

Philippians

Instructions for the Community continued

Co-operation in Salvation (Chapter 2 verses 12 – 18)

Paul's appeal to his friends at Philippi is more than just an appeal for unity and harmony, it is an appeal to live their whole lives in a way that leads to the salvation of God both in time and in eternity.

Nowhere in the New Testament is the work of salvation more succinctly stated as in verses 12 and 13.

... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for God is at work in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. (RSV)

... work out your salvation with fear and trembling. For God is the one who, for his good purpose, works in you both to desire and to work. (NAB)

... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure. (AV)

As always Paul chooses his words very carefully, the Greek word he uses for 'work out' is *katargazesthai* which always conveys the idea of bringing to completion. Paul is once more encouraging his friends, whatever happens, do not give in! Do not be satisfied with a half-hearted response, keep going until God has worked out fully in you his plan for your life.

God is at work in you!

The word Paul uses for 'work' is the Greek verb *energein* there are two significant things about this choice. This verb was always used to speak about the '*action of God*' and was also always used to describe '*effective action*'. Therefore, God's action is never hindered, left half-finished, it is always fully effective.

Salvation is of God.

- a. It is God that works in us the desire to be saved. The desire for salvation is not brought about by human emotion, but by God himself. The beginning of the process of salvation is stimulated and awakened by God.
- b. The continuation of the process is dependent on God. Without his help we cannot progress in goodness. Without his help sin cannot be conquered and no virtue achieved.
- c. The end process of salvation is with God for it is friendship with God. The whole process of salvation is begun, continued and ended in God.

Salvation is of Man.

There is another side of this, 'work out your own salvation.....' Paul quite bluntly points out to his friend's that without their co-operation (and ours today), even God is helpless. The fact is that salvation like any gift needs to be received and accepted.

Paul's thoughts in this passage Chapter 2 verses 12 – 18 can be summarised as the:

Signs of Salvation:

1. *Effective action* Continual evidence in our daily lives of growth, sadly too many Christians are never really any further on, we remain victims of the same habits, temptations and guilty of the same failures. The Christian life must be a continual progress towards God.
2. *Fear and trembling* This does not mean the fear of a slave for his master or fear at the prospect of punishment, Paul's readers would have been familiar with these words as an Old Testament phrase indicating seriousness in the service of God aware of their human limitations. Indicating a fear and trembling that causes them to seek God's help.
3. *Serenity and certainty* Verse 14

Do all things without grumbling or questionings (RSV)

Do everything without grumbling or questioning. (NAB)

Do all things without murmurings and disputings: (AV)

Paul's choice of word here is unusual, for grumbling/murmuring, he uses the word *goggusmos* which in the Greek sacred writings has a special significance, it is the word used for the rebellious murmurings of the children of Israel against Moses (e.g. Exodus 15:24). He is referring to the threatening and discontented mutterings of a group who distrust their leaders and he follows it with the word *dialogismos* which describes useless disputing and doubting. He strongly advises his friends not to waste time in useless disagreements which destroy trust and certainty.

4. *Purity* Paul would much rather his friends be: verse 15

that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish..... (NAB and RSV)

That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke... (AV)

The word translated blameless is the Greek word *amemptos* which literally means to be clearly seen to be without fault, totally pure. What Paul is saying becomes clearer if we consider another word, he uses elsewhere in his letters the Greek word *sinecere* meaning literally 'without wax'. It was a common practice when making statues that any imperfections were filled with wax so that they appeared perfect. However, when the statues became warm the wax easily melted and the faults became easy to see.

The word translated innocent or harmless is *akeraios* literally meaning unmixed, unadulterated. It could be used to describe wine and milk that had not been mixed with water and diluted or metal that has no alloy in it. When used to describe a person it implies motives that are sincere and unmixed. The translation of the Greek word *amōmos* into without blemish refers to the sacrifice of a pure offering to God.

Paul has remarkably high expectations of his friends. He wishes their lives to be without fault not hiding flaws and defects, sincere, pure in motives and able to stand the scrutiny of God!

5. *Missionary endeavour* This has two aspects

- a) The proclamation of the Gospel in words that are clear and easily understood.
- b) The witness of a life that is absolutely straight in a crooked and perverse generation. It is the offer of light in a world that is dark. Paul uses the same Greek word for light as is used in the creation story *phosteres*, the lights set in the firmament to give light upon the earth.

The Christians at Philippi are encouraged not only to lives without faults but also to shine as lights in the world! It will not surprise us to learn that.....

Paul longs to know that his friends have made progress.....verse 16

Holding forth the word of life,.....that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.(RSV)
....as you hold on to the word of life.....I did not run in vain or labor in vain. (NAB)
holding fast the word of life....I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. (AV)

The Greek word Paul uses for labour is *kopian* which means to labour to the point of exhaustion. It is most likely that *kopian* describes the rigour of an athlete's training. Paul is saying that he prays the discipline of training he has imposed on himself will not be wasted. One of the features of Paul's writing is his use of descriptions from the life of an athlete. Everyone knew what he was talking about because every Greek city had its gymnasium, which was far more than just a physical training ground, it was also the intellectual club of the city. In the Greek world there were the great Isthmian Games at Corinth, Pan-Ionian Games at Ephesus and the greatest of all the Olympic games held every four years. Not only did the athletes come, the historians and poets came to give readings of their latest works and the sculptors came to make statues of the winners. It was in the gymnasium that the philosophers, sophists, teachers and preachers often found their audience including Socrates who used the gymnasium to discuss the eternal problems. Where there were crowds of men, Paul would naturally be there to preach the Gospel, but he was also a keen spectator and understood the training and the strict regulations that must be observed. References can be found at: 1 Corinthians 9:26 and 27, Philippians 3:14, 2 Timothy 4:7 and 8. For Paul the greatest prize in life was to know that others through him had come to know, love and serve Jesus Christ.

At verse 17: we read

Even if I am to be poured as a libation upon the sacrificial offering of your faith,.....(RSV)
But even if I am poured out as a libation upon the sacrificial service of your faith.....(NAB)
Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith.....(AV)

Paul has this amazing gift of being able to speak in a language that his friends could understand, he has already used the picture of the games, now he uses a picture from heathen sacrifice. One of the commonest forms of heathen sacrifice was a *libation*, which was a cup of wine poured out as an offering to the gods, every heathen meal began and ended with a libation. Paul is writing in prison, he is awaiting trial and is aware that his death might not be far away, so he is referring to his service to his friends at Philippi in a way they could understand as a sacrifice to God.

Verses 17 and 18

....I am glad and rejoice with you all.....rejoice with me (RSV)
....I rejoice and share my joy with all of you..... rejoice and share your joy with me (NAB)
....I Joy, and rejoice with you all..... rejoice with me (AV)

Paul is completely willing to make his life a sacrifice to God and if that happens then it will be a joy! He asks his friends not to mourn at the prospect but to rejoice. To Paul the call to sacrifice was a call of his love for Christ and therefore not a cause for regret and protest, but with joy.

Faithful Servants Chapter 2 verses 19 – 24

Paul could not come to Philippi himself, so he sent Timothy as his representative. Timothy was a native of either Derbe or Lystra. His mother Eunice was a Jewess and his father was a Greek, he was not circumcised and would therefore appear to have been educated by Greek methods. We do not know when or how he was converted to Christianity; we only know that on his second Missionary Journey Paul met him and found in him someone who he could use in the service of Jesus Christ. Whenever Paul needed information from a church, or wished to send advice, encouragement or rebuke and could not go himself it was Timothy he sent. Timothy was sent to Thessalonica (I Thessalonians 3:6), Corinth (1 Corinthians 4:17) and Philippi. In the end Timothy was also a prisoner for his faith. (Hebrews 13:23). Timothy was willing to go anywhere; in his hands a message was safe. His one desire was to serve, to serve Paul and Jesus Christ. He is the patron saint of all those who are quite content with the second place, as long as they can serve.

The Courtesy of Paul Chapter 2 verses 25 - 30

We have already briefly considered the story of Epaphroditus (week 1 page 3) clearly a very brave man, being prepared to offer himself as the personal attendant of a man awaiting trial on a capital charge was taking a considerable risk. In Rome Epaphroditus fell very seriously ill, news of his illness had filtered back to Philippi and Paul is aware that it is time

that Epaphroditus returned home. However, there is a problem, the Philippian Church has sent him to stay with Paul if he goes back home there would be those who would consider him to be a quitter. In verse 25 Paul gives Epaphroditus an incredible testimony designed to silence any criticism on his return. In this testimony every word is carefully chosen, Epaphroditus has been Paul's, brother, co-worker, your messenger and servant/minister in my need. The Greek word used for messenger is *apostolos* literally meaning anyone who is sent out on an errand, but Christian usage had ennobled it and by using it he ranks Epaphroditus with himself. The word translated servant or minister is *leitourgos*. In secular Greek this was a splendid word. In the ancient days in the Greek cities there were men who because they loved their city, undertook huge civic duties at their own expense. These men were the greatest benefactors of the state and became known as *leitourgoi*.

Paul takes the words *apostolos* and *leitourgos* and says to his friends at Philippi give a man like that a welcome home!

There is a word in this passage which later had famous usage - verse 30

... risking his life.... (RSV and NAB)

....not regarding his life.... (AV)

The Greek word is the verb *paraboleuesthai*; it is a gambler's word and means to stake everything on a turn of the dice. Paul is in effect saying that for the sake of Jesus Christ Epaphroditus gambled his life. In the Early Church there was an association of men and women called the *parabolani* the gamblers. It was their objective to visit prisoners and the sick especially those who were ill with dangerous, contagious and transmissible diseases. In the Christian there should be an almost thoughtless courage which makes him ready to gamble with his life to serve Christ.

Rejoice! Chapter 3 verse 1

...rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous.... RSV

...rejoice in the Lord. Writing the same things to you is no burden for me.... NAB

...rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is not irksome to me.... AV

Paul must have felt that he had been setting a difficult challenge for his friends at Philippi. For them there was the real possibility of the same type of persecution as Paul was suffering himself, from this point of view Christianity looks forbidding and uninviting, but, in it and beyond it all is joy. Jesus says, "no one will take your joy away from you" (John 16:22 NAB)

Like any good teacher Paul is not afraid of repetition, again in this verse he urges his friends to rejoice. But he also appears to make the case for more major repetition by saying that he intends to write things to them that he has written before. This is interesting because it must mean that Paul has written letters that have not survived. Paul was writing from AD48 to AD64 sixteen years, but we only possess thirteen letters.

Legalistic Teachers Chapter 3 verses 2 and 3

Look out for the dogs, look out for the evil workers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh (RSV)

Beware of the dogs! Beware of evil workers. Beware of mutilation! (NAB)

Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of concision. AV

Quite suddenly Paul's accent changes to that of warning. Wherever he taught Jews followed him and tried to undo his teaching. Paul therefore wants to warn his friends particularly from a Greek background not to be deceived by the Jewish teachings. Paul always emphasises that we are saved by grace alone, salvation is the gift of God, we can never earn it, we can only accept it.

1. *Beware of the dogs* To us a dog is a well loved member of the family, but in the near East at the time of Jesus they were pariah dogs, roaming the streets, in packs, hunting, snapping and snarling at all the met. In Greek thought, the dog stands for everything that is blatantly unclean. The Jews called Gentiles 'dogs', Paul how ever points out to the Jewish teachers that they are the 'dogs' because they pervert the gospel of Jesus Christ.
2. *Evil workers* The Jewish teachers were quite sure that they were right, in their view it was necessary to keep the Law's countless rules and regulations to achieve righteousness. which resulted in taking men further away from God. They thought they were working for good but in fact they were working evil. Paul is convinced that the only valid kind of righteousness there is, comes through faith, it comes from the grace of God. Finally, in this verse, he calls the Jews the -
3. *Party of mutilation* There is a pun in the Greek here that is not transferable to English. There are two Greek verbs which are very like each other:
Peritemnein to *circumcise*
katatemnein means *to mutilate - incision*

According to Jewish belief circumcision was given to Israel as a sign and symbol that they were in a special relationship with God. (Genesis 17:9,10) Mutilation is forbidden (Leviticus 21:5) But what is the point of this? Paul is pointing out that if a person is in a special relationship with God then something far more is needed than just a mark on his body. Long before Paul's teaching the great teachers and prophets of the Jewish faith had seen that a change of heart and mind was also necessary, a 'spiritual circumcision' Paul concludes in verse 3

For we are the true circumcision, who worship God in spirit.....RSV

For we are the circumcision , we who worship through the Sprit of God.....NAB

For we are the circumcision which worship God in the Spirit.....AV

Paul therefore says that it is Christians who are genuinely circumcised, not with an outward

mark of the flesh but rather with a change of heart. Therefore, they will worship God in Spirit with devotion and sincerity of heart. Their only boast will not be of what they have done, but what Christ has done for them. They will not put their confidence in merely human things. Pauls makes it clear to those reading that the Jew places his confidence in the physical mark of circumcision and in the performance and duties of the Law. The Christian places his confidence in the mercy of God and the love of Jesus Christ.

Pauls Credentials Chapter 3 verses 4-7

Paul had just attacked the Jewish teachers and insisted that it is the Christians who are the truly circumcised and covenant people. It would not be surprising if his opponents may have attempted to say “but you’re a Christian, you don’t know what you are talking about”. Paul certainly did know what he was talking about and lists his credentials not to boast; but to show that he had enjoyed every privilege that a Jew could enjoy and had risen to every attainment that a Jew could rise to!

1. He had been *circumcised when he was eight days old*. He had been born into the Jewish faith, had known its privileges and observed its ceremonies since birth.
2. He was *of the race of Israel*. By calling himself an Israelite, Paul stressed the absolute purity of his descent.
3. He was *of the tribe of Benjamin*. He belonged to the élite of Israel.

From birth Paul tells us he has been a God fearing, Law observing Jew, his lineage was pure and he belonged to the most aristocratic tribe of the Jews. Pauls continues by literally saying if anyone thinks they can be confident in the flesh, then I should be able to so! Consider this list of achievements.....

4. *Born of Hebrew parents* at Tarsus, educated in Rome by Gamaliel, speaking both Hebrew and Greek
5. He *trained as a Pharisee* (The Separated Ones) and therefore had a thorough detailed working knowledge of the law.
6. He has been a *persecutor of the Church*. To a Jew zeal was the greatest quality in the religious life, Paul was so zealous that he had tried to wipe out the opponents of Judaism, he knew Judaism at its most intense and fanatical heat.
7. In regard to the righteousness that comes from the law *he was blameless*. The Greek word he uses is *amemptos*. Paul claims that there was no demand of the Law he did not fulfil.

Paul proves to his Jewish listeners that he has the right to speak. He is not condemning Judaism from the outside. He has experienced its highest point; and he knew it was nothing compared with the joy that Christ had given. He firmly believed the only way to find peace was to abandon the path of human achievement and accept the way of grace.

Righteousness from God Chapter 3 verses 8 and 9

Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord. For his sake I suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ..... (RSV)

For his sake I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them so much rubbish that I may gain Christ and be found in him not having any righteousness of my own based on the law but that which comes through faith in Christ..... (NAB)

Yes doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and I do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ.....(AV)

Paul had already come to the conclusion that all his Jewish privileges and attainments were nothing but a total loss, this was not a snap decision perhaps later to be regretted and reversed. Here he is saying 'I came to that conclusion, and I still think so.

In this passage the keyword is *righteousness*. *Dikaionē* is always difficult to translate in Paul's letters, the problem is finding an English word to cover all it includes. Righteousness for Paul nearly always has the meaning of a *right relationship with God*. In effect Paul is telling his friends at Philippi "all my life I have been trying to get into a right relationship with God, I tried to find it by strict adherence to Jewish Law, but I found the Law useless, no better than *skubala*". *Skubala* had two meanings in common language derived from *kusi ballomena* which means *what is thrown to the dogs*; and in medical terms it means *excrement*. Paul's friends at Philippi would know exactly what he meant. He found the Law no more use than trash thrown on the garbage heap in helping him to get into a right relationship with God. So, he gave up trying to create goodness of his own and came to God in simple faith as Jesus told him to do and found the fellowship that he had so long and hard sought. Paul is explaining to his friends that in his experience the Jewish way is wrong and pointless, you will never get into a right relationship with God by your own efforts in keeping the Law. But he continues to tell them, there is a way to get into a right relationship with God, it means taking Jesus Christ at his word and accepting what God himself offers you.

The inadequacy of the law and the amazing experience of knowing Christ and accepting the offer of God's grace!

The language Paul chooses to use – *excrement* - shows his utter disgust for the Law that resulted from his own continually exasperated efforts to live by it: contrasted with the joy that shines through this section of his 'chat on paper to his friends' showing how gloriously and positively adequate he found the grace of God in Jesus Christ.