

Philippians 2:12-13 God Is At Work In You

We are hard wired to resist obedience.

Last week we talked about some of the many ways that technology allows us to be more self-centered and to do what we want to do in isolation from others. We use those technologies because there is this big part of us that wants to be independent – even if you come from a family or cultural background that stresses interdependence and working together, there are times when you resist that idea because you have your own ideas and convictions.

So, it's hard for us to embrace this idea of being obedient, and that we are called to do it, without voting on it, without clicking a "like" button, without discussing it and coming to a consensus, there are things we are just commanded to accept. And this is a MAJOR theme throughout the Bible – we are constantly confronted with the question: who is really in charge, me or God? When push comes to shove, who will I obey, myself and my desires, or God?

This morning we'll see that as Paul is writing to the Philippians he tells them, you guys have a pretty good track record – you've been doing a good job of this so far, but you need to keep on obeying and I'll tell you why – *it's because it's God who is leading you on toward things that bring Him pleasure*. So you have to decide, are you going to do what pleases God, even though that may be hard, or are you going to take the easy way out and do whatever pleases your flesh?

We're going to take a look at five things we can learn from two verses here and we'll see what they can teach us about who God is, what He is doing, and how we should respond.

[12](#) Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; [13](#) for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.

THEREFORE – in light of the fact that Jesus humbled Himself and came to do God's will, and that one day every knee will bow, now you should also do God's will. So, obey the desires and promptings that God is giving you because if you do, they will lead you closer to Him and it will bring Him pleasure. How do we do that? By understanding five things.

#1 God IS at work – you should be expecting and experiencing it.

God has something for your life – it might not be what you think – it involved prison for Paul, difficulty for the Philippian church, and the cross for Christ – but, the difficulty God allows is always worth it. It's never accidental or unforeseen. He does know your name, He does care about you, and yes, God has a wonderful plan for your life, but you have to let Him define wonderful because He sees things from an eternal perspective.

So, God IS at work. You can deny it, you can ignore it, or you can obey it, but you can't say He isn't there, or He isn't working on you.

#2 God is at work IN YOU

God has created you as a distinct individual – even if you're a twin; you're not exactly like your sibling. And He has planned out good things for your life, good ways for you to serve Him, good ways for you to interact with others. Will you let it happen?

God isn't just busy at work at the controls of the universe; He's actively involved in our lives. Every one of us. God isn't just at work in the lives of the big shots, He's not just working in the life of the pastor – He's at work in *every one* of our lives. No one is so small or insignificant that God isn't at work in them.

I think it's easy enough for us to imagine that God is leading, or guiding, or speaking to someone else, someone that we respect, or someone we assume is godly, or righteous, or holy. But you might have a hard time believing the same thing is available to you. But that's what Paul is saying here to the Philippians – he's saying God is at work *in you* and *you* need to obey Him even though I am gone.

Which touches on our third issue.

#3 God is at work in you so YOU need to respond

Now remember, Paul was the one God used to start their church, Paul was the one God used to lead some of them to Jesus. They looked up to Paul and respected him, but Paul is saying, in effect, you don't need my training wheels – you need to ride all by yourself. You need to obey now while I'm gone just like you did when I was there personally.

Here we see an important principle of tension – on the one hand, God calls us into a Christian community, as individuals. We are called to be a part of something bigger than ourselves - the Bible uses imagery of Christians as body parts of a single anatomy, as members of a single family. God uses us to bless, serve, and encourage one another. No Christian should ever be an island; no Christian should never cut themselves off from fellowship with other Christians. And yet, on the other hand, we are all accountable to God as individuals.

And that means we need to mature to the point where we stand before God alone and not in the shadow of our friends or spouses, not in the shadow of our parents or pastors, but alone.

God blesses us with godly men and women in our lives who can tell us about Jesus and who can show us how to live for Him, and we learn a lot from their examples, but He wants all of us to get to the point where we are able to stand on our own two feet before Him and eventually to even be used as the example of spiritual maturity in the life of someone else.

In order to get there, we sometimes have the individual, or the group, or the church we looked up to stripped away from us and we are left alone to “work out our own salvation.” That can happen through deployments, moves, moving out from your parents, etc. But it can and will happen if you are going to mature. You will go through some season where you have to stand on your own.

Now, either before that season comes or in the midst of it, some of you will need to answer the question – are you doing this “God thing” because you’re personally convinced it’s right and true, or are you doing this for God *and* your girlfriend, God *and* your parents, God *and* your grandma, God *and* your group of friends? Whatever. Do you only do the right thing because so and so is watching and expecting it of you, or will you stand, even when you are alone because you’re convinced it’s right?

See, Paul encouraged the Philippians to stand on their own two feet whether he was around or not **because** they had their **own** relationship with God.

Turn with me to the Old Testament and I’ll show you another example of seeing this played out – how an older man encourages a younger man to respond to God on his own and what the outcome was. Turn with me to 1st Samuel 3.

You need to know what was going on before what we’re about to read – this is between the time when God delivered Israel out of Egypt and when they were finally united as a kingdom governed by David from Jerusalem. They’re living in the land of Israel, but Jerusalem hasn’t been established yet and there is no temple, instead there is this mobile temple of sorts called the Tabernacle – it’s a really ornate tent that God gave specific instructions on how to build.

And a young boy named Samuel is living there – his mother Hannah hadn’t been able to have kids and so she prayed and prayed and finally God gave her Samuel. She was so grateful for it that she surrendered him to God and sent him to serve God in the tabernacle and live there every day under the eye of Eli the priest.

1 Now the boy Samuel ministered to the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; *there was* no widespread revelation. 2 And it came to pass at that time, while Eli *was* lying down in his place, and when his eyes had begun to grow so dim that he could not see, 3 and before the lamp of God went out in the tabernacle of the LORD where the ark of God *was*, and while Samuel was lying down, 4 that the LORD called Samuel. And he answered, “Here I am!” 5 So he ran to Eli and said, “Here I am, for you called me.”

And he said, “I did not call; lie down again.” And he went and lay down.

6 Then the LORD called yet again, “Samuel!”

So Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” He answered, “I did not call, my son; lie down again.” 7 (Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, nor was the word of the LORD yet revealed to him.)

8 And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. So he arose and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you did call me.”

Then Eli perceived that the LORD had called the boy. 9 Therefore Eli said to Samuel, “Go, lie down; and it shall be, if He calls you, that you must say, ‘Speak, LORD, for Your servant hears.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

10 Now the LORD came and stood and called as at other times, “Samuel! Samuel!”

And Samuel answered, "Speak, for Your servant hears."

[11](#) Then the LORD said to Samuel: "Behold, I will do something in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. [12](#) In that day I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. [13](#) For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them. [14](#) And therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever."

[15](#) So Samuel lay down until morning, and opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel was afraid to tell Eli the vision. [16](#) Then Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son!"

He answered, "Here I am."

[17](#) And he said, "What *is* the word that *the LORD* spoke to you? Please do not hide *it* from me. God do so to you, and more also, if you hide anything from me of all the things that He said to you." [18](#) Then Samuel told him everything, and hid nothing from him. And he said, "It *is* the LORD. Let Him do what seems good to Him."

[19](#) So Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. [20](#) And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel *had been* established as a prophet of the LORD. [21](#) Then the LORD appeared again in Shiloh. For the LORD revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD.

So, what do we learn from this and from Paul's relationship to the Philippians? We see this dynamic played out - we're called to be part of a community: Eli played a role in Samuel's life, Paul played a role in the life of the Philippians...but everyone also stands alone before God. In both cases these spiritually mature men pointed younger believers toward a personal relationship with and response to God.

That means one more thing, we learn that no intermediary is required for any of us, though God does appoint people to help us and for us to help. Eli didn't step in and take over for Samuel and then give Samuel the notes on what God wanted. Paul doesn't say, "Hold on until I get there and I'll show you what to do." In each case, the older encourages the younger to do the right thing but then it's up to the younger to hear and obey.

And that brings us to point number four, back in Philippians Two:

#4 God is at work in you TO WILL according to His good pleasure

To will – to desire good things. To desire the right things. One of the first things that God does when He comes into your life is to begin to help you reorganize your priorities. He gives you new desires. Desires for things you were never interested in before, maybe even things you looked down on. He stirs a different set of values in you. And this desire *for* good things leads you to *do* good things.

In fact, according to Ephesians 2:10 God has "fore-ordained good works that you might walk in them." There are good works that God wants to do with your life. Not always easy works, but good works

Sometimes they're little works and sometimes they're enormous projects, I've found that ironically, the little ways are the hardest to obey because they seem so trivial.

So, how do I know when God is stirring me? How do I know when something, some idea, or some desire in my heart is from Him?

One Question to ask and four lenses to use:

- A. Will it bring Him pleasure? It's a blunt tool, it's not delicate instrument, but it's still effective, and it helps us remember that life is really all about bringing Him pleasure, honor and worship, and not serving our selves.
- B. Through His Word – we see what it says, will we line up?
- C. Through Conviction (HS) - We know when God is trying to get a hold on us.
- D. Through Circumstances – It just looks like this is what I'm supposed to do
- E. Through Counsel – others agree

But now, look, you can get yourself all bent out of shape on this issue by carrying it to extremes – how far down into the details of my life does God's will go? Does God have a perfect will for me to drink milk or orange juice with my breakfast? And if so, which is it, and how will I know?

Don't get lost in the search! Just worry about what you **know** you should do. If I came to you and asked, "what do you think God wants you to do right now?" most of you have an answer – you may or may not be doing it, but you have an answer. *Focus on that thing and do it.* Obedience in one area of life may lead to revelation in others.

This leads us to the next issue:

#5 God is at work in you BOTH to will and TO DO according to His good pleasure

It's not enough to know what God wants, you must also do it. BUT, and this is significant, God not only shows you what He wants done, He gives you the power to do it. *But...* then *you* must do it. He gives you the seed, but you have to plant it. He'll send the water, He made the soil, but He uses us to do some of the work too. God's work in us doesn't *lessen* our responsibility, it *increases* our it – after all, we **know** what He desires and He equips us for it!

Here's where Paul's admonition to "work out your salvation" comes into play. He's saying that since God is at work in you, telling you what is right and leading you to do things that are right, things that bring Him pleasure, you *ought* to be doing them. "Even though I'm not there with you," Paul would say, "do the right thing – work out this salvation you have been given."

Now that's an important concept with which to close this morning. What does it mean to work out your salvation?

We've talked recently about the three stages of salvation – let's review those:

- Justification – bam, the work is done, you are accepted on the basis of the work of Christ on the Cross – you don't have to work FOR your salvation
- Glorification – will also take place suddenly when you enter into His presence for eternity, but you're already saved now if you trust in Him, so you don't have work UNTIL your salvation wondering if you've really reached it

- Sanctification – work OUT your salvation - this is where we are today, working it out, allowing Him to have more and more of His way in us. The Greek word used here in the original text was also used in the context of mining – to work a vein, to get everything possible out of it. God has given it to you, He’s showing you where and how to apply it and what to do about it, so do it! Let Him have His way!
 - o Work it out with fear and trembling. This isn’t meant in the sense of terror, but in a sense of awe at what has been entrusted to you – it’s like the feeling you get when proposing to your fiancé, or swearing in or re-enlisting, or buying a house, getting accepted to a school in DC when you’re originally from California or Texas and taking it – you’re excited, but also full of fear and trembling.

So this is what Paul wants the Philippians to understand, and what God wants us to understand today:

God IS at work

God is at work IN YOU

God is at work in you SO *YOU* MUST RESPOND

God is at work in you to WILL according to His good pleasure

God is at work in you to will and TO DO according to His good pleasure

As we said earlier, He has good plans for you, a full life planned for you, opportunities for you to love, and to serve, and to cry, opportunities for you bring smiles and hope and for you to wipe away tears. He is at work in this world. Even in the midst of pain and sorrow and suffering, He is at work, and He wants to use you to be His hands and feet.

It’s an enormous privilege that He offers to us – this chance to be a part of what He is doing. But the only way we can do it is if we start saying no to our selfish desires, and start saying yes to Him. If we obey and bring Him pleasure.