

## | Philippians |

### Week 6 Scripture Guide | Philippians 2:12-18

#### **Biblical Context**

In this section, Paul returns to his original purpose of citing Jesus' example in 2:1-11, which is living lives worthy of the gospel (1:27). Paul does this by focusing on three primary things. One is their obedience to God (2:12-13). Two is their witness to the world (2:14-16). And three is their's and Paul's common suffering in gospel ministry (2:17-18).

**v. 12-13** First Paul begins the section with their obedience to God. He commands the Philippians to get to work. The word *κατεργάζεσθε* is translated work-out, which means to expend effort so that something gets produced. Thus, they are to cultivate their salvation. Strive for it. Expend some mental, physical, and spiritual energy for the sake of their salvation.<sup>1</sup> Because of Jesus and his obedience on their behalf, their lives should be conspicuously marked by obedience.

Another thing to note is that this command is not given to individual Christians, per se. The "your" given is plural in the Greek whereas "salvation" is singular. This means there was to be a common act of working out their shared salvation was to be a communal effort. So it could be rendered: *Y'all work out y'all's salvation*. Thus the working-out of the Philippian church's salvation should have been evidenced by a transformed community and transformed lives within that community.

Paul grounds his command in the power and presence of God. Using the terminology again, he relates their work to what God is doing: working (*ἐνεργῶν*, same root in v. 12). As they are working, these Christians have God working in them, so that they desire holiness and expend holy energy for God's purposes. Thus, God doesn't plan to leave the Philippians the way he found them. The work God begins when they first believed in the gospel should now continue in daily faith and obedience (1:6). And yet, this doesn't happen apart from their awestruck reverence for God; it should evoke fear and trembling. Why fear and trembling? Just like when Mt. Sinai shook (Exo 19:18) when God came down to the Israelites, the same God has come down to the Philippians.

**vv. 14-16** Next Paul turns to their witness to the world. Paul repeats a similar charge that he gave at the beginning of the chapter. They need to focus on the health and harmony of their church community. Back in 2:2-3 he told them to have "one mind" and have the "same love" and do away with all their rivalries between each other. Now he says to stop complaining and being so argumentative with each other. Why? Because they have been made children of God, who were born in the likeness of their "older brother" Jesus (Rom 8:29).

In the next sentence he changes the metaphor. Paul tells the Philippians they shine (*φάινεσθε*) like lights (*φωστῆρες*) in the world (*κόσμῳ*). In some Bibles, *φωστῆρες* is translated as lights, or others translate it as stars. Either fits, but a strong case can be made for stars. This would make sense because of where he says they are placed - in the *κόσμῳ* Though translated as "world" in most Bible versions, it is the same root word for what we call "outer space", or at times what the Old Testament calls "the heavens". So thinking of it as "shine like stars in the heavens" opens up many possible parallels within the rest of

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon Fee writes, "[Whether] their final salvation will be realized personally and individually... is not at issue here... [This passage] is about how saved people live out their salvation." (Fee, Gordon (1995). *Paul's Letter to the Philippians - The New International commentary on the New Testament*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company) There is some tension here however. Jesus saves us completely (Heb 7:25). Thus, our faith in his work on our behalf is intended to produce the Spirit's work within us (Rom 8:3-4, Rom 6:13-14, Eph 2:10).

Scripture. For example, one such parallel could be in Genesis 1. On the first day God speaks and makes light shine out of darkness (Gen 1:3). Then on the fourth he puts lights into the heavens, the sun, the moon, and the stars, to “give light upon the earth” (Gen 1:14-17). In this way the Philippians are put in the world to do the same job as the very first works of creation. Another possible parallel comes from Daniel 12:3, “those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.” Thus Paul compares the Philippians to God’s chosen people who were in prison-exile yet carried on worshipping God (Dan 6:10) and proclaiming his kingdom (Dan 4:17).

Continuing with the star/light parallels, in the last phrase of this passage, the Philippians are to shine and hold out light. In fact, the word ἐπέχοντες, though usually translated “holding fast/firm”, could instead be rendered “holding forth”. What are they holding? The word of life. Which is Jesus himself, the Word of God, the true light. Who in the same way, held out light for the world. In him was the light of life, which the “corrupt and twisted” darkness could not overcome (John 1:5).

**vv. 17-18** Lastly Paul focuses on their common mission and suffering for the sake of the gospel. The upshot of it all is their joy, since they have shared in Paul’s sufferings by participating in his gospel ministry. He tells them that he may be poured out,<sup>2</sup> perhaps thinking of death in prison or perhaps sometime soon afterwards. There is yet a deeper connection to the Hebrew sacrificial rites that God gave the ancient priesthood (Exo 29:40). God commanded that various offerings of rams, bulls, or grain would have about two-bottles worth of wine poured on top of them as they were burned. Though maybe a costly sacrifice for them, a drink offering was another opportunity for humble worship and thanks to God, who called it all a pleasing aroma. Then to describe the Philippians’ faith, Paul uses the word λειτουργία (the same root for liturgy) which means a worshipful service. Paul is saying that he is glad to be the wine offering poured out on top of their faithful sacrifice of service. He rejoices in their faith, and he calls them to rejoice in his.

### **Connection and Application**

As Christians, whose spiritual life began with the gospel when we first believed, it is to continue on in bearing fruit from the same gospel. This was Paul’s charge to the Philippians in 1:27, “live lives worthy of the gospel”. In other words, he calls them to live in congruity with the truth and power revealed to them. Now in 2:13-18, he expands it again. Christians are to “work out” what God has “worked in” them. Christians are to obey God to bring into full fruit that decisive work of salvation that he first started in them (1:6). We are able to do this because God’s good pleasure is working within us for our ultimate good. Then, in light of that, we are to be shining examples of God’s glorious work to the world (2:16). Since we have been adopted as his children (2:15) we are now made like his son, the light of the world (John 8:12), to bring light to a dark world. Lastly, we are to imitate the life of Christ and the example of Paul, which was a life devoted to sacrificial suffering for the sake of joy. Like the Philippians, we are called to join in sacrificial living that seeks to find joy in our daily walk with Christ.

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<sup>2</sup> There is a strong connection to this thought in 2 Timothy where Paul writes his final letter. In it, Paul writes from prison again, and he acknowledges that the end of his ministry has come (2 Tim 4:6-7). But he doesn’t view being poured out as a cause for sorrow. He recognizes that his whole life has been analogous to a drink offering to God.