

Don't Stop  
Philippians 2:12-18  
11-17-2024

the letter to the Philippians is in many ways, a very personal one for Paul. All throughout he appeals not just to their faith but their relationship with him as the basis for their faithfulness and obedience.

he referred to them as his partners in the gospel and sharers together in God's grace with him, he conveys his continual concern and constant prayers for them, he expresses his affection for them stating that he had them in his heart, he writes of his longing to see and be with them once more, and that's all just in the first chapter.

In light of this, he challenged them in verse 27 to conduct themselves, or live, in a manner that is worthy of the gospel of Christ.

as he continues to appeal to the bonds of their relationship in verse 12 of chapter 2 he writes,

***“Therefore, my dear friends, literally my beloved, 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,***

Paul is not calling for us to work out our salvation and pursue Christ on our own, but his call is to the entire body to grow together as the community of faith, strengthening and building up each other's faith and practice not just our own

And we have the assurance that we don't do any of this by ourselves but in cooperation with God

The work of salvation is never our own but a work of God, and that means our growth too is accomplished in cooperating with God, for as he continues Paul says,

***for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.***

Your growth and salvation are done in cooperation with him, at his initiative, and in communion with other believers as Paul immediately turns from God to the body stating,

***Do everything without complaining or arguing, so 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 as you hold out the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing.***

As Paul does so often in this letter, he then reminds them, and us, that there is joy to be found in Christ

Joy in service

Joy in fellowship.

And yes, even joy in suffering and hardship as he closes this section with the words,

***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. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.”*** (Philippians 2:12–18)

**In 2006 Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger wrote, Johnny Lechner is finally moving on. Actually, the University of Wisconsin at Whitewater is forcing him to graduate. He has been there too long. He is targeted to receive his diploma in May. You probably know someone who squeezed a four-year degree into five or six years, but he has gone way beyond that. Lechner has been in college for 12 years.**

**That’s right—twelve years. He is almost thirty. This entire time he has been working on his bachelor’s degree. He has been allowed to be in matriculation for three times the length of an average collegian.**

**Lechner still dresses like a college student or poster child for Abercrombie and Fitch. He still goes to college parties. In fact, one of the major goals for his final year was to go on two spring break trips. He is such an**

**overachiever. He even ran for a position on student government with the platform of his collegiate experience.**

**On late night talk shows, Lechner says he likes college, just in case you were unsure. He enjoys the carefree lifestyle and the avoidance of real-world responsibilities. He likes sleeping late, playing some music, going to a couple of classes, and then hanging out with friends. Staying in the same place is comfortable for him. College has become a perpetual comfort zone for Lechner.**

**That was written in 2006. Apparently, something happened to change administrations mind, because even though he entered as a full-time freshman in 1994, as of April 2010, he was still listed in the student directory of the University of Wisconsin and had earned enough credits to graduate with 9 majors and five minors.**

**The Board of Regents even initiated a new rule in his honor, called the slacker rule, also dubbed the Johnny Lechner rule, which requires students who stay long past the 4-5 years to pay twice the standard in-state tuition. By 2010 he finally had enough of the University of Wisconsin and had taken just about every class he could think of, so he left. He didn't graduate, he transferred to a school in California.**

**And as far as I could discover, he never did graduate and went into acting instead.**

He got stuck.

Trapped in the warm cocoon of what was safe and comfortable and easy while trying to avoid growing up and becoming a responsible adult.

If we aren't careful, we can find ourselves in a similar situation spiritually.

We can become so comfortable with where we are, content with the spiritual status quo, that we cease trying to become all God has created us to be.

We may still go through the motions, attending church sometimes, reading our bible sometimes, praying when we want something, occasionally give to the

offering, but having little to show for it, little to point to indicate that we are growing spiritually, and little increased awareness of God.

**John Ortberg described it like this, “For most of us, the great danger is not that we will renounce our faith. It is that we will become so distracted and rushed and preoccupied that we settle for a mediocre version of it. We will just skim over our lives instead of actually living them.**

We can get stuck in a spiritual holding pattern.

**Settling for what we know and comes easy instead of following Paul’s example when he said in Phil 3:13-14, I have not already arrived at my goal but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus has taken hold of me. Brothers and sisters I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it but one thing I do, forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called us heavenward in Christ Jesus**

A major cause for this is due to a misunderstanding of salvation itself  
Seeing conversion and accepting Jesus into our lives as an end rather than the beginning of our journey of faith.

the goal and driving force for our faith must always be to become more like Jesus by getting to know him better  
as Paul wrote in 2 Cor 3:18, we are to reflect the Lord’s glory and be transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory which comes from the Lord.

Without this pressing on and transformation, it will be the world that is shaping us not God

***This in spite of Paul’s warning in Romans 12:2 “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind”***

The cross is the beginning of our salvation, not the end  
Accepting Jesus as our Lord and Savior is not all there is to being saved

It is better described as a race to be run not just a prize to be won

**In both 1 Cor. 9 and 2 Tim 4 Paul even describes the Christian life as a race to run and which we need to go into strict training for**

So Paul says continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in you to will and to do his good pleasure

To work out means to accomplish something, to see it to completion  
It means don't stop halfway or give up and start coasting but rather keep running and pressing on until like Paul said in Acts 20:24, we finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given us.

See your faith to the end and bring it to completion so that Christ will be fully formed in you, as Paul wrote in Gal. 4:19

**In psychology there is something called the "Law of Cognition" which basically means you are what you think  
Our thoughts determine our actions**

**Of course, this isn't some new psychological theory but rather an affirmation of what Gods word already tells us in Prov 23:7 which says, as a man thinketh in his heart, so he is.**

**So if we start thinking of salvation as merely conversion and accepting Jesus as our savior rather than a whole new way of living, we will give little thought to how the cross and resurrection are to impact how we live our lives day by day  
But if we realize that's salvation encompasses all of life from now on, we will live with much greater awareness and sensitivity to God and the things of God**

The Philippians had started on their journey of faith and Paul wanted to be sure no persecution or trial or infighting and division would get in the way and derail them as it had done with the Galatians to whom he wrote,

**You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth? That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you,**

There can be times for all of us when we are tempted to stop trying and start coasting

- Maybe we become disappointed when things don't go as we had hoped and we blame God
- Maybe we got married, kids came along, then a mortgage, bills began to pile up, work got more demanding and life got busy so we just stopped putting much effort into it and faith took a back seat to other things
- Maybe our health threw us for a loop and we had a hard time getting back on track.
- Maybe we just got older and felt like we needed a break and decided we did our part so let those who are younger step up
- Or perhaps it was a prolonged period of spiritual dryness. We hadn't heard from the Lord in a while, prayer seemed pointless, bible study irrelevant

Whatever the cause, we reached the place where we just stopped trying and started coasting

And even though it may not be our intent, by our failure to keep on working out our salvation as Paul instructs, we actually start fighting against God who is working in us to desire and to do his good will.

And as a result we fail to live in a manner that is worthy of God

**Because as he states in his commentary on Philippians, Dean Flemming said here Paul is unpacking what it means to live a life worthy of the gospel which he had told them to do in 1:27**

as he makes this admonishment, Paul does so with great assurance when he says you won't have to do it all on your own, by your own strength and abilities

As you work on your salvation be assured that God is working in you both to will and to do his good pleasure  
He will be there to help you through

Because our working out is in reality a response to what God is already working in our lives

Because salvation is not attained through our own efforts but is a work of God

**Back when he began the book, in verse 6 Paul even said he who began a good work in you will see it through to completion until the day of Christ Jesus**

Jesus suffered and died on the cross for our salvation.

He did all the work but his work didn't end there

We don't replace him with our own efforts now

He was raised from the dead and lives in our hearts and pours out his spirit

now we are to cooperate with him and what he wants to do, because as Paul said in Colossians 1:27, it is Christ in us which is the hope of glory

**Warren Wiersbe has said, God is more interested in the workman than in the work. If the workman is what he ought to be, the work will be what it ought to be. Unfortunately, too many Christians obey God only because of pressure on the outside, and not power on the inside.**

We must continue to work out what God has already started working in – for it is God who works in you to will and to do his good purpose

Without this continual working out, this ongoing growth our faith can shrivel up and become like the fetus Philip Yancey writes about in Reaching for the Invisible God. He said,

**In a medical museum I once saw displayed an ossified fetus. The placard explained that a very obese woman had gotten pregnant and never noticed it. Something went wrong and the fetus was never delivered, remaining instead in her womb. Its cells were gradually replaced over the years by minerals in the same process that petrifies trees. When the woman had an unrelated surgery at age 65, the doctors found inside her a hunk of bone, heavy as a bowling ball, in the shape of a perfectly formed fetus. If we don't continue to work out what God is working in our lives, our faith may shrivel up and die.**

**The shape and form may be there, but it is stillborn and never grows.**

Which raises the important question. What are we doing to work out our salvation, to work out what God is working in and bring it to completion?

We are not just to know Christ died for our sins but must do something with that knowledge, to cooperate with the power and working of God.

As he expresses through his letter, we do this through things like our worship, our witness, our relationships and fellowship, our service, and our discipleship practices

But it is not just what we do that matters, the way we do it matters also

It must be done in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, he says  
Specifically without grumbling and arguing,  
not division and strife but support and fellowship with others  
for if we do it in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, Paul says we will shine like stars in the universe as we hold out the word of life

our unity and care for each other becomes perhaps our greatest witness to the world that what we believe and say is true because it is not just what we say and do but also how we do them that is our witness.

**As someone has said, Perhaps the most powerful thing Christians can do to communicate to a skeptical world is to live fulfilled lives, exhibiting proof that Jesus' way truly leads to a life most abundant and most thirst-satisfying.**

This happens when we live out the realization that while salvation may start at conversion, it doesn't end there

When we are saved, we then begin that journey of faith, working out what God is already working in us.

In the words of Dr Seus,

**Said Conrad Cornelius O'Donald O'Dell,**

**My very young friend who is learning to spell:  
The A is for ape, and the B is for bear.  
The C is for Camel, the H is for Hare.  
The M is for mouse. And the R is for rat,  
I know all 26 letters like that...  
Through to Z is for zebra. I know them all well.  
Said Conrad Cornelius O'Donnel O'Dell.  
So now I know everything anyone knows,  
from beginning to end. From the start to the close.  
Because Z is as far as the alphabet goes.**

**Then he almost fell flat on his face on the floor,  
When I picked up the chalk and drew one letter more!  
A letter he never had dreamed of before!  
And I said you can stop with the Z but not me!  
In the places I go there are things that I see  
That I never could spell if I stopped at the Z.  
I'm telling you this cause you're one of my friends.  
My alphabet starts where your alphabet ends!**

For a lot of people, it seems like the Z of being a Christian is conversion, that it ends there.

Spiritual versions of Johnny Lechner

With little concern for what comes next, for Christian growth and discipleship

For transformation and new creation

For becoming what we are created to be

Jesus comes to us and says, where your Z is, is only my beginning.

Faith begins with the cross, it doesn't end there.

Move beyond the zebra and continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will and to do his good pleasure.

wherever we are on our journey of faith, new believer or old, the challenge for all is to continue to work out the salvation God is working in our lives

and the invitation for any who have not yet started the journey of faith, is to not just get to know about God but to get to know him

