

Work Out Your Salvation with Fear and Trembling

Sermon Text: Philippians 2:12-18

¹²Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

¹⁴Do everything without complaining or arguing, ¹⁵so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe ¹⁶as you hold on to the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing. ¹⁷But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. ¹⁸So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

1.) The Apostle Peter once said of Paul that “his letters contain some things that are hard to understand” (2 Pt. 3:16). One method of correctly interpreting a difficult word or phrase in Scripture is using the process of elimination: what *can't* it mean. In verse 12 we have Paul commanding the Philippians, “continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling”. Based on the immediate context and the wider context of Scripture, which of these interpretations is preferred, which ones must be rejected and why?

- Paul is telling the Philippians to earn/merit their own salvation by their works.
- Paul is telling the Philippians to cooperate with God in their own salvation. They do their part while God does his.
- Paul is telling the Philippians to live in mortal fear that they might slip up and lose their salvation.
- Paul is giving the Philippians insight into the real-time mystery of God's saving grace at work in and through the redeemed will and work of believers. Realizing this we should strive to live with spiritual seriousness, caution, and awe.

2.) How do Christians shine like lights? What is our power-source? (v. 14-16)

First Lesson: 1 Samuel 15:1-3a, 7-29

Samuel said to Saul, “I am the one the LORD sent to anoint you king over his people Israel; so listen now to the message from the LORD. ²This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. ³Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. ...⁷Then Saul attacked the Amalekites all the way from Havilah to Shur, to the east of Egypt. ⁸He took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and all his people he totally destroyed with the sword. ⁹But Saul and the army spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs—everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed.

¹⁰ Then the word of the LORD came to Samuel: ¹¹ “I am grieved that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions.” Samuel was troubled, and he cried out to the LORD all that night. ¹² Early in the morning Samuel got up and went to meet Saul, but he was told, “Saul has gone to Carmel. There he has set up a monument in his own honor and has turned and gone on down to Gilgal.” ¹³ When Samuel reached him, Saul said, “The LORD bless you! I have carried out the LORD’s instructions.” ¹⁴ But Samuel said, “What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?” ¹⁵ Saul answered, “The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the LORD your God, but we totally destroyed the rest.” ¹⁶ “Stop!” Samuel said to Saul. “Let me tell you what the LORD said to me last night.” “Tell me,” Saul replied.

¹⁷ Samuel said, “Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel. ¹⁸ And he sent you on a mission, saying, ‘Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; make war on them until you have wiped them out.’ ¹⁹ Why did you not obey the LORD? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the LORD?” ²⁰ “But I did obey the LORD,” Saul said. “I went on the mission the LORD assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. ²¹ The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the LORD your God at Gilgal.” ²² But Samuel replied: “Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. ²³ For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king.”

²⁴ Then Saul said to Samuel, “I have sinned. I violated the LORD’s command and your instructions. I was afraid of the people and so I gave in to them. ²⁵ Now I beg you, forgive my sin and come back with me, so that I may worship the LORD.” ²⁶ But Samuel said to him, “I will not go back with you. You have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you as king over Israel!” ²⁷ As Samuel turned to leave, Saul caught hold of the hem of his robe, and it tore. ²⁸ Samuel said to him, “The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to one of your neighbors—to one better than you. ²⁹ He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind.”

1.) King Saul had begun his reign with the Lord. Initially he had been humble, gentle, valiant, and filled with Spirit as Israel’s first king (cf. 1 Samuel 10-11). However, what change took place in Saul’s heart as exemplified in his actions? (v. 12, 15, 23)

2.) How is Saul’s example a warning for us as we “work out our salvation with fear and trembling”?

Gospel: John 15:5-16a

⁵ “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. ⁸ This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

⁹ “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.”

1.) Identify and explain the following in Jesus’ illustration of the Christian life: vine, branches, sap, fruit, and fire. How do each of these give us confidence or caution? (v. 5-8)

2.) What does God’s love for us in Christ move us to do? (v. 9-14)

3.) Evaluate: A Christian should live as if their salvation depended entirely on their efforts, while simultaneously trusting that everything depends on God.