



Make Me Proud

Introduction

Philippians 2:12-18

Love always includes an invitation – an invitation to be loved, to allow oneself actually to receive another’s love. That may sound strange, but keep in mind that love is never forced but instead is always given, offered as a gift that the recipient may choose to accept or not. Which is, of course, what makes love vulnerable. We offer love with no guarantees. It can be no other way. Not for us, not for Paul, not for the Philippians, not even for God. But when you allow yourself to be loved, when, that is, you accept the invitation, you also become vulnerable, entering into a relationship, allowing yourself to be seen. Will the person who has offered love renew or rescind that love once we allow ourselves to be seen. No matter how eagerly we may want to sink into that love, we may also worry that it will not always be there. So both lover and beloved are vulnerable.

But that’s only half the story. If vulnerability is the first half of the story of love, transformation is the second. Love does something to us, conveys worth, dignity and honor. Love transforms. And love empowers. And this is what Paul moves to at this point in his long-distance conversation and love letter with the Philippians. He invites them to accept the invitation God makes in Jesus – the one who gives up divine status in order to be joined to them and us in human form – and to allow themselves not only to be loved but also to be transformed, to be changed, to be empowered. Paul asks, that is, that they work out their salvation – that is, live into and actualize this new relationship of love with God – with fear and trembling.

Fear and trembling. That may seem an unusual phrase to connect with the salvation granted through God’s love. But two dimensions of its meaning may help us appreciate Paul’s import. First, Paul invites the Philippians to the kind of awe and wonder that is appropriate to being loved at any time, but particularly when loved by the Creator of the cosmos. Second, though, it’s not just awe and wonder, in that precisely because it is God who is loving us, God who is inviting us, we may wonder and even worry that we are hardly up to becoming the people God calls us to be. And so we work out – that is, claim, live into, make our own, and actualize – God’s gift of salvation and new relationship with a certain fear and trembling. But once Paul admits the scale of the adventure God invites us to, he also reminds us that precisely because it is God who is at work in us, we can have confidence and be renewed in our efforts to allow ourselves to be loved, changed, transformed, and equipped to love others, to dare great things, and to work for all that is good.

So this is an invitation...and it is a promise. The promise that the God who loved us from the first will bring us and all things to a good end. Cause for awe and wonder indeed!¹

¹ Devotional by David Lose found @ <http://www.davidlose.net/2012/11/philippians-2-12-13/>

Open it

1. What is your favorite drink? Why do you enjoy it so much?

Read it

Philippians 2:12-19

Explore it

2. What word does Paul use to describe the Philippians in verse 12?
3. What does Paul want the Philippians to do in spite of his absence?
4. What shouldn't the Philippians do?
5. In what ways should the Philippians live within this crooked and twisted generation?

Apply it

“All My Loving”

Paul begins this section, “So then, my beloved” (v 12a). This is addressed exclusively to Christians. Not a word applies to unbelievers. If we miss this point, it will lead us to falsely see these verses as teaching that someone must work to earn their salvation. However, this charge is not delivered to unbelievers, but to “my beloved.” This is a clear reference to those who are in the circle of the redeeming love of God. God has a general, benevolent love for all mankind, but a special, specific love for believers. Although God gives general expressions of his common grace, he reserves a special love for his own elect, far deeper than his general love for all mankind. This is why Paul addresses the Philippians, as “the beloved.” Unbelievers are never referred to in this manner.²

6. One of the fundamental aspects of any good Bible study is making sure you understand the context of a particular passage. Our passage is a wonderful illustration of this truth. What erroneous conclusions might someone come to in verse 12 if they miss the fact that Paul is speaking to a group of believers and not unbelievers?

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed...

*This is a sweet, pastoral motivation that we should practice with those under our instruction.*³

7. Paul is going to command the Philippians to live differently than the world does. Why is it important for us to share words of affection and affirmation with those we are called to lead or teach? What can happen if we refrain from encouraging them?

² Lawson, Steven. *Philippians For You: Shine with joy as you live by faith* (God's Word For You Book 18) (p. 104). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

³ Merida, Tony. *Exalting Jesus in Philippians* (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (p. 107). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

“Don’t Let Me Down”

Paul explains that their obedience has been "not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence." This is to say, Paul recognizes that he does not have to be in Philippi, at their side, in order for them to live their Christian lives effectively. Their primary dependence is not on Paul, but on the Lord Jesus Christ. The Philippians cannot use the absence of Paul as an excuse that they do not need, or that it is too hard, to obey the Lord. Though Paul is away from them, he commends them for "always" walking in obedience to God.⁴

8. Why does Paul make the point that the Philippians obey amidst his absence? Why might Christians be tempted to disobey when they are in isolation and without spiritual leadership around them?

9. How is the obedience of the Philippians in Paul’s absence a better testimony of God’s work in them? How might this be applied to our own lives and circumstances?

Verses 12-13 provide us with a wonderful starting point for understanding what we call in theology “sanctification,” that is, the lifelong obedience of believers, which leads us to growth in Christlikeness. This passage is not about works-based righteousness. Paul doesn’t say, “Work for your own salvation.” We can’t earn salvation (Eph 2:8-10). Paul says, “Work out your salvation.” That’s a huge difference. God has worked salvation for us by His sovereign grace alone. Christ has done the work on the cross to bring us “justification.” Sanctification is about living in light of this gracious gift of salvation, living in light of our new position and our new identity. As Paul teaches us about sanctification, he commends the Philippians, then he commands the Philippians, and he then comforts the Philippians.⁵

10. What is the difference between “working for your salvation” and “working out your salvation.” Why is this an important distinction to make?

⁴ Lawson, Steven. *Philippians For You: Shine with joy as you live by faith* (God's Word For You Book 18) (p. 105). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

⁵ Merida, Tony. *Exalting Jesus in Philippians* (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (p. 106). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

“You’ve Really Got A Hold On Me”

The Greek word for “work,” is **energein**, which Paul uses in the phrase “It is God who works in you,” means “to energize, to work effectively.” The English words energy and energize come from it. Therefore, it is God who is energizing us within our inner beings to complete the great things He has planned for us to do. Of course, we still have to choose to obey, but for whatever He wants us to do, He provides sufficient power. The meaning of this Greek word makes it very clear that it is not our efforts that make God’s power work on a daily basis. We don’t have to grit our teeth and tell ourselves we must make things happen to bring glory to God or to obey Him. He has already determined* the things He wants us to do. We just have to cooperate, live close enough to hear His directions, and then do what He says. That brings freedom!⁶

11. While God is actively at work in our lives creating and producing holiness, what part do we play in this process? How does knowing God is the one behind the work bring comfort to every Christ follower?

The NET Bible translates this phrase in verse 12 as “continue working out your salvation with awe and reverence.” One of the most lamentable characteristics of modern Christianity is the lack of awe, reverence and wonder that God’s transcendent and truly awesome nature warrants. The Bible has several examples of people who met with God and were terrified by his brilliance and power. Yet many modern Christians treat God with flippant familiarity.

While it is impossible, at this present time, to have a truly accurate understanding and appreciation of our holy, majestic God, we need to be wary about being too casual and complacent in our relationship and conversation with him. We should also be wary about having a shallow, superficial view of salvation.

Yes, God is our closest friend who abides with us in a close spiritual union, who personally and lovingly guides us, and who graciously and generously assists us. But God is much more than that. Our God is also gloriously powerful, transcendent, holy.

The Creator of the universe is at work within us, using his tremendous power and benevolence to recreate us in the image of Christ. Our part is to cooperate with God in his transforming work and to “purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God” (2 Cor. 7:1). You cannot have holiness without reverence.⁷

12. Why is a healthy sense of fear and trembling necessary for personal holiness? What are some reasons that a Christian might choose to live without it?

⁶ Miller, Kathy Collard. Paul and the Prison Epistles (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series) (Kindle Locations 3301-3308). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

⁷ Study notes by Marg Mowczko found @ https://margmowczko.com/philippians-2_12-18/

13. What does a life of fear and trembling look like? How can one experience joy while living out the truth of verse 12?

“Cry Baby Cry”

It might surprise you to see that Paul chooses the avoidance of “grumbling and arguing” as his concrete expression of working out our salvation. He gives a comprehensive application, “Do everything,” with this particular command, “without grumbling and arguing.” What’s in view? Everything. Live all of life, doing everything you’re called to do, without grumbling. Paul issues another all-inclusive imperative to the Corinthians like this one, only in a positive sense: “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for God’s glory” (1 Cor 10:31). Instead of grumbling, glorify God in all that you do. Why would Paul mention this temptation to grumble? One reason is obvious: Christian perseverance is difficult. Discipleship isn’t an easy road. Pursuing holiness, giving generously, practicing hospitality, loving one’s spouse and kids appropriately, sharing the gospel, and other facets of Christian discipleship could tempt one to complain and murmur.⁸

14. What things cause you to grumble and complain? When is it okay to complain or grumble about something?

15. How can a complaining and grumbling spirit do damage to our relationship with God as well as to other people?

⁸ Merida, Tony. *Exalting Jesus in Philippians (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary)* (pp. 110-111). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

“Here Comes The Sun”

Paul uses three key words to describe how we should live: - **1) Blameless**—above reproach. No serious accusation can stick. **2) Innocent or Pure**—high-quality, unmixed alloy. What you see is what you get. **3) Without blemish or faultless**—fit to be offered to God-like a lamb without spot or blemish. We will make an impact on the world by lives that are visibly, observably, measurably, noticeably and obviously different from the people around us. We are to be different to make a difference. Our values set us apart from the surrounding culture. Why is it so important that we be “straight arrows” in our lifestyle? Because we live in a “crooked and perverted generation.”⁹

16. Paul commanded Christ followers to shine as lights amidst the darkness of their day. How are our days crooked and twisted? How do we go about making a positive impact in our world today?

17. How does “holding fast to the Word” keep us from a grumbling spirit and blameless living? What truths from Scripture are preparing you for the day of Christ?

“From Me To You”

Paul mentions being “poured out as a drink offering” on their behalf (v. 17). This refers to the Old Testament practice of pouring wine on top of an animal sacrifice so that the heat of the fire immediately vaporizes the wine, turning it into a beautiful aroma. He is saying, “Even if I end up losing my life for you, it won’t matter to me as long as you live for Christ.” With that statement we come to the bottom line of Christian service. I wonder how many of us can truly say that it doesn’t matter whether we live or die so long as the people we know follow the Lord?¹⁰

18. Paul uses imagery from Old Testament times as he calls all Christians to have an attractive aroma that draws unbelievers to Christ. What aroma are people breathing in when you are around them? Does anything need to change? If so what?

⁹ Sermon excerpt from Ray Pritchard entitled Star- Quality Christians found @ <https://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/2013-03-11-Star-Quality-Christians/>

¹⁰ Ibid

Note: This study was compiled and questions were written by Pastor Tim Badal, Village Bible Church. www.villagebible.church/smallgroups