

## **Week 5 (Oct 8–14): Choose Joy by Choosing Holiness!** **Philippians 2:12–18**

Throughout the Bible, the call for God’s people has been the same: “Be holy just as I am holy.” What does it mean to be “holy?” Holy means to be “set-apart” or “to be of a completely different substance,” one who is consecrated and devoted to the Lord. When you follow Jesus, you are called to pursue holiness. This pursuit is not because your good actions save you or because somehow you sustain your salvation. Rather, pursuing holiness is living everyday devoted to the Lord and His ways.

We are called to live in such a way that Jesus is worshipped and glorified as we grow in Him and become more like Him. One of the best definitions of this call to holiness is the call to look more and more like Jesus throughout our life. This is the Christian life. The joy and contentment we have in life directly corresponds to our pursuing holiness and conforming more and more to His image. Let’s look at what Paul has to say about holiness by pulling out the main verse of our passage and then letting Him define holiness in the surrounding verses.

### **Your Holiness MATTERS!**

#### **Philippians 2:15**

*...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.*

Sometimes we talk about the Christian life as if it ends with our confession of salvation. But that is just the beginning! When we believe in Jesus, the Lord calls us to a new life in Him. This new life of grace is a life when we are recognized as children of God by becoming blameless and pure. In the midst of “a crooked and depraved generation” (Deuteronomy 32:5) we are called to shine like stars in the sky.

The idea of “becoming” blameless and pure communicates the process of the task at hand, not just the product. Paul indicates that our holiness as Christians is a constant act of BECOMING something different. The Christian life is not about being perfect but about pursuing the example of Christ in our lives. The hope of the Christian life is that through the everyday transformation of the Spirit, we would become more blameless and pure with each opportunity. Why? Like a star in the night sky, our goal is to shine the light of Jesus among all people! The surrounding verses show us how this works.

## **Holiness Is a WORK OF GOD**

### **Philippians 2:13**

*For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.*

Our holiness, blamelessness and purity are not accomplished by simply trying harder in our own strength. The only way to pursue true Christian holiness is by growing in our relationship with God and allowing Him to do a work in us! When God's people went rogue in the Old Testament and disconnected their actions from their pursuing a relationship with God, they inevitably "did evil in the sight of the Lord" (e.g., Judges 2:11). The story of Israel proves that without the transformation and working of God, people can't live in the ways of God.

This is the theology behind the preceding verse (Philippians 2:12). The work of God in the life of a believer means that we have every necessary tool to live the life God has called us to live. God has not called us to an impossible task, but a task where we must remain dependent on Him.

## **Holiness Is a DISCIPLINE**

### **Philippians 2:12**

*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.*

First, this passage does not mean that we work for our salvation and tremble for fear of losing it when we mess up. This is the essence of any works-based salvation and is in opposition to the truths of verse 13. Instead, because we have an appropriate fear of the Lord (especially as it relates to the grandeur of verse 9–11), we should naturally live a life of action, not passivity. Salvation prompts a life of working as we follow the example of Christ. Not because this saves us, but because this is what it means to be saved.

This is the purpose of what we call spiritual disciplines or exercises: Bible reading, prayer, fellowship with other believers, fasting, etc. These are all like exercises for the Christian. In salvation, the believer's dry bones (Ezekiel 36–37) gain a flesh that can be worked out and grow stronger. The Bible makes clear that we can approach God's throne confidently and not out of fear (Hebrews 4:16). But fear and trembling in this instance is a call to revere and respect Christ enough to steward our new life well. The happiest people in the world are the ones who are working out their salvation with fear and trembling because they are the ones directly in the will and purposes of the Father.

## **Holiness Is a CONSTANT PURSUIT**

### **Philippians 2:14, 16**

*Do everything without grumbling or arguing... 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.*

In the context of the surrounding verses, Philippians 2:14 is best understood in conjunction with this idea of working out your salvation with fear and trembling. What good is a worker who is complaining as he is working? Or arguing about it every step of the way? This grumbling kind of attitude negates the work being done.

In all of Israel's wilderness wanderings, though the Lord remained faithful and provided everything they needed, they negated His work by grumbling and complaining (e.g., Exodus 16:2). This kind of complaining is the opposite of a life of joy in the Lord. Furthermore, obedience with complaints and arguing is still a form of disobedience.

Instead, we are called to hold firm to the word of life, which is again related to becoming blameless and pure! Hold firm to this Jesus who is the King of Life. Does this mean that if we let Jesus go, will He let go of us? No! Christ has never and will never let go of His people. Rather, He always inviting us back to take hold of this life He has promised. Holding firm to the word of life means continuing to pursue His ways in both the good and the bad of life.

## **Holiness Takes SACRIFICE**

### **Philippians 2:17-18**

*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.*

Notice the three complimentary words in these verses: "poured out," "sacrifice," "service." All of these are related to the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. In a humble way, Paul views their "sacrifice" and support of him as primary to his "drink offering sacrifice." Though scholars have debated the exact meaning of this phrase, one central point is clear: Paul recognizes that pursuing holiness, for them and him, is equivalent to sacrifice.

A sacrificial holiness is the opposite of obeying without complaining or arguing (e.g., Romans 12:1-2). Our obedience and pursuing holiness may take sacrifice, but the result is always rejoicing and gladness. In other words, pursuing holiness, even though it takes a constant dying to self, should result

in joy. When we follow the commands of Christ, Christ our Lord becomes our source of joy.

**Discussion Questions:**

- What is personal holiness and how is related to the holiness of God?
- The word “your” in v. 12 is plural. How do we “work out” our salvation as the church?
- What is the difference between working out our salvation and working for our salvation?
- What is the difference between *becoming* pure and blameless and sustaining your salvation by your good actions?
- How does grumbling and complaining damage our witness?
- Even in the midst of contemplating sacrificing his life for others, Paul remains joyful (v. 17). How can you maintain a joyful attitude in the face of the problems of life?
- Is pursuing holiness often pitched as a joyful activity? Why or why not?
- What are some practical ways we can live as “living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to the Lord” (Romans 12:1–2)?