescuing them from Egypt, still, the wilderness is full of the bodies of fallen Israelites.

Now, these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Okay, so, Paul's saying, the Old Testament history of the people of Israel being brought through the wilderness is there, not only to tell us what happened, but also to teach us not to fall into the same sins.

[17 : 51] Okay, then, Paul, what are the sins? What are the sins of the Israelites? Okay, number one, verse seven, don't be idolaters as some of them were. Okay, so don't worship other gods as some of them did. As it's written, the people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.

It's the first thing, don't be an idolater. Secondly, verse eight, we should not commit a sexual immorality as some of them did. And in one day, 23,000 of them died. Verse nine, the third one, we shouldn't test Christ as some of them did and were killed by snakes.

Again, Christ is in the Old Testament. Their failure to obey is a testing of Christ. And fourthly, and I think we probably just skip over this, but this is really important, isn't it?

We understand idolatry, sexual immorality. We understand that we're not supposed to test Christ. Verse 10, and do not grumble as some of them did and were killed by the destroying angel.

I think Paul probably has in mind that Numbers 14, when the spies come back from the promised land to persuade the people that actually, do you know what? The promised land is amazing, but it's way too hard for us to get there.

[18 : 56] We're not gonna, you know, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb, the rest of them are like, there's no way, there's no way we'll be able to get there. There was no way we'll be able to conquer that. And so the Israelites moan and complain, have you brought us here to kill us in the desert?

You know, I wish that we'd just stayed in Egypt. And they grumble and they moan. It's that we'd be better off if we weren't even Christians. Life would be easier if we weren't trying to do this thing called church.

And they grumble and they moan. And that whole generation litter the wilderness with their dead bodies because they grumbled. Because they grumbled.

Now, I want you just in your pairs or groups or whatever to think about the answer to this question. Then we'll talk about it together. What do Christians tend to grumble about and why?

And why do we tend not to take it seriously? Okay, have a think about that. I don't think it's a difficult question. What do Christians tend to grumble about and why? And why do we tend not to take it seriously?

[19 : 55] And then we'll talk about it together. Okay. Do you want to share our answers? Great.

Let me repeat that for the Zoomers. Yeah, we grumble when we feel entitled to something and we don't get it. Yeah. Thank you, Charleston. That's really helpful. Yes. So that's really helpful, Mike.

We want to distinguish between a sinful grumbling and complaining in a sort of sinful sense and that it is right to raise things that are not right and to seek resolution to them.

And you see that, don't you? Particularly in the Psalms. The Psalmist is raising complaints with the Lord about things that... Yeah. Yeah. So that's a really helpful corrective.

Thank you, Mike. We do need to distinguish between that. We're not saying that Christians are never allowed to say anything bad. Yeah? So I think we've tried just to find out on you. So what would be a test?

[20 : 53] What is the acid test of the difference between righteous complaining and unrighteous grumbling? Yeah. Mike? Yeah. I wonder if...

That's one of the sorts of questions which is really difficult to give a definition to right now but you kind of know. in your own heart. Does that make sense? I wonder if maybe then the distinction, Liz, is that sinful grumbling is not seeking any resolution other than airing it, right?

Whereas complaining is seeking some kind of resolution with the Lord or with others, isn't it? So actually if I'm... Grumbling is that self-fulfilling thing where actually all I really want to do is moan or grumble about it.

I don't actually really want anything to change because I'm not really desiring change. I'm just grumbling. Can you still decide? Jen at the back? Yes. Yeah. Yeah.

It could be to do with your motives. Yeah. Jeff? Yeah. Yes. Yeah. Grumbling is the opposite of thankfulness, isn't it?

[22 : 00] In that sense. Yeah. Yeah. Do we ever have a right to be angry with God? I don't think so. I mean, I think we might be... There might be times when it's right and okay to, like we were saying before, raise a complaint with God about the situations and circumstances that we're facing in a psalmist-like way.

I'm really struck... When God comes and speaks to Jonah under the tree and goes, do you do well to be angry? And the answer is, no, you don't, Jonah. No.

Yeah. Why do we not tend to take grumbling seriously? Why do you think this is a blind spot?

Yeah. Great. Yeah. Because it's so normal. Because everybody does it. Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah. And people grumble in all sorts of different forums about all sorts of different things.

Yeah. It's challenging, isn't it? It's challenging. Right. Let's do the final instruction. Verse 16. Hold firmly to the word of life.

[23 : 09] Hold on. Hold firmly without letting go to the word of life. There's a reason for it as well, isn't there? Second half of verse 16. And or so, then I will be able to boast that my running wasn't vain and my labors were not vain.

Now, it's worth noticing what Paul is doing here. He's consistently doing this in the passage. He's pushing us forward to action and then pushing us back onto the word of God all at the same time. So hold firmly to the word of life.

He's pushing us back into the word of God. This work, you know, do this. Do this work. Go. Change. Hold.

Trust. Rely at the same time. You know, in a sense, forward motion in the Christian life is motion downwards into the word of God and the truths about Christ. You know, holding on is the same as moving on.

You know, Paul is running and laboring, but he doesn't want his running and laboring to be in vanity. He wants the Philippians to keep standing and keep holding firm to exactly where they are in the truth of God's word.

[24 : 16] I guess it's true to say, isn't it, that every generation of the church has a slightly different temptation to let go of the gospel in a slightly different way. Each culture or each particular background or congregation has a slightly different nuanced temptation to abandon the truth.

I think it was J.C. Ryle who said that the gospel itself is both very, very strong and powerful to save, but at the same time, it's very fragile because it's easy to break it. So you can break the gospel by adding to the gospel.

You can break the gospel by subtracting from the gospel, or you can break the gospel by neglecting it or by twisting it or tampering with it. It might be that we add to it rules or peripheral beliefs.

It might be that we subtract from it so that it's fundamentally changed or that we just neglect to talk about it so that it is not heard. So I think it's worth us thinking, and we'll do this perhaps just as a big group just before we finish.

What are our temptations to let go of the gospel? How does this work in our culture? So when we're told to hold on, where do we find the pressure to let go? And what are people's thoughts on that?

[25 : 26] Where are we tempted to let go as we're told to hold firmly to the word of life? Yes, so the temptation to let go of the gospel because it seems like you get a better life by letting go.

Yeah. That's the lie of the devil from the Garden of Eden, isn't it? He's God really good. Is he? Are you sure he is? Because he's withholding this from you.

Are you sure he's good? Yeah. And it comes in all sorts of different guises, doesn't it? To all sorts of different people. Yeah. That's really helpful, thanks Lee. Anything else? Yeah.

An intellectual idolatry. That's really fascinating. Would it be fair to summarize it something like this, that you fail to hold on to the word of life by removing any sense of mystery or the unknown in it?

Yeah, so if you can fail to hold on to the word of life by making either God too simple, so that you just think you can understand everything about him, or Christian living easy.

[26 : 31] Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, so if your version of the Christian life is easy and your version of God is simple, then you have not really understood. Yeah. I mean, I was reading a statement about somebody that went into younger and stuff and they said, oh, this helps me to worship God better.

And I thought to myself, oh, it's because the view of God that you have done, there's no mystery. Yeah. Yeah. Interesting. Yeah, that's helpful. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. To make up for something that they left in their relationship with God.

Yeah. That is really interesting. Yes. Do you compromise, whether it's work or relationships or whatever, that it's, and it's almost like the fear of men, in a way, because you know what the gospel is all about, but the compromise may be, well, actually, I'm not going to actually say, like, I'm going to water it down.

Yeah. Or I'm not going to live the way the Bible says to live. Otherwise, I may not have friends or I may not have a job or whatever. Yeah. And we find ourselves compromising the truth of the gospel in order to achieve our aim.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So we can compromise the truth in order to try and get ourselves on in life. Yeah. Oh, the Christian life's too hard, too difficult. We're not going to, we're going to twist and compromise it that way.

[27 : 50] Last bit, Charleston. Yeah. Okay. Yes. I think you're right, Charleston. I think the pressure to compromise around relationships in all sorts of different ways is massive, isn't it?

Yeah. Massive. Yeah. Great. We've run out of time. Paul just wraps up this section, doesn't he, with his joy and gladness that's interestingly not dependent on him playing a big part, but rather in verse 17 that he is like the drink offering, the small libation, as it was called, poured out on the big offering of the Philippian church in sacrificial service of the Lord.

Paul is just happy. I get to play a part in this and that's enough for me in joyful participation in what Christ is doing in them. And he says, verse 18, that that should bring them joy too.

So you too should be glad and rejoice with me. In other words, and we'll end with this thought, Paul knows of no better way to be happy, to be a happy Christian than to pour out yourself in the service of others to the glory of Christ.

If you're not happy or joyful as a Christian, then this is the way to find joy, to pour yourself out in the service of others to the glory of Christ.

[29 : 02] Let me pray and then we'll stand and sing as we praise. Heavenly Father, these have been challenging words for us this evening. And so we pray, please, that you might help us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

We pray that you might help us to do everything without grumbling or arguing. And we pray that you might help us to hold firmly to the word of life. And even as we say and pray these things, we know and we rejoice in the fact that it is you who is at work in us to will and to act according to your good purpose.

So we praise your name in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.