**Work Out Your Salvation**

**Pastor Mike Thompson / Fish Lake Chapel / Nov 24th, 2024 / Philippians 2:12**

**WORK OUT YOUR SALVATION (2:12)**

**November 24th**

**READING THE TEXT**

**12So then, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence but even more in my absence, continue working out your salvation with awe and reverence, 13for the one bringing forth in you both the desire and the effort—for the sake of his good pleasure—is God. 14Do everything without grumbling or arguing, 15so that you may be blameless and pure, children of God without blemish though you live in a crooked and perverse society, in which you shine as lights in the world 16by holding on to the word of life so that on the day of Christ I will have a reason to boast that I did not run in vain nor labor in vain.**

**INTRODUCTION**

Many people think of the Christian life mostly in the negative. Don’t go around any bad people. Don’t go to the movies because some movies are bad. Don’t go to restaurants if they serve liquor. Don’t ever hang around unbelievers because their influence will drag you down.

We don’t want to put ourselves in places that are completely and obviously evil. However, sequestering and isolating is not **“working out your salvation.”** It is impossible to live out the mission of the church if we have no connection with those who need to be saved.

Other people think this passage primarily speaks to our private devotions and prayer time with God. We think; “hey if I get alone and really connect with God then I am working out my salvation.” Private time with God is very important. But avoiding fellowship is like feeding yourself breakfast and giving yourself a pep talk and ignoring your family for the rest of the day. You might feel good, but the family is neglected and suffers.

Paul is writing to a group of people and instructing churches, not just individuals. Yes, we feed ourselves but that is only to give us strength to work out our salvation as we engage with other believers.

Much of The American evangelical church focuses on intimacy and personal connection with God (which is good), but often at the expense of reverence for God and fellowship with others. Many unwittingly think Jesus is like a boyfriend only better. Praying is like going on a date and it’s just me and Jesus as He whisks me away from the world. If I just hang out with Jesus all by myself, I don’t need other people. I don’t even need the church. After all, God is for a personal relationship with him, but he is not for religion. This might be the most widely distributed fallacy in the history of the church. God doesn’t like religion. If that is the case, why did James tell us to participate in true religion?

**James 1:27 27Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their adversity and to keep oneself unstained by the world.**

Religion is the intentional practice of our faith alongside other believers in God’s church. That is a primary way we work out our salvation. The Church is set up as a body. And if there is no engagement with other believers it is impossible to work out our salvation with fear and trembling the way God wants us to. As a group of believers practicing true religion, we put our resources together and care for orphans and widows and people in need. In the practice of true religion was encourage one another to live a holy life. We pray for one another, confess to one another, and grow in Christ and His word together.

When you hear of people avoiding going to church because God hates religion but wants only a personal relationship with me, please cringe along with me. You can’t have a strong and obedient relationship with God apart from God’s church. We can’t fully work out our salvation with fear and trembling apart from the body of Christ.

Some claim they can’t find the right church. Usually that is because they camp out on hobby horse issues and make minor issues into major ones. We must have our style of singing or we must all read from the right bible, the one I use. We must do communion the right way and there should be liturgy or there can be no liturgy. So, we can’t find the right church because people won’t embrace our hobby horse issue and make our minor thing a major thing. Often people say we can’t find the right church but don’t really try because if we are honest, we don’t want to get up on Sunday morning and prioritize fellowship over the pregame show or just sleeping in.

But Paul tells us to find a church and stay there and work out our salvation with fear and trembling, not by church hopping or fault finding or perfectionism or badgering others to be more like us. Let’s work through these passages together as a means of working out our salvation.

**12So then, my dear friends** (a church)**, just as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence but even more in my absence, continue working out your salvation with awe and reverence, 13for the one bringing forth in you both the desire and the effort—for the sake of his good pleasure—is God.**

GOD DOES THE “WORKING”

Recently, when Chinese diplomats were visiting SanFrancisco there was a huge effort to clean up thousands of homeless encampments and remove the garbage and excrement from the streets. Company was coming so we’d better clean up. But that rings hollow for many. We should keep things right all the time, and not just clean up when company is coming.

It is the same for Paul, who wants the church to continue to work out their salvation even in his absence. He tells us to “work out” our salvation with reverence and awe. Let’s start with the phrase ***“working out our salvation.”***

At first blush this looks like something we undertake working out salvation with great effort by our own human willpower. We think up things to do and then gut them out and follow through. But that would be inconsistent with the rest of scripture and Paul’s teaching.

Our part is to seek him and yield to the work that God desires to do in us. Seek God and yield. That is our work and that is our part. God brings the desire (will) and effort (motivation) for us to do things His way.

In fact, I would boldly claim that no person has ever been saved from their sin because they turned their life around. They were saved when they yielded to the work that God was already doing in their life to draw them to faith in Christ. How do we know that? Jesus told us…

**John 6:44 “no one can come to me (Jesus) unless the Father draws Him.”**

The implication is that we don’t have to try to talk people into the faith. We can look at where God is already moving and stirring hearts and invest in that work. It is the same with sanctification. Those whom God is moving to dig into the word of God will get all kinds of attention and investment. Those who are playing at their faith will not get the same investment. They will get love and encouragement but none of us can talk someone into being thirsty for more of God and less of themselves.

**Awe and Reverence:**

Let’s turn our attention to the words “awe and reverence.” As we stated in the introduction, many churches focus on the intimacy of God but almost completely ignore the reverence of God and standing in awe of God. God’s holiness is his highest attribute. But we treat intimacy and love as God’s highest attribute.

When we truly get ahold of the holiness of God everything changes and gets ordered rightly in our mind and life. Considering his holiness, we want to work out our salvation. We want to drop pretentiousness. Considering God’s holiness, we no longer camp out minor issues and focus on fault finding.

So the way we work out our salvation with awe and reverence is to focus our eyes on God and who He really is. With God’s help we truly get ahold of God’s holiness, and this causes awe and reverence and everything changes. We work out our salvation once we see God as He really is, and then we take a humble reverent attitude into our prayer life and fellowship with others.

**14Do everything without grumbling or arguing, 15so that you may be blameless and pure, children of God without blemish though you live in a crooked and perverse society, in which you shine as lights in the world**

***Vs 14 No complaining or arguing***

(so that)

***Vs 15 We can be blameless, without fault***

(pure) (no blemish)

Result…

**Vs 15 We are lights shining in a dark world**

I hope we see the connections here and do not take any of these verses in isolation. They are all connected. We are called to avoid grumbling and complaining, why? Because it hurts my ears and makes me tense? No. We avoid grumbling and complaining because that is part of what it looks like to remain pure and blameless in the world.

The world is filled with grumbling and complaining. What if we stood out because we refused to be grumbling and complaining people? This world is filled with fault finding, blaming, playing the victim and searching for bad people so that we can be the good ones. But we know that all have fallen short of God’s glory. All are corrupt and all need forgiveness. So, we don’t have to fault find. We are all at fault. When we get ahold of God’s holiness and see him with awe and reverence everything changes. We no longer care about complaining or grumbling because our focus is on God instead of the small faults and differences between us.

The result of being slow to complain and slow to grumble and fault find is that we become blameless. We are not joining in the world’s sin of hating others. We just went through a political season in which people dehumanized their opponents calling them Hitler or fascist or racist instead of comparing their policies to the policies of their opponents. I have never seen an entire campaign based almost entirely on slandering or bad-mouthing one’s opponents while giving almost no policy positions. That is what we must not join, slandering, grumbling, complaining reveal a heart with no faith and no trust that God has plans that will not fail.

Instead of fault findings and slandering we are called to do verse 16;

**16by holding on to the word of life so that on the day of Christ I will have a reason to boast that I did not run in vain nor labor in vain.**

Jesus and his apostles laid down their lives so that we would have the gospel of salvation by grace through faith. In the face of persecution Paul invested his life in getting churches planted and writing instructions. So, if we live according to the flesh and we act like the world we make the labor of Paul useless to us.

How do we hold to this word of life delivered to us by Jesus, the Apostles and faithful witnesses. We must know the word of life to hold on to the word of life. And we must allow the word of life to have its affect on us and shape us.

**SUMMARY / APPLICATION**

Definitions:

1. **Arguing** = reasoning in mind which has turned negative and become grumbling and complaining
   1. Example: Grumbling: Old Testament Jews in Egypt, desert and promised land.
      1. Note: Our inner dialogue matters!
2. **Blameless** = Pure or without mixture / dilution
   1. Nothing that leaves room for scandal
      1. Example: Regarding Daniel, charges had to be invented
3. **Without Blemish**
   1. **Psalm 139:23-24 “examine my O God and probe my thoughts. Test me and know my concerns (vs 24) See if there is any idolatrous way in me…**

**TAKING IT HOME**

1. What would the world look like if our (your) witness were removed?
2. How are you holding to the word of life?
3. Are you joining the world in grumbling and complaining?
4. How does your life stand out to others who know you?