

## Lesson Four (2:12-30)

### Work Out Your Own Salvation (2:12-18)

*12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*

*14 Do all things without grumbling or questioning, 15 that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, 16 holding fast 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. 17 Even if I am to be poured as a libation upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. 18 Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.*

**V. 12 Therefore, My Beloved, As You Have Always Obeyed** – The word “therefore” points to a connection with something said earlier. The point of connection here lies in the “obedience” of Jesus in verse eight and the fact that the Philippian brethren have “always obeyed.” They have obeyed both God and his spokesman Paul.

**Not Only As In My Presence But Much More In My Absence** – Paul had problems in other places with people turning against him when he was gone from them (II Cor. 11:1-4; Gal. 4:12-20), but he had confidence that the Philippians were more loyal.

**Work Out Your Own Salvation** – The verb “work out” means to “accomplish, carry out, or carry through with something.” The verb is a present imperative, meaning that we must “carry out and keep on carrying out” our salvation.

In a single stroke, this phrase corrects at least three possible errors in understanding salvation:

1. Our salvation was *not* a one-time past event.
2. We are *not* totally passive in salvation.
3. We can *not* be saved by the efforts of others in our behalf.

**With Fear And Trembling** – Fear is something of a paradox in the New Testament. It is easy to go to one extreme or the other in promoting or relieving fear. On the one hand, we must conduct ourselves in fear as long as we live (I Pet. 1:17) lest we be judged to have failed to reach the promised rest (Heb. 4:1). We should fear God who has the power to cast us into hell (Luke 12:5). On the other hand, we are told not to fear, for it is the Father’s good pleasure to give us the kingdom (Luke 12:32). We did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear (Rom. 8:15). Perfect love casts out all fear (I John 4:18).

This dilemma is partly caused by the wide range of meanings of the word “fear.” Sometimes it means terror, alarm, and fright. At other times it means reverence, respect, and awe. In this verse, Paul did not encourage a cringing terror or alarm, but a sober respect for the consequence of failure.

**V. 13 For God Is At Work In You** – Verse thirteen must always be considered along with verse twelve, for the two verses make up a single sentence. If verse twelve is isolated from its context, you will have an unhealthy emphasis on self-earned salvation and an unnatural fear of failure. Just remember this important fact: God is at work in you!

**Both To Will And To Work For His Good Pleasure** – Both our decision to serve and the service itself would have been impossible without God working in us. While God allows—and requires—our participation in salvation, the ultimate credit for salvation belongs solely to God.

Verse thirteen must also be taken in context. Isolated, it might be taken as proof of man’s total depravity and inability to make any positive response in salvation. Verses twelve and

thirteen, taken together, provide a remarkable balance. They show the beautiful joint participation of God and man in the plan of salvation.

**V. 14 Do All Things Without Grumbling Or Questioning** – Christians should serve God with an eager willingness. They should not “grumble” as the children of Israel did when they “murmured” in the wilderness (Exo. 15:24; 16:2, 7, 8). They should not “question” as the Pharisees did when they stood back questioning and complaining about Jesus (Luke 5:22).

**V. 15 Blameless And Innocent, Children Of God Without Blemish** – William Barclay notes the following progression in these three descriptions of the Christian. First is what he must be to the world—blameless. His life is of such purity that no one can find anything in it to blame. Second is what he must be in himself—innocent. Even beyond what the world can observe in his outward behavior, he must know in himself an integrity of purpose, an “unmixed” character. Third is what he must be in the sight of God—without blemish. This word was often used in the Old Testament of the animals which were chosen to be sacrificed to God. Before they were fit to be brought before Him, they had to be totally without flaw or blemish.

If the Philippians are seen as a sacrifice offered to God, then Paul is seen as the libation, or drink offering, poured out upon that sacrifice (v. 17)

**In The Midst Of A Crooked And Perverse Generation** – The word “crooked” could be used for both a “crooked” road or a “dishonest” man. The word “perverse” means “thoroughly twisted and distorted.” Together they describe people who are warped out of moral alignment with God. It should be noted that the moral atmosphere of the first century was no worse than that of the twentieth century. Any generation—or any person—that does not know God is warped.

“They are no longer his children because of their blemish, they are a perverse and crooked generation.” (Deuteronomy 32:5)

**Among Whom You Shine As Lights In The World** – The darker the night, the brighter the light! Just as God appointed the sun, moon, and stars as lights (*phoster*) in the generations of men upon the earth. As Jesus was the light of the world (John 8:12), so are his disciples (Matt. 5:14). They must not obscure the light by blemishes and impurity, but let it shine, so men will give glory to God (Matt. 5:16).

**V. 16 Holding Fast The Word Of Life** – The Greek word for “holding fast” may also be translated “holding forth.” If translated as “holding fast,” the reference is to personal commitment to the truth of the gospel. If understood as “holding forth,” the emphasis is more on evangelism. When one thinks of the Olympic runner carrying the torch, both ideas blend into one. If the Christian is to “shine” as a light for his dark generation, he must “hold fast” and “hold forth” the gospel.

**In The Day Of Christ** – The last great day, the time of the consummation, as in Chapter one, verse ten.

**I May Be Proud That I Did Not Run In Vain Or Labor In Vain** – As a great relay runner, Paul had carried the torch of evangelism to the Philippians. If they dropped the torch or failed to pass it on to succeeding runners, Paul would have run his part of the race for nothing.

**V. 17 Even If I Am To Be Poured As A Libation** – Paul had the mind of Christ, the attitude of self-sacrificing servanthood. He pictured himself here as a drink offering (see Num. 28:14, 31) poured out upon the altar. His life was expendable.

**Upon The Sacrificial Offering Of your Faith** – Literally, “upon the sacrifice and priestly service” of your faith. Paul saw their faith as a sacrifice offered in priestly service at the temple, and himself as the drink offering poured on top of it.

**I Am Glad And Rejoice With You All** – Paul had already stated that his only reason for living was for their progress and joy in the faith (1:24-25). If his life was used—or used up—for the benefit of their faith, Paul could only rejoice.

**V. 18 Likewise You Also Should Be Glad And Rejoice With Me** —It was one thing for Paul to be glad to make the sacrifice of his life for the Philippians; it was quite another thing

for them to be glad to have him do it. Still, it was necessary that they understand and accept this as the will of God. Paul wanted them to learn to “rejoice in the Lord always” (4:4), even for the things that might initially cause their hearts to break.

### **Timothy And Epaphroditus (2:19-30)**

*19 I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I may be cheered by news of you. 20 I have no one like him, who will be genuinely anxious for your welfare. 21 They all look after their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. 22 But Timothy's worth you know, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. 23 I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, 24 and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself shall come also.*

*25 Titus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, 26 for he has been longing for you all, and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. 27 Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. 28 I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. 29 So receive him in the Lord with all joy; and honor such men, 30 for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete your service to me.*

**V. 19 I Hope In The Lord Jesus To Send Timothy** – Another major reason for sending this letter to Philippi was to prepare them for the coming of Timothy. Paul was not certain what the future held for him (v. 23). It was his expectation to be acquitted, to send Timothy with up-to-the-minute news, and to journey to Philippi himself shortly afterwards (v. 24).

**So That I May Be Cheered By News Of You** – Paul also anticipated the possibility that Timothy would have enough time to return from Philippi before Paul's release.

**V. 20 I Have No One Like Him, Who Will Be Genuinely Anxious For Your Welfare** – Like Paul, Timothy had the mind of Christ, the attitude of self-sacrificing servanthood. Paul had no one “equal-souled” to Timothy, for Timothy's concern for the Philippians could even be called “anxiety.” (This strong word for concerned involvement is the same word Jesus forbade in reference to material concerns in Matt. 6:34.)

**V. 21 They All Look After Their Own Interests, Not Those Of Jesus Christ** – Is this a blanket condemnation of all Paul's other co-workers? Does this describe Luke, Titus, and Mark? Perhaps Paul referred only to the few co-workers presently available for appointment to this mission. Or perhaps Paul simply meant that in comparison with Timothy, all others were made to look selfish by contrast. At any rate, it is not our task to evaluate Paul's assistants, but to learn to be self-sacrificing servants who care for the interests of others (2:4).

**V. 22 But Timothy's Worth You Know** – Timothy's “worth” was the approvedness which comes from having been tested in the fire and found genuine. (See notes on 1:10) The same word is used by Paul in Rom. 5:4 to describe the “character” which is produced by enduring suffering.

**How As A Son With A Father He Has Served With Me** – The Philippians had observed Timothy's service during both the second (Acts 16:3) and third (Acts 18:5) missionary journeys. They could understand quite well the closeness in the relationship between Paul and his “genuine child in the faith” (I Tim. 1:2).

**V. 23 I Hope Therefore To Send Him Just As Soon As I See How It Will Go With Me** – Paul seems to have expected a decision to be reached shortly. While he expressed some uncertainty about the future here, it should be noted that his uncertainty is not in the Lord, but in Nero.

**V. 24 And I Trust In The Lord** – Paul's confidence was also expressed with the same Greek word in 1:6 and 25. Nero was unstable, but the Lord was not!

**Shortly I Myself Shall Come Also** – Was Paul in fact released from this imprisonment in Rome? Not only does church history affirm this, but it is required in order to fit the epistles to

Timothy and Titus into the chronology of Paul's life. The traditional view is no doubt correct that following his release, Paul wrote I Timothy and Titus; and during his later imprisonment, he wrote II Timothy.

**V. 25 I Have Thought It Necessary To Send To You Epaphroditus** – Paul wanted to make it clear that Epaphroditus was returning home to Philippi by Paul's own decision, not as a matter of Epaphroditus' own pleasure or as the result of his personal failure.

**My Brother And Fellow Soldier, And Your Messenger And Minister To My Need** – Epaphroditus had been sent from Philippi to bring gifts to Paul (4:18) and to be Paul's personal assistant during his imprisonment. This long and impressive array of titles was given as a precaution against anyone thinking that Epaphroditus had failed.

**V. 26 For He Has Been Longing For You All** – The word used here for "longing" is the same word Paul used in 1:8 to express how he himself "yearned" for these same brethren.

**And Has Been Distressed Because You Heard That He Was Ill** – This shows the genuineness of the servant's heart. Even in desperate sickness, the main concern of Epaphroditus was that his brethren back home would be worried.

**V. 27 Indeed He was Ill, Near To Death** – The Philippians had heard correctly about his illness. He was so sick, he very nearly died (v. 30).

**But God Had Mercy On Him** – Epaphroditus' recovery was not viewed as a process of nature, but as an act of God.

**On Me Also, Lest I Should Have Sorrow Upon Sorrow** – Paul felt sorrow first of all because by coming to Rome, Epaphroditus had become sick. Paul would have felt much additional sorrow if this generous service had also led to Epaphroditus' death.

**V. 28 I Am The More Eager To Send Him, Therefore, That You May Rejoice** – The Philippians' joy had been threatened by Epaphroditus' sickness. His return would confirm to them that in all things they could depend upon the Lord and rejoice (4:4).

**V. 29 So Receive Him In The Lord With All Joy** – This repetition perhaps indicates that Paul was afraid they might not receive Epaphroditus well. It would have been easy for them to have reservations about him, thinking of him as a "drop-out."

**And Honor Such Men** – The principle involved here goes beyond Epaphroditus and the first century. Too many times veteran missionaries and preachers have returned home with broken health and depleted finances, only to find indifference to their plight.

**V. 30 For He Nearly Died For The Work Of Christ** – Like Paul and Timothy, Epaphroditus had the mind of Christ, the attitude of self-sacrificing servanthood. He was willing to lay down his life, if necessary, for the cause of Christ.

**Risking His Life** – The word for "risking" was the secular term for gambling. He "took a chance" and laid his life on the line for Jesus.

This same word was later used to name the "Parabolani," a brotherhood of "riskers" who voluntarily cared for the sick when no one else dared to come near.

**To Complete Your Service To Me** – None too subtly, Paul reminded the Philippians that they owed a lot to Epaphroditus. He had "filled in" for their "lacking" in service to Paul. Those who had not gone had no room to criticize the one who had.

#### STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. In what sense do we work out our own salvation? Can salvation be earned?
2. What extremes will result if either verse 12 or 13 is isolated from its context?

3. In what three respects is the Christian's life to pass inspection? (See verse 15)
4. How could Paul have "run in vain"?
5. What is a libation? In what way could Paul liken his own life to a libation?
6. What do you know about Timothy? What did the Philippians know about him?
7. Were all Paul's other co-workers selfish?
8. Why did Paul build up Epaphroditus so much?
9. What lesson must the church learn today about men like Epaphroditus?
10. What vivid imagery is behind the phrase "risking his life"?

#### **A.B.A. REVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. What does the verb "work out" mean in verse 12?
2. Explain what is significant about the verb "work out" being a present imperative.
3. List 3 possible errors, in understanding salvation, that are corrected by Paul's words, "work out your own salvation."
4. Explain the paradox surrounding the word "fear" in the New Testament.
5. What is the proper way to understand the word "fear" in verse 12?

6. What role should “fear and trembling” have in following Paul’s words, “work out your own salvation”?
7. Why is it important to always understand verse 12 (“work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”) in the context of verse 13 (“for God is at work in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure)?
8. Why is it also important to understand verse 13 in the context of verse 12?
9. “Verses twelve and thirteen, taken together, provide a remarkable \_\_\_\_\_. They show the beautiful \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ in the plan of \_\_\_\_\_.”
10. Summarize William Barclay’s insight on the words blameless, innocent and without blemish.
11. How were the words “without blemish” used in reference to animals sacrificed to God in the Old Testament? What does this indicate about the need for purity in the lives of Christians?
12. Explain the meanings of the words “crooked” and “perverse” in verse 15.
13. What judgment upon sinful living is found in Deut. 32:5?
14. What is the Greek term for “lights”? In what sense are Christians “lights in the world”?
15. In verse 16, what are two ways that the Greek word for “holding fast” may be understood?
16. In what way should a Christian “hold fast” and “hold forth” the Gospel?
17. Explain the meaning of the word “libation” in verse 17.
18. What is a literal translation of “upon the sacrificial offering of your faith”?
19. Today, would Paul liken your faith as “a sacrifice offered in priestly service at the temple”? Why or why not?
20. What major reason, for writing Philippians, is expressed in verse 19?
21. What is the connection between the word “anxious” (in verse 15) and Matt. 6:34?

22. What is the connection between the word “worth” (in verse 22) and Romans 5:4?
23. Name the missionary journeys in which Timothy faithfully served with Paul.
24. Was Paul ever released from this imprisonment in Rome? Explain your answer.
  
25. When did Paul write I & II Timothy and Titus?
26. How does Paul describe Epaphroditus in verse 25?
  
27. What does Paul share about the illness of Epaphroditus?
  
28. What lessons can be learned from the faithful, self-sacrificing servanthood of Epaphroditus?
  
29. What is the meaning of the word “risking” in verse 30?
30. Who were the “Parabolani”?
  
31. What is the most important lesson that you have learned this section of study, and will it change your life in any way?