

## PHILIPPIANS BIBLE STUDY

Philippians 2:14-18

Lesson #16

### OBEDIENCE, WITHOUT GRUMBLING

*12 So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.* Phil 2:12-13 (NASB)

*14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing; 15 so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, 16 holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain. 17 But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. 18 You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.* Phil 2:14-18 (NASB)

### INTRODUCTION

Today we're completing the section of verses that we began several weeks ago from chapter two of Philippians. I said previously that the general theme of this chapter from verses 1 through 18 could be called a humble attitude of obedience to God. I could have also added a loving concern for others to that title, because that's a significant part of this teaching as well. They both kind of go together, don't they?

In the preceding verses we've been given an objective (vv1-4) which is: to think the same way, to have the same love, to share the same feelings, and to have the same goal. Easy enough words to understand, but have you ever experienced any church or other group who actually accomplished this? I don't think I ever have, at least not for very long. Some come closer than others, and some may look like they do for a little while, but in the end, even Paul himself found that this just doesn't seem to happen very easily, as he expresses in verses 20 and 21 of this same chapter.

Since our objective is so lofty, we're given a visible example toward whom we're to look while in the process of striving toward this objective. In verses 5-11 Jesus Christ is held up as the perfect model of humble attitude and unwavering obedience, and we are told to have this same attitude in us that was also in Him.

I've been involved in a lot of discussions in my Christian life that bring up the point that the scriptures often tell us to do something that seems, or is, impossible for us to do. If you say this in a public forum then immediately somebody jumps up and insists that God would never command us to do anything that we aren't capable of doing, because that would be unfair on God's part. And surely God is not unfair is He? Have you ever heard this debate before, or maybe even been involved in it yourself? Maybe even you were that one who jumped up and cried "unfair."

This was exactly the gist of the objection Paul dealt with in Romans chapter 9 concerning the sovereignty of God to do as He pleases with His own possessions without answering to the questioning of His own creation. The problem isn't with coming up with an acceptable answer, it's with the asking of the question in the first place. The question is the problem, not the answer. The answer is simple enough to understand, it's just hard to accept, if you don't have an understanding of the absolute and unquestionable sovereignty of God over His own creation. There are many who will agree with the concept that God is sovereign, but then immediately object when he actually **exercises** that sovereignty.

But God isn't just sovereign in **concept**, He is fully free to **exercise** that sovereignty at will, according to His own good pleasure, without being in violation of any kind of perceived rules of fairness or divine righteousness. God's sovereignty not only extends to the **force** of His will, it also extends to the **exercise** of His will, in whatever manner He so pleases to accomplish His own purposes.

The fact is, God is constantly commanding us to do things that we can't possibly do ourselves. For example, we are told to be perfect as He is perfect. (Mat 5:48) We are told to be holy as He is holy (1 Pet 1:15-16) . We are told to believe in Him for our salvation, and then we're told that **none can do that** unless they are being specifically drawn by the Father. (Jn 6:44,65) So, is God a mean old tyrant who doesn't treat His poor little creatures fairly?

Unless we come to realize, from the scriptures, that God has a very specific long range plan that He is divinely accomplishing, and that He has every right to execute that plan however He sees fit, then we will be hopelessly trapped in this minute little human perspective that we live in. And giving His children tasks that are beyond their capability is something that He is doing intentionally, and for a very specific reason. This is an indispensable part of His long range eternal kingdom plan

And now I will tie this into the point of these verses that we're discussing about attitude. You thought I was off on a tangent, but there actually is a good reason for what I've just been saying about God's sovereignty and our acceptance of it. The command to have the attitude of Christ Jesus is something that we just can't do by ourselves. We can try our best, and we can make significant progress, but in the end , just as Paul will say in the next chapter of the epistle, he hadn't yet arrived either but kept pressing on toward the goal. And that my friends, from God's perspective, is the whole point.

Firstly, We are given a perfect goal, set by a perfect example, toward which we are to set our sights and labor our whole lives. That goal had to be higher than we could possibly achieve on our own, or we wouldn't ever come to realize the immense value of the fulfillment of that goal when Christ returns for us and completes within us, Himself, that which we strove for, and longed for, our whole entire lives. It is God's intention that we come to see, understand, and earnestly desire a righteousness that we cannot achieve by ourselves, and that we all come to completely and fully recognize that fact, by striving our whole lives toward an unattainable goal which He gave us **for that very reason.**

The almighty God of creation has determined to share with us **His own righteousness.** And He insists that we realize the magnitude and value of that free unmerited gift that is totally unattainable any other way. And thus, we spend a lifetime striving toward that which we are intentionally unable to achieve, so that when the end arrives, we are adequately prepared to accept the gift that He has prepared for us from before creation. Vessels of mercy, predestined from before creation to contain the very glory of God that He has decided to share with us, His elect children. (Rom 9:23)

And secondly, it is against this backdrop of human helplessness and hopelessness that God chooses to demonstrate the greatness of His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, lost and helpless, God sent His Son to die for us in our place to redeem us from our lost situation and thereby visibly display His glory in an unprecedented act of mercy and kindness toward those who hadn't done anything whatever themselves to deserve it. God uses this situation to display the boundaries of His great mercy to all creation, **and this is exactly what He has planned from the beginning.**

Let me make an example: a woman has a house that is very cluttered and unkept. She sees the need to clean it up and has the desire to do so. Based on this perception of the need, and the desire to make corrections, she diligently sets herself at the task of cleaning it all up. But, days and even weeks go by, and she sees that she isn't making any real progress. As soon as one area gets cleaned another area seems to just pop up. She finally realizes that the job is bigger than she can ever do by herself. Then suddenly a neighbor knocks at the door and says she and her friends have come to volunteer to help clean her house. Together they make short work of the job and the house is clean and pristine.

Now, how grateful will the woman be for the neighbors help? If she had never started the process in the first place, and hadn't spent weeks of diligent labor trying, then the neighbor's offer would have been of little or no value at all would it? In fact she might have even considered it an insult. The level of her appreciation will be based on her perceived value of the work that was donated. And the value of that work will depend on just how much she wanted it in the first place, and how long she had spent, and how hard she had labored, trying unsuccessfully to do it by herself.

What makes God's gift of salvation valuable to us? If we're given something for free that we believe we can do ourselves whenever we wish, then it's just a convenience isn't it? But, if it's something that we could never ever possibly do ourselves, then it's a priceless treasure isn't it? This is the point of all those admonitions of the scriptures calling us to a higher level of righteousness than we can ever possibly attain on our own.

And, it serves to visibly distinguish and separate those who really seek and value the righteousness of God from those who only claim they do but don't demonstrate it with their lives and actions. So that we may know which one we are.

Now, there are two ways we can deal with this scriptural truth. One, we can throw in the towel and say that if God already knows we can't do it by ourselves then what's the purpose of even trying to be Christlike in our lives, we're just going to fail anyway? And many professing Christians take this very attitude. The let go and let God bunch who willingly acknowledge defeat and throw the whole thing back on God to do in the sweet by and by. But, if there was no active and conscientious striving toward Godly righteousness in a persons life, then of how much value will it be to them if it was indeed granted? God is not going to have a family of quitters. Only those who **persevere to the end** in their striving against sins temptations will find themselves to be among the saved and elect. (Mt 10:22, 24:13; Mk 13:13) The rest will hear the words "depart from Me, you who [continue to] practice lawlessness." (Mat 7:23)

These people are missing the whole point of salvation. Which involves the preparation process to become vessels of mercy and glory, which process is called sanctification. I hope this doesn't shock you, but according to the scriptures, God didn't save you for the purpose of saving you, He saved you for the purpose of glorifying Himself. This foundational truth has been missing from many of the churches for a long time, but it lies at the very heart of the master plan of God. But we ourselves are often so man centered that we don't recognize it when we read it over and over in the scriptures.

(Salvation is by His grace, and salvation is for His glory)

The other group however, are those who hunger and thirst for His righteousness **because** they perceive the value of it, and diligently seek it with a pure heart, regardless of the difficulties involved. God will only acknowledge those as His who have perceived the value of His gift of righteousness and earnestly pursued it. We know we will not get it in this earthly life, but it is in this earthly life that we must come to realize the value of it, and are thus adequately prepared to be the vessels that may eventually contain it. God will not put His righteousness into any vessel that isn't rightfully appreciative of the value of it. And we grow that appreciation here on this earth by daily striving for it with all our hearts and souls, even while knowing full well that we'll not be able to complete it until Christ's return. But then, He will.

We begin the process of developing the attitude of Christ Jesus by a diligent process of the study of scriptures. Then we practice putting that knowledge into action in our daily living by being obedient to it. By both our successes and our failures we come to see and appreciate the value of God's gifts, and our attitude is progressively becoming transformed into the image of Christ's, so that He will be the first born of many like minded brothers. And for this purpose we were predestined from before creation. (Rom 8:29-30)

It's amazing but true that probably 95% of evangelical Christianity believes that God saves sinners for no grander purpose than to keep some of them from going to hell. This is even more amazing in the face of the preponderance of scriptures that plainly state that God saves sinners to display His own glory. For which (glory) He made all mankind, and even the whole universe. He made some expressly to display the glory of His mercy (Moses and the children of Israel), and some expressly to display the glory of His power. (Pharaoh and the Egyptian army). (Rom 9:9-24)

(Use example of writer of Superman Hero)

I want every born again believer to fully understand his or her purpose and his or her responsibilities as they are described in the holy scriptures. First, we must accept the fact that we will not achieve perfect righteousness here in this earthly realm, because Jesus said that His kingdom was not of this realm. Therefore it is not ours either. In this realm there will be persecutions and trials in various types and degrees. Though not all will be the same.

Do not judge the success of God's work by what you see and hear in this world. Neither by your own successes or failures. But rather, be encouraged if you find yourself to be in the fight. If you seek for a righteousness and obedience that you value and desire but just can't seem to obtain, then rejoice and give thanks, because that's exactly what's supposed to be happening to the children of God at this stage of the master plan. You are a vessel of mercy being prepared to contain and display, for eternity, the marvelous glory of God. Do not expect this to be painless or trouble free.

Do not love the world, or the things of this world, for they are not of God. Do not listen to those false prophets who tell you that God wants to bolster your self esteem, and financially prosper you in this world. That is exactly the opposite of the scripture's teaching. God demands that we be humbled, as demonstrated by Christ in His incarnation, and that we set our treasure in heaven, not here on this earth. (Mt 6:21)

If you're listening to one of those deceivers who's preaching this prosperity gospel today, then get out of there right now. This man or woman is not sent from God, he is a false teacher with sinister motives, no matter how pretty he smiles or how sweet she looks. They are appealing to your residual earthly desires to lure you into their camp. (2Pet 2:1-3) Get out of there, and don't give him or her any more of your money. If you won't give them your money then they probably won't want you any more anyway, though some just want the recognition and respect they can get.

The good news is that although we are commanded to labor toward a task that we ourselves can't possibly accomplish, nevertheless it eventually will be accomplished to perfection at the appointed time of Christ's return. (Phi 1:6) That which He started in us, He will bring to completion in us, but only after our striving on our own long enough to realize that it is an impossible task without Him. This is that blessed hope of the return of Jesus, who will vindicate His name and put our struggle with the old sin nature to an end. That honor has been reserved by the Father for His Son at His coming. And for these reasons and many more, we ever cry, Come Lord Jesus and redeem us from these fleshly bodies and provide for us a heavenly body fashioned in your own likeness. In which no sin nature dwells. Hallelujah.

There will be no boasting tolerated in the kingdom of God, because everyone there will have come to fully understand, and freely confess, that they are there solely on the mercy of God, and not in any way on their own merits. As the scriptures say, Let those who boast, boast in The Lord. (1Cor 1:31; 2Cor 10:17)

Now I've taken this particular track through these verses about the attitude of Christ Jesus because, if we are in a real church that's regularly and accurately teaching the word of God, then we are frequently being reminded of our inadequacies and failures. So then, once in a while we need to be reminded that though the road to the kingdom is a rough and rugged one, it is more than worth the struggle. (Rom 8:18). Jesus said that we all must strive (literally agonize) to enter into the kingdom of heaven (Lk 13:24) If you feel that it isn't a difficult road, then you quite possibly aren't really on the road that's going there. So that there's no misunderstanding, that doesn't mean that the road isn't desirous to us, it just means that the way which we desire is not so easily traveled. Which is, that righteous road of obedience to God.

Now for clarity let me say that it isn't about whether we are or aren't good enough, or spiritual enough; none of us are now, or ever will be, in this life. It's about having a genuine desire, from the heart, to get there, and being willing to start every new day with a renewed commitment to become more Christlike than the day before, even when we know ahead of time that the task is more than we can handle by ourselves. Because, in our hearts, the expectation of the eventual goal is well worth the difficulty of the journey. When speaking about salvation, Jesus said that with man many things are impossible, but with God all things are possible. (Mt 19:26; Mk 10:27; Lk 18:27)

The command of scripture, and the desire of our hearts is to strive to have in us the same attitude that was in Christ Jesus, because someday, when the appointed time arrives, **He will bring that work to completion.** And in the meantime, we are being kept by the power of God, through faith, for a salvation ready to be revealed in that last time. (1Pet 1:5) Therefore, we do not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap the harvest of God's righteous salvation, if we do not grow weary. (Gal 6:9)

Now a very, very quick summation of verses 14-18 tells us to do everything the scriptures teach without grumbling or arguing so that we will be blameless and pure, children of God who are faultless amidst a crooked and perverted generation. Now this was written over 1900 years ago, but that crooked and perverted generation is still alive and well. In fact it's flourishing as much as ever, and therefore our job of shining as stars in the world is just as applicable now as it was when it was written. **(God is glorified by the testimony of His redeemed)**

If you can't beat em then join em seems to be the motto of the churches of today, but that's not the call of God to His children. His call is to come out from among them and be holy. (2Co 6:17) In context this is a call not to go out of the world, but to abstain from those crooked and perverted things of the world. Yes, The world is the mission field, but we are not to indulge ourselves in its practices, or pretend to condone them. On the contrary, we are to shine like stars in the world by virtue of our righteous behaviors, and even expose those things which are the evil works of the devil, which is our testimony to the glory of God's redemption. **(Explain the difference between exposing as opposed to judging.) (Christians are not commissioned to be policemen, we are commissioned to be messengers. We warn, God judges)**

We are told to hold firmly the message of life. Which life is manifested in the transformed behaviors of the saints. The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. And is worked out through a saving faith that affords redemption, regeneration, sanctification, and ongoing transformation, that all will be brought to completion at the glorious return of Jesus Christ or Lord.

***20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; 21 who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.***

Phil 3:20-21 (NASB)

In lieu of this understanding, Paul can truly say to the Philippian believers that even if he is being poured out as a drink offering (that is, even if he is executed by the Romans) nevertheless, he shares his joy of salvation with the saints, and implies that they are not to be discouraged or fearful either, but rather to likewise share the joy of their salvation with him also.

At the end of verse 18 Paul has concluded his thought on the attitude of Christ and the obedience of the saints, and puts in some personal information of interest in the remaining verses 19-30.

In these verses Paul turns his tone of speaking from that of a teacher to that of a father or brother. He speaks to some of them by name and commends those who have diligently labored in the ministry. He shows his own personal feelings for them and his genuine concern for their health and welfare as well as their spiritual condition.

In verses 20 & 21 he kind of vents his own frustrations to the Philippians over some of those who had previously served full time in the ministry with him, but had subsequently left the full time service to attend to some of their own personal and family matters. He doesn't condemn them for that directly, but he clearly feels it was a misplacing of priorities on their part, which may be safely inferred from the tone of the sentence.

But, having considered that, Jesus chose 12 men to be His Apostles, and most of them were married with families and jobs. (1Cor 9:5) Paul recommended that everyone should remain single if they had that gift, but then acknowledged that not all did. So they would have additional troubles in life that the single person wouldn't have to contend with. (1Cor 7:28) And such was, and still is, the burden of all to rightly balance our time and efforts while here on this earth. But that Christ demands to be **our first love** is beyond any question. (Rev 2:4)

Next week we'll begin in chapter three where Paul resumes his instructional demeanor and turns his attention to some "would be" teachers, that were troubling the church with false teachings and doctrines that were contrary to the truths of the gospel that Paul had taught them earlier.

Have you ever noticed that every one of the New Testament books includes verses dealing with false teachings or false teachers? Why didn't it just leave these parts out and just speak about happy things? After all, isn't the gospel supposed to be "good news?" Why didn't the writers just leave all that bad stuff out? Then it would really be good news, right? Is that true, should the bad stuff have been left out?

The fact is, the New Testament is either the best news that one could ever possibly hear, or it is the worst news that one could ever possibly hear. "I have good news and I have bad news" declares the New Testament. And within the texts of those 27 books is all the information necessary for anyone to find out which one of those persons they are. Is it for you good news, or is it bad news. You can only know if you read it. All of it, the good and the tragic, the promises and the warnings, and act upon it accordingly.

You may be in a church that has decided to simply skip over all those warnings and stick to the loving stuff. You may have decided to try to do that yourself. But if that were God's intention then He wouldn't have put all that stuff in the scriptures in the first place, and skipping over, or even just intentionally minimizing any scripture, is done so at one's own peril.

Nobody likes confrontation. Well, almost nobody. But unless false teachings are exposed, along with their teachers, the truth of scripture becomes hopelessly mired in a collage of errors, myths, and superstitions. So, Paul now openly deals with some of those errors and their teachers, and exposes them for just exactly what they are.

The fact is, without the pure and undefiled truth, there is no church, no matter how many people are meeting there. (1Tim 3:15) The church is where the divine truth of God is revealed and where it is supported, maintained, and protected. Without it we are nothing but another social group. I wish we understood this better today. But more on this next week.

To God Be The Glory.

Narrow Gate Baptist Church - Miami  
Robert Andrews, Pastor

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