

**Passage Reading by Rochelle**

<sup>12</sup>Therefore, 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, <sup>13</sup>for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

<sup>14</sup>Do everything without grumbling or arguing, <sup>15</sup>so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky <sup>16</sup>as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. <sup>17</sup>But 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. <sup>18</sup>So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

<sup>19</sup>I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. <sup>20</sup>I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. <sup>21</sup>For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. <sup>22</sup>But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. <sup>23</sup>I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. <sup>24</sup>And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.

<sup>25</sup>But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. <sup>26</sup>For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. <sup>27</sup>Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. <sup>28</sup>Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. <sup>29</sup>So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him, <sup>30</sup>because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me.

Thank you Rochelle, let's pray...

## **The Philippians (and we) are called to obey God even when things get hard...**

So Philippians is written by an early church leader named Paul to the church he planted in Philippi. Over the past decade, Paul and the Philippian church have shared a great relationship and partnership helping people to start life changing relationships with Jesus.

But now it's a difficult season. The Philippians are struggling with persecution and false teaching, and these major stresses from the outside are contributing to difficult, divided relationships inside the church.

2020 has also been a difficult season, one where we can no longer depend on many things we used to. As we feel like there's just nothing we can anchor to right now, that uncertainty can lead to stressed relationships.

And moreover for the Philippians, their leader Paul is now absent. And it's harder to keep on your best behavior when the leader isn't around.

I remember times as a kid where a teacher had to unexpectedly step out of class. And next thing you know, sluggish students are suddenly filled with ingenuity, in mere seconds turning school supplies like pens and rubber bands into fully operational bow and arrow weapon systems with pinpoint accuracy.

### **Relevance: The difficulties of obedience may require us to have a fresh perspective**

So when no one is watching, and things are difficult, it's hard to do what Paul says to do in this passage. It's hard to keep obeying God, working out our salvation. I don't know about you, but when things are hard, Paul's message of, "Keep obeying God, and even if things get harder still, continue to work out your salvation" is not the first message I'm looking to hear.

In hardships, we might prefer messages like, "Hey man, in the end, you've got to be true to yourself and do what makes you happy. No one else has any right to tell you what is right or wrong for you." That kind of cultural message might resonate more for us in hard moments than Christian lyrics like, "...there is no other way, to be happy in Jesus, than to trust and obey."

Even in good times, obedience may not be our favorite. We might associate godly obedience with obligation to do things we don't really want to do. Like say you kids being told, "Do your chores." Or like those older being told "go overseas and be an impoverished missionary."

We may view God's commands as a bit of a cosmic bummer, not only with what God tells us to do, but also what He tells us to avoid, some things we really want to do. Like say you kids really wanting to get your brother or sister back after they've annoyed you, or like those older really wanting to make love to whoever they please on their own terms, not God's. The Bible's calls to obedience may even be part of why you, or our friends, do not yet identify as followers of Jesus.

As we go through Philippians 2 this morning, we're going to see that Paul views godly obedience differently, in far more relational terms. And this relational view of obedience has the potential to deeply impact our relationships with God, each other, and our community.

So if you've got a Bible or Bible app, open to Philippians, chapter 2 as we look at this relational kind of obedience. If not, no worries, we'll have the verses on the screen. If you're new to the Bible, the big numbers are chapter numbers, and the little numbers are verse numbers.

### **Teaching: Godly obedience...**

*Flows out of relationship with God (12-13)* – We're starting in verse 12 of Philippians chapter 2. There we'll see that godly obedience, which is described as "working out your salvation", flows out of relationship with Jesus. Verse 12: **(12-13)**

<sup>12</sup>Therefore, 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, <sup>13</sup>for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

If I ran into you this week, it wouldn't make sense if I started our conversation saying, "Therefore, I apologized to Stephanie." No, we use the word "therefore" to connect to something we said before. Like: "I was really inconsiderate, therefore I apologized to Stephanie."

Notice that verse 12 starts with "therefore". So we need to understand the previous verses to understand what verse 12 means. And verses 5-11 are about the mind-blowing things that Lord Jesus did to restore our relationship with Him.

Verses 5-8 say that Jesus is almighty, glorious, in very nature God; and yet He chose to humble Himself by taking on a human nature as well, becoming one of us, so that He could rescue us from our sins; even becoming obedient to death on a cross! On the cross Jesus

suffering unimaginable physical and spiritual pain, paying an incalculable price, to restore our fractured relationship with God.

And not only has Jesus drawn this close to us in love, but He's also almighty, the One who created billions of galaxies and is before and outside of time! The One exalted to the highest place, with the name above every name, before which every knee should bow and every tongue confess as verses 9-11 say.

So verse 12 is saying, "Therefore, in light of this glorious Jesus, Who you're now in relationship with, continue to work out this salvation you've received. That's what verse 12 is saying.

And notice the call is not to "work *for* your salvation", as if you must obey first in order to earn relationship with God. Verse 12 is not legalism. Rather, the command is to "work *out* your salvation". The Philippians, and followers of Jesus today, have already been saved, by grace, through faith in Lord Jesus's death and resurrection for us.

And in response to this astounding grace, we obey, not in order to try to make ourselves acceptable before God, but because by grace we've already been accepted, as those beloved. So for Paul, obedience is not legalism, and it can't be reduced to just a list of "do's and don'ts". No, it's at its core a response of love. Obedience flowing out of being in grace-based relationship with the One Who is our Savior, Lord, and friend. The kind of friend Who opens His arms wide to us in love, even from a cross. Therefore, work out your salvation.

And notice how the end of verse 12 says to do so with "fear and trembling." This means that we have an attitude of awe and reverence as we obey this kind of God. And a second reason for our awe and reverence is because, as verse 13 says, "...it is God who works in you..."

So there's awe and reverence because God Himself works in our lives every day. God's Spirit is here with us now, in relationship with every follower of Jesus, filling us with His love, helping us to obey.

Verse 13 describes how God's Spirit works to help us to work out our salvation. God works in us "to will and to act." So as we respond to the work of God's Spirit in our lives, He helps our will, what we desire, to be more about Jesus and His ways.

And God's Spirit also helps us "to act", meaning that He helps us to do acts of obedience. So as we work out our salvation by responding to God's Spirit, He produces in us over time more desire and more ability to live for God.

And He works in this way, as the end of verse 13 says, “in order to fulfill his good purpose.” The Holy Spirit, in relationship with us, working for our good and God’s glory. And the more we respond to His work, the more we become like Jesus and deepen our friendship with Him.

*Impacts our relationships (14-16)* – But as you know, obedience can be a struggle, the passage says, to “work out our salvation.” We’re reminded of this challenge in verse 14, as Paul gives a relevant example of working out our salvation. **(14-16)**

<sup>14</sup>Do everything without grumbling or arguing, <sup>15</sup>so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky <sup>16</sup>as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain.

About 1,500 years before this letter to the Philippians, the Israelites were freed by God from their slavery in Egypt. Then they were traveling in the wilderness on their way to the promised land. There in the wilderness, as things got difficult, the Israelites did a lot of grumbling and arguing against their leaders and against God.

And as things got more difficult for the Philippians, their relationships also became more characterized by grumbling and arguing. And as things have gotten difficult here in 2020, we may have become more characterized by grumbling and arguing.

If that’s the case, Paul’s challenging command for us in verse 14 is to “Do everything without grumbling or arguing”. Verse 15 gives us motivation for this, sharing that when we avoid grumbling or arguing even in hard times, we positively impact our relationships, showing ourselves to be children of God who shine like stars in the sky.

So if you want to shine for Jesus as a bright light in a dark world, you don’t start some epic non-profit that impacts countless people. Just be the kind of Christian who does everything without grumbling or arguing, holding fast to gospel truth even when things get hard.

When the Israelites were grumbling and arguing in the wilderness, they had lost sight of the amazing grace of God choosing them to be His people and freeing them from slavery in Egypt. And so when we get in a pattern of grumbling and arguing, perhaps we’ve lost sight of the amazing grace of God choosing us to be His people and freeing us from our slavery to sin and death.

But when we instead remember, connecting with God in gratitude and avoiding unhelpful grumbling and arguing, God will work through our obedience to impact people. We'll bless each other, being a place of refreshing, encouraging, non-grumbling/argumentative kinds of relationships. And we'll also be a refreshing, encouraging presence in our community and online.

I'm thinking with all the unhealthy forms of grumbling and arguing about topics related to COVID and justice issues and the approaching election, that we could really use lots of children of God shining bright like stars in the dark sky as we avoid unhelpful grumbling and arguing.

*Is aided by relationships with living examples (17-30)* – It can be easy to get sucked into negative patterns like grumbling and arguing. So Paul shares another support that helps us to obey: relationships with living examples of godly obedience. The first example is Paul himself in verse 17. **(17-18)**

<sup>17</sup> But 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. <sup>18</sup> So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

Paul is currently imprisoned as he writes. He thinks he'll be released but knows it's possible that he'll be executed for planting churches. But Paul knows that even paying that price for Jesus and the Philippian church is worth it. So if he must pay it, he will rejoice even in that, and he encourages the Philippians to join in his rejoicing in these verses.

So Paul is quite the living example of godly obedience. But Paul isn't with the Philippians and may never be. So Paul plans to send another living example to the Philippians soon. We see that living example starting in verse 19. **(19-24)**

<sup>19</sup> I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. <sup>20</sup> I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. <sup>21</sup> For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. <sup>22</sup> But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. <sup>23</sup> I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. <sup>24</sup> And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.

Timothy helped Paul to plant the Philippian church and had visited a few times since,<sup>1</sup> so the Philippians knew of Timothy's godly obedience, and Paul wanted the Philippians to be strengthened in their hardships by Timothy's living example.

And so today, we are encouraged to godly obedience as we're in relationships with living examples. As we pursue these relationships, let's make sure we don't have a selfish posture that only wants that living example to pour into us without us doing anything in return. As Timothy was mentored by Paul, we see in these verses that Timothy blessed Paul as well: serving with him like a son and taking that blessing from Paul and spreading it to the Philippians. This is to be relationships in the church: living examples blessing each other and sharing that blessing with others.

It appears from verse 23 that Paul will see his trial's outcome before sending Timothy to the Philippians. But right away Paul sends another living example in verse 25. **(25-30)**

<sup>25</sup> But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. <sup>26</sup> For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. <sup>27</sup> Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. <sup>28</sup> Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. <sup>29</sup> So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him, <sup>30</sup> because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me.

Epaphroditus' example reminds us that it's not just pastors like Timothy who may be living examples. There are many living examples in our church family, modern day "Epaphroditus," who model for us that it's all about Jesus. And who can share stories about how God has worked through their godly obedience. May we all aspire to be these living examples for each other.

### **Interview with Rochelle**

This morning we've seen that godly obedience is about relationship. It flows out of our relationship with God, Who cherishes us and helps us. And it impacts our relationships, and is

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<sup>1</sup> See Acts 16, 19, and 20.

aided by relationship with living examples. So I'd like to invite a living example, Rochelle Meyer, to join me up front now. Give us a sec as we get things set up for Rochelle.

Rochelle and her husband Jonathan are newer to our church family, and many are worshipping from home, so if you haven't met them yet, Rochelle used to serve as a missionary in an extremely dangerous country in Central Asia, one where people are killed for faith in Jesus. So Rochelle is a living example we can learn from, so thank you Rochelle for sharing with us today.

Questions:

*1) Share a little about yourself and your relationship with God leading up to your calling to missions.*

*2) Why is it worth it to obey God even when it's risky and hard?*

*3) How did God work through your obedience in that dangerous country?*

*4) Let's say tomorrow you're with a group who are grumbling and arguing in harmful ways, and you feel yourself getting worked up and you're tempted to join in. How does your relationship with God help you to obey in moments like this, what does it look like to be Spirit-led when tempted?*

Would you join me in thanking Rochelle for sharing? As the passage says, we honor people like you Rochelle, who risked your life for Christ. You show us that Jesus is worth the risk, that it's all about Jesus. He's worth obeying, even when He leads to risky places, so thank you.