



Sermon Text: Philippians 2:12-18

Sermon Date: March 12, 2017

Scripture is filled with theological tension. The problem, however, is that we prefer neat, tidy, tension-free theological categories. But the tension is necessary. These seemingly opposing truths (which *are* reconcilable) stabilize us on the high wire of doctrinal orthodoxy. On Sunday, we encountered a text that is filled with necessary theological tension.

Gospel-shaped Obedience is Demanded AND Dependent

In verses 12-13, we encounter the most challenging tension in our text. In verse 12, Paul commands us to “*work out our salvation with fear and trembling.*” With the utmost seriousness, we are to bring about our salvation (that is, sanctification = the process of living righteously). Hard work is required! Yet, in verse 13, Paul highlights that this obedience is ultimately dependent upon God “*who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*” All our work—both inspiration and action—is ultimately dependent upon God’s work. Keeping this theological tension in place safeguards us from laziness and legalism.

Gospel-shaped Obedience is Inwardly Pure AND Outwardly Powerful

In verse 14-16a, we encounter a second tension. Obedience is about our inner purity, but also about our outward evangelism. In verse 14, Paul commands them to display Christian contentment by doing “*all things without grumbling or disputing.*” Yet the reason Paul commands this is so that they will “*shine as lights in the world, holding fast to [or holding out] the word of life.*” Personal holiness for the sake of powerful evangelism. We too must maintain this inward / outward tension. Too often we will primarily care for one (personal holiness) or the other (powerful evangelism); but, both are essential.

Gospel-shaped Obedience is Individual AND Interconnected

In verses 16-18, we see how interconnected obedience is. Paul wants the Philippians to individually work out their own salvation so that on the Day of Christ’s return his labor will not have been in vain. There is a connection between them. We too must maintain this tension. We must strive for our own sanctification, and yet we must sincerely strive for the sanctification of others. But we can easily error on both sides. We can care only about ourselves and become isolated. Or we can care so much about others that we ignore ourselves and become nosey. Both our individual obedience and our corporate growth must matter.

Gospel-shaped Obedience is Fueled by Focusing on Christ

So how do we obey—not just in our external actions but also our attitude and emotions? How can you make yourself joyful or content? The flow of chapter two gives us wise instruction. The example of Christ stands at the center, fueling obedience to the commands that come before and after it. The hard work of obedience begins with fixing our hearts on Christ and feeling the realities of the gospel. We press the Cross into the fabric of our daily lives. This is the primary battlefield—satisfaction in Christ. When the gospel is reality to us and Christ is glorious, only then are we ready to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. Focusing on Christ must always be our first step of obedience.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What stood out to you from the sermon and the biblical text from this Sunday?
2. When viewing the tension between obedience being demanded and dependent, to which side are you naturally pulled? Why is it essential that we maintain the biblical balance?
3. Why is it important to make focusing on Christ the first step of obedience? Do you feel like you are daily focusing your heart on Christ? If not, what is hindering you?
4. Suggested reading: <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/complaining-never-wins-the-culture>