

Philippians 2:12-30

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[0:00] I'd like you to turn to Philippians chapter 2, the passage that we read. Philippians is a letter in which Paul is not writing to deal with some big doctrinal error like he does with the Galatians where they were turning to legalism.

He's not dealing with division in the church like he is with the church in Corinth. There doesn't seem to be a particular theological problem or church problem that he's dealing with.

Instead, the most common word in Philippians is the word rejoice. Paul keeps telling them to rejoice, and you'll see that in this passage as well. Because he has a lot to be thankful for.

Paul also talks about the Philippians as being partners with him in the gospel. The fellowship that they have. And Philippi was the first church that Paul went to in Europe, in northern Macedonia. And they received him well there. And then when he went from Philippi down to Macedonia, about 70 miles away, they sent support to him.

[1:11] And so they continued that partnership. And they kept that up. When he went to Athens and then down to Corinth in the southern part in Greece proper, the people in Philippi sent gifts down to support Paul.

And so before that gift came from Philippi, Paul was preaching and teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath. And the other days of the week he was working as a tent maker.

But when the gift came from them, then he quit his tent making and he devoted himself to preaching and teaching the whole week. So they were partners with him in the gospel. And the reason for his writing this particular letter is that they found out that Paul was in prison in Rome.

And you think of, you know, in those days with limited communication, not like we have, they didn't always know where he was or what he was doing. But they found out that he was in Rome and he was in prison and they said, we've got to do something.

So they enlisted the aid of Epaphroditus and sent him from their church to go to Rome and to take a gift to Paul there and to be with him and to help him out in his ministry.

[2:30] And so Epaphroditus has been with them. Now Paul is sending Epaphroditus back. So that's the reason why Paul writes this letter to them. And so he has a close relationship with them and he wants to encourage them in their walk with Christ.

When I look at this passage, the thing that comes to my mind is a lot of athletic things. So Paul talks to them like a coach would talk to his team and wants to encourage them to keep on keeping on while he is away and not able to be with them there.

He also talks about working out your salvation. And even though I know he's not really talking about a workout at the gym, that terminology can remind us of that and it helps us to understand what he's talking about.

He also talks about the baton and I'll bring that out. Holding on to the baton and then passing it off when it's your time to do that. And then he talks about the rejoicing that's at the end of the race that Paul is ahead of them.

He has run his lap in this relay race. He's passed the baton on to them. Now he wants them to carry on. And he is still watching this race and rejoicing with them.

[3:54] And so that language comes out. And then we'll look a little bit at Timothy and Epaphroditus, who are two stars that we can look at. And we can admire them as people who have run this race and who are examples of how we can run this race.

So let's use kind of that theme as we go through this passage. If you look at the first couple of verses there, Paul says in verse 12, Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now not only in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

So here is a word from their coach writing to them from a distance. I have seen the evidence of what you have been doing because I see Epaphroditus, who is one of you. And I've seen this gift that you have sent to me. And I hear reports about you. And I'm praying for you and concerned for you. And so I want to know that you keep on keeping on. You know how hard it is sometimes if we are doing something that requires real effort to keep going. Some people are part of this IPC running group to encourage one another. [5 : 09] Sometimes you just have to, it's hard to get out of bed and lace on your shoes and go out the door unless you know that there's somebody out there who's expecting to meet you, who will encourage you.

And so in the same way, we need the encouragement of others. We need the encouragement of our coach. But also when you look at the word you in this passage, it's not singular, but it's plural. So he's talking about them encouraging one another. Even though I'm not there as your coach, you need to be working out your salvation with one another, encouraging one another. Now there are people who get confused by a passage like this because it says, well, obey. That's a word. I have to do this.

I have to obey. And not only in my presence, but much more in my absence. Work out your salvation. I need to work out my salvation so that I can be sure that I'm saved.

[6 : 06] And there are Christians who wake up one morning feeling very spiritual and godly and encouraged in their Christian life. And they say, it's all going well today. It's working out well. And the next day they remember that they succumb to a temptation or they just don't have the appetite to read the Bible.

It just doesn't meet their need like it did yesterday. Or praying just seems so hard and they feel discouraged. And they think, well, maybe I lost my salvation. Some Christians live like that. They're just never sure. They think of God's love like the daisy. You know, he loves me. He loves me not. And you pull off the pedals and wonder if I die on a day when he loves me, then I'm OK. But what if it's a day when he loves me now? Paul isn't telling them you need to obey because you need to work out your salvation. He started out by saying, therefore, he's talking about the salvation that Jesus Christ has secured for us.

He went to the cross for us. And now he's been exalted and has a name above all names. That's the salvation we have. And what we are to do is to develop that.

[7 : 21] We are to work out what that means in our lives. We are to grow in that salvation. So it's not justification. If I do it all right, God will consider me righteous.

But because God has considered me righteous in Christ, I need to live as a righteous person. He's not saying if I'm obedient enough, then God will consider me his son or his daughter.

But because I am God's son or daughter, therefore, this is how we live in this family. This is how I need to live. So if you want to talk about it in terms of your salvation, more specifically, we would say sanctification.

How do you grow as a Christian? You grow by continuing to exercise and you grow by continuing to follow what Paul has said and what Christ has shown us and what he has done for us.

What God is working in us. Paul says, work out your salvation with fear and trembling. And this poor, fearful Christian says, yes, fear and trembling.

[8 : 26] I'm really good at that because I don't know if God really loves me or not. Well, why does it say fear and trembling? He says, work out your salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

I don't have experienced fear and trembling because I'm all on my own and no one's going to help me. For one thing, it's plural. It is we together as a church working out our salvation with fear and trembling.

But the reason for that fear and trembling is not because I have so little confidence in me, but because I'm amazed at what God is doing. Have you ever been in a situation where, you know, you've been trying to do something?

Maybe you decided to sign up for a painting class. And so here you are smearing these ridiculous colors over and it looks, you know, the teacher comes over and says, well, I'm not quite sure what the subject is here.

You know, you have this bowl of fruit in front of you or this bouquet of flowers in front of you, but it looks more like a robot or it looks like something. I'm not sure what it is.

[9 : 36] You know, you're very conscious of your own weakness. But then the teacher says, let me let me take your brush and palette. And just with a few strokes, suddenly it becomes a bouquet of flowers.

And you think, how did they do that? And you're just amazed to see them at work. Imagine if you walked into Michelangelo's studio and you see him working away and you're just fascinated. How did he see that beautiful statue in that block of marble? How did he do that to make it come out the way it is? That's the way we respond.

And we respond with fear and trembling, not because we're afraid of what we're doing, but we're in awe of what God is doing. What God is doing in us.

And because it's not just singular, among us. What God is doing among us. So we look at somebody else's life as a Christian brother or sister.

[10 : 37] And we think, wow, God is doing this in you. See what, see how God has provided for you and cared for you. This is amazing what God has taught you.

I'm learning from you because what God is doing. And so we respond with fear and trembling because it is God who is working in us. This image of the coach.

Here is Paul a long ways away, 600 miles away from the Philippians. He can write them a letter. They can have occasional conversation in that way. Epaphroditus is going to go back and talk to them.

This is what I learned from Paul. But that distance, humanly speaking, is a long way. But the Holy Spirit is there working in them.

And not only working alongside them, but he's working internally with them. I remember when I was in high school, I joined the cross-country team. And we had a coach who would say, okay, this is what I want you to do.

[11 : 35] Here's the map you're going to run today. And so he would send us off and then he would go back into his office. And then he might get in his car and go and meet someplace and see us go by.

And then he would drive back to the school and wait for us to come back. When our son was a cross-country coach for a high school team, he ran with them. And it was such a difference that he was running alongside them.

But here God is not running alongside them. God is working in them both to will and to work for his good pleasure. When you're involved in sports, sometimes your problem is not your ability to work, your strength.

It's your motivation. And sometimes it's not your motivation, but it's this pain that you have or this weakness or something. But God is working in us in both sides.

Both the will, the motivation, and the work to enable us to do these things. And why does God do that? Paul says God does this for his good pleasure.

[12 : 39] God is pleased to work in you as an individual. God is pleased to work in you corporately as a family or as a couple or as a house group or as a Bible study that meets together.

God is working in there among you for his own good pleasure. In the next paragraph, Paul talks to them about shining as stars in the world in which they live.

Do all things without grumbling or disputing 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 stars in the world.

Our fearful Christian brother or sister says, Well, there it is again. God's only going to accept me if I do things without grumbling or complaining.

In fact, do all things without grumbling or complaining. And only if I succeed in that will I be considered blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish.

[13 : 42] Well, that's not really what Paul is saying if you look at it more carefully. Paul is writing to the Philippians as people who are solid believers. He's writing to a church that has been covered with the blood of Christ because he died for them on the cross.

He's talking to them about challenges and running a race when you're tired and when it's hard and when it's hot and when you're thirsty and when your muscles ache.

He's talking about living in a dark generation, a crooked and perverse generation, crooked and twisted generation. And Paul says when you live there, you shouldn't be like the children of Israel in the wilderness, grumbling and disputing all the time and complaining about what God has done.

There's going to be pain, there's going to be difficulty, but you need to respond in a good way. You need to respond to what God is doing in you because you know God is the one at work.

So instead of giving way to that human weakness of yours to grumble and complain, instead you need to do those things without that so that you may be blameless and innocent children of God.

[14 : 56] The emphasis is not so that you will be blameless and innocent and if you're those things then you will become children of God. It isn't become, it's be. So that you would be children of God who are blameless and innocent.

In other words, you are children of God and what you need to be is children of God who respond well to God's working in you. Who do that without grumbling and disputing.

Who are able to display in this dark world the blameless and innocent qualities that God is giving to you. That God is working in you.

So he says we live in a crooked and twisted generation. It's dark out there and we need to shine as lights in this world. The contrast there is very plain.

Sometimes you feel like I'm just a small candle and how much difference can I make? But when you take a candle to a dark place suddenly it lights up the whole room.

[15 : 58] Maybe not well enough to read the prescription that the doctor gave you or something like that but the light is good enough for you to see the shape of the room.

You are no longer in the darkness and the fears, the things that you thought were terrible have been dispelled. Children, when you go to bed sometimes at night and the light goes out do you imagine that your coat hanging on the chair is some kind of a monster?

Or do you begin to imagine things that are not really real at all? I remember as a child lying in bed and having a fever and Genghis Khan and his Asian hordes were riding out of the wallpaper and coming across the quilt on my bed and I'd hide myself under the covers in the bed thinking that somehow they would go right over me and I'd be protected.

But if my mother came into the room with a candle that was all the light I needed to know that's my coat on the bed. Those are flowers on the wall. Genghis Khan and his horsemen are not in the wallpaper and everything was okay again.

So Paul tells us we are stars shining in the darkness in the midst of a crooked and depraved generation. Again the words are plural.

[17 : 19] It's not singular. It's not you and I competing to see which one of us is the brightest star. But together we make a constellation. It is by shining together that we make an impact in this world.

We encourage one another in those things. And so we're not just one candle but we are a multitude of candles in a place that really needs to see the light. Paul says here something that you'll that is where I get this image of the baton.

He says shining as lights in the world verse 16 holding fast to the word of life so in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run or in vain or labor in vain.

If you have the ESV it says holding fast to the word of life. Anybody have the NIV? What does it say? I know the answer to that question but it says holding forth the word of life.

The word of life. Now which one is correct? Are you supposed to hold fast? Or are you supposed to hold forth? Well the answer to that question is yes. And that's why the image of a baton is such a good image.

[18 : 37] If you ever ran in a relay race in school there were two things that you practiced when you were doing a relay race. The running they assumed that you'd already learned that in other races but you had to learn what to do with that baton.

One was you had to learn to carry that baton and not drop it. Because if you got to the next person in the relay without the baton forget it. Because it's the baton getting to the end that's important it's not the person.

So you had to hold fast that baton and not let go of it. But you also practiced over and over again the handoff. So that when you got up to your partner in the race the next person you could slap that into their hand and they would grip it.

So you had to know when to let go and they had to know when to take hold of it. And I think that's what Paul is talking about here. Because we're supposed to hold fast to the word of life that Paul has passed on to them.

And they are to be ready to hold forth the word of life when it's time for them to give it to the other person. So that's what we experience day by day in our Christian life.

[19 : 52] That I need to be able to hold fast to the word day by day so that I have this in my heart and I know what it says and I'm ready to answer from the scripture.

I'm holding fast to that. I'm not letting it slip out of my hands. But when I come to another person maybe in a witness to them then I need to hold forth the word of life.

I need to offer it to them and hold it out and offer it to them. Or if I'm like Paul with a church Paul had to take that word of life and know it and he had to put it into the hands of the Philippian church.

He had to hold it forth to them. He had to give it to them so that they were able to take a hold of it.

And so Paul says in running this race if I have passed the word of Christ to you and you are holding fast to that and you are passing it to other people then I know that this race is going well.

I know that in the day of Christ I may be proud of what I have done that I did not run in vain I did not labor in vain. If Paul went to Philippi and he expressed a lot of his own opinions on various different subjects and they liked those opinions and they held on to them he would not have accomplished his purpose because he didn't hold forth the word of life and what they held fast to was the word of Paul and not the word of Christ.

[21 : 19] So that's what Paul says we need to take a hold of the word of Christ. And then at the end of that race he says there is rejoicing even if I'm to be well let me read that again from verse 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.

If you've ever been in a relay race or you've watched one let's say the second leg they do a good job they hold on to the baton they get it into the hand of the next person the next person gets a good start and then they say okay I'm done here and they go back and take a shower.

No they're staying there cheering until their race is finished until their colleagues until their partners have completed their part because this is their race together.

it's plural again it's not my race it's our race and so that's what Paul is doing he's watching the rest of the race he's watching the Philippians because if the Philippians run well and they pass on the baton then Paul can be proud of what they have done together.

Notice the way in which it concludes here in verse 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 likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

[22 : 52] Paul's writing from Rome and he's a prisoner there he says that several times in the first chapter that he's a prisoner and that passage that we're familiar with in which Paul talks about how he doesn't know how his trial is going to come out if he loses then he will be put to death and go to be with Christ and if his case wins and he's set free then he'll be able to consider his ministry and so he says I'm torn between the two whether it's better to die and to be with Christ which is better for me or to live and to come back to you which is better for you so he says to live or to die I want to honor Christ in what I do so here's Paul saying he says you have offered the sacrifice of your faith in running this race in holding on to the word of Christ in working out your salvation with God working in you

I see that you are running this race well it's a sacrificial offering that you have brought before God and he said I might be poured out as a drink offering on that sacrifice by my death I might not but even if I am I can rejoice because your sacrifice comes to God and I am a libation which is offered on top of that which is added to it so no matter how this comes out I'm rejoicing in you and you also should be glad and rejoice with me let me just conclude with a couple stars Paul talks about Timothy and he talks about Epaphroditus and I'm not going to go into all of those things but when you're involved in sports it helps sometimes to have a hero somebody that you look to and this person has the skills and the abilities it's not just a matter of buying the jersey but I want to be able to dribble the ball like this person does

I want to run with determination like this person I want to have the skills of this person so I'm watching to see how they do this Paul encourages us to watch the example of Timothy and Epaphroditus and also to realize that we may be somebody's of Timothy or somebody's Epaphroditus so we need to learn what they've done so that somebody else can see that in us and learn from it Paul says several things about Timothy he's sending them sending Timothy to them as his emissary to speak to them to encourage that church but he talks about Timothy being trustworthy he says I have no one like him this is verse 20 I have no one like him who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare for they all seek their own interests not those of Jesus Christ why does Timothy seek the welfare of the church in Philippi because he's concerned not for his own

interests but those of

Jesus Christ so here's Jesus Christ who sacrificed himself for the people in Philippi for you and I he is the one who is God at work within us to will and to do for his own good pleasure Paul wants to serve that coach that savior that rescuer and so therefore he is concerned about the welfare of the Philippians I think of that in my own life sometimes I think I'm not really concerned about this person I don't really see them for who they are I remember learning from a friend and colleague that I you know if we went into a government office to do business together we did a lot of that or if we went into a shop and were paying somebody I tended to see the person in the business in the government offices this is the person who has the rubber stamp I need to please them only enough to hear them bang that stamp on my papers and then I could care less about that person I've got my papers or

I've gone into the shop and I've bought something from this person and I saw them kind of an extension of the till they could tell me where to find the mustard or they could bring up my purchases and take my money but I wasn't concerned about them and I learned from my colleague he was concerned about these people he wanted to know things about them where they came from he wanted to know something about their family or their life and he would remember them he would go back to the same person again and again in the shop instead of looking for the shortest queue in waitrose he looked for the queue where this person he knew was because he wanted to maintain a relationship there and I realized that in some ways I was not being like Timothy I was not concerned about that other person because my first concern wasn't Jesus Christ it was me and if my first concern was Christ then my concern would have been that person as well so that was a lesson I needed to learn and my friend

[27 : 57] Jeff was like my Timothy in that way as a star ahead of me he was someone who could be an example for me Epaphroditus is another man here that Paul talks about and Epaphroditus is the one that the Philippians sent as their emissary he came with a gift of some sort to Paul it may have been financial it may have also been some clothing or parchments or books or something like that Paul to Timothy says send my cloak and send my books and my parchments and maybe they came with other things for Paul it wasn't it wasn't just that they deposited a check in his account or they transferred some money it was not an impersonal relationship it was a very personal relationship so they sent whatever gift was with Epaphroditus as we read here Epaphroditus got there and was working with Paul but while he was with

Paul he became sick and he was so sick that Paul says Paul was afraid that he was going to die so Paul was afraid that his sorrow was going to be compounded by the loss of Epaphroditus who had become very dear to him now Paul is sending Epaphroditus back to the Philippians with this letter and he wants them to know that Epaphroditus has done the job for which you sent him so Epaphroditus is not coming back because he's shirking the responsibility you gave him he's coming back because I have sent him and I'm certifying this it's almost like Paul signs here to say I certify that Epaphroditus did his job and he's coming back at my behest and so Paul sets Epaphroditus is an example to us Paul says describes Epaphroditus as his brother so he's a brother he's a fellow believer he's also my fellow worker so he's drawing the circle a little bit smaller we have worked together in ministry and then he makes that circle even tighter by saying he's my fellow soldier we have suffered we have faced death and stared it down we have been brothers to the end and we have shed blood together for

Christ and so that's how he describes Epaphroditus as the one he is sending back he also says that for you he is your apostle he uses the word apostolos he's your official emissary who was sent to me and he's also a minister one who has come to serve me so Paul wants to certify that this is the kind of man that you should follow this is the kind of man that you should that you should want to be like so Paul says to them to welcome him back within their church as someone who has accomplished what what he has been sent for in the work of Christ so as we look at our own our own experience sometimes we feel like our coach is far away our coach went to Northern Ireland and he didn't he doesn't answer his phone and then another coach was Graham and he went to hospital and he's not here we can feel sometimes like we are abandoned because some particular person is at distance from us like Paul was at distance at a distance from the Philippian church and yet we need to be reminded as Paul reminds the Philippians that God is here God is not only by our side but God is working in us and within us and among us and God is doing his work in us and we can also be reminded of the people like Timothy and Epaphroditus in our

lives you may be thinking of someone who has been a great example to you someone who has encouraged you someone who has prayed for you someone who keeps corresponding with you and wanting you to grow in your Christian life that example that they have of passing the baton to you is an example for you to hold fast and for you to pass it on to others let me pray