

Group Study Outline

Launching

What criteria could you use to take your own spiritual temperature?
Using those as a thermometer, are you healthy/poorly/terminally ill?!

Questions

Recap: why is Paul writing to the Philippians? what does he want?
What does 1:27 mean?

Read Philippians 2:12-18

Paul says God works in them, and they must work out their salvation.
What is it that they have got to *continue* doing?
When Paul talks about obedience, what obedience does he mean?
If Christians copy Jesus' obedience, what will that mean we do?
Why should we live like this for others' salvation (acc to these verses)?
What does God want? what does Paul want?
How does God help us to live obediently (13)?
Why do you think Paul adds the phrase 'with fear and trembling'?

So, what does it mean (here in Phils) to *work out your salvation*?

What would Paul say to a Christian who thinks all this emphasis on
gospelling is a bit OTT?
What would Paul say to you about your Christianity?!

How will Christians shine (according to 14-16)?
What matters most: living as a Christian or sharing the gospel?
What will make Paul *boast*? why will he *boast* about it?
(Explain 17 from notes) What is Paul asking the Philippians to do here?

Take some time to apply this paragraph ...
How does what Paul writes here challenge you to change? be specific!

Read Philippians 2:19-30

How is Timothy living out what Paul is looking for in the Philippians?
How is Epaphroditus living out what he's looking for in the Philippians?
... in each case, spot words and ideas we've already seen in Phils

Conclusion

What criteria does Paul use to assess someone's spiritual temperature?
Give yourself a rating according to these criteria!



Philippians 2:12-30

Theme Sentence

Living the salvation Jesus brought us means copying his obedience.

Story Board

Jesus' model for us is a life of total obedience to God for the sake of others' salvation. You enjoy that salvation. Well, living that salvation means living the obedience we see in Jesus. That's the thing God definitely wants to achieve in you: a life lived with the gospel at the heart.

Your role in this world (just as it has always been the role for God's people) is to be light in a dark place. So live a life that shows all the hallmarks of God's working in you: be irreproachable, and speak out the gospel. Resist the temptation to opt for an easier life. And as you live lives like that, sacrificing yourself for the gospel's sake, I'll rejoice now ... and at the end of time, I'll be over the moon!

I hope you're getting my point through this letter: I keep saying it again and again! And Timothy and Epaphroditus both model it for you. Be like them ... like me ... like Jesus himself. In other words, be more concerned that others are saved than for personal comfort.

Application

- do I live out that salvation that comes to me because of Jesus' obedience? To live it out means copying Jesus' concern that others are saved. Disobedience in this is a failure to embrace the gospel.
- Christians are a light for non-Christians around us. Do I see that is the purpose for which God keeps me still on this earth? Am I *shining ... holding fast* to the gospel?
- what kind of character summary could Paul write about me? Would any of the things he's writing about here feature? Would he use 2:4 to describe me as he does Timothy (2:21)?
- how has the gospel affected anything I've done today? this week?

Verse by verse

12-13 These verses explain the relationship between our working and God's working in the Christian life: we *work out* what God *works in*. For example, people become Christians as God calls them (Rom 8:29-30), as we speak the gospel (Rom 10:14-17). I'll understand the Bible as I think hard, as God gives me understanding (2 Tim 2:7). But note that in all this, God both *wills* and *works*. When we feel 'I don't want to be godly', God *wills*. When we feel 'even if I wanted to, I can't do it', God *works*. As we saw in 1:6, it's God who *will bring to completion* the work which he has begun in every Philippian Christian.

But what does it mean to *work out your salvation*? Paul calls on them to *continue* as they *have always obeyed*. So then, it's obeying that matters. And the kind of obedience he is talking about is what he has just described in Jesus (who was *obedient even to death* 8) and now applies: as he obeyed, so should you. In 2:1-11, Paul challenged us: to embrace the gospel is to enjoy its blessings, and also to be changed by it from self-interest to concern for others' salvation. In 2:5-13, the point is similar: if we have experienced the salvation that comes to us because of Jesus' obedience, living out that salvation means copying that obedience. Remember, Jesus' obedience was for others' salvation.

14-18 Paul reuses Deut 32:5 (the wording is close in Greek). Moses' song witnessed against Israel's unfaithfulness (Deut 31:19-22) which, by the NT, is so bad that they are indistinguishable from the rest of the world, and God's new people are Christians. There are two reasons why Paul makes this link:

- (a) Christians now have the role that Israel was given: we are to be light to people around (Isaiah 49:6; Matt 5:14) and we *shine* both by how we live, and by what we say. So 2:14 stands in opposition to the blameless purity and holiness to which we are called *until the day of Christ* (1:10). But note, Paul's main theme is still the call for us to live gospel-centred lives.
- (b) what started the rot for Israel was that they grumbled and put the Lord to the test (cf 1 Cor 10:9-10; Heb 3:7f). So *complaining and arguing* are not small crimes for God's people. What made Egypt so attractive that the Israelites complained about wanting to return there (eg in Exod 16:3; Num 20:5) was that the wilderness was too hard. The Philippians face the same danger: they may

not *stand firm for the gospel* because the opposition is too hard (1:27-28a). With this understanding, 14 no longer seems oddly-inserted: Paul is calling for the Philippians to resist any pull of 'let's go back to the world', and to suffer for the gospel instead.

16-17 Paul's life and Christian ministry are inseparable (1:21a): so if they don't *work out* their salvation to live as shining stars, Paul will feel he's not completed the job. But 'even if I die in this ministry, it's all like the finishing touches to the real sacrificial offering to God: you! On *the day of Christ* I want to boast about you Philippians, so transformed by the gospel you embraced that it changed how you lived your lives ... and your eternity. I rejoice to see it.' (NIV translation is helpful here.)

19-30 We've seen that gospel-centeredness means being more concerned that others are saved than for my personal comfort. As if the examples of Paul (1:12-26) and Jesus (2:5-11) are not enough, Paul gives two further examples of people modelling it. Timothy/Epaphroditus display the *sacrifice* and *service* (17 NIV) that Paul looks for from the Philippians' faith.

19-24 Timothy

Timothy is doing 2:4 exactly (20-21), even though it seems that he's the only one (20a). Again, the point is that they should be like him: *serve ... in the gospel*. 22 gives a lovely picture of what *partnership in the gospel* is like: it means serving the gospeller in a close, family-style relationship.

We might expect 21 to end with ... *not the interests of others* (cf 2:4). But, of course, to look to the interests of others is to look to the interests of Jesus: his interests clearly were others' salvation (which is precisely the point in 2:6-11).

25-30 Epaphroditus

Epaphroditus is another member of the family, another partner in the gospel (25). What he did was bring the Philippians' gift (4:14-19) which constituted very practical help for the gospeller (25).

We don't know how his near-fatal illness is connected with this visit to serve Paul, but the point is that he had shown just the same kind of self-denying, self-effacing service *for the work of Christ*. *Risked his life* is a gambling word implying that he had weighed up the possible outcomes, and opted for the one that would best serve the gospel (even if he lost his life). According to 3:7f, when Paul did the sums, he got the same answer.