

THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

“Response to Jesus Example”

Philippians 2:12, 13

Review

1. The assumptions of this chapter (vv. 1-4) elicit a strong command (v. 2) which is followed by six exhortations (vv. 2-4). These very appeals were the incredible “mind” of Christ (v. 5).

2. Demonstrating the “mind” of Christ are the seven steps He took down: 1) Existing as God. 2) Thinking as God. 3) Making no reputation. 4) Taking a servant form and made in likeness of man. 5) Being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself. 6) Being obedient unto death. 7) Being crucified with a servant’s death.

3. It is this self-humiliation of our blessed Lord which is the mind believers are called to emulate (v. 5). Moreover, the seven steps up by which the Father responded to the Son’s humiliation (vv. 9-11) express the glory of the “mind” of Christ.

4. With this blessed background, the Spirit of God instructed the Apostle Paul to write the verses in the present text to explicate the significance of our Lord’s example. This is why the conjunction “wherefore” is given (v. 12). It throws one back to the context and makes the example of Christ something of special note. The word could be rendered “consequently” or “so then.”

5. It is important to acknowledge that the Apostle is addressing “brethren,” hence believers. They have received Jesus as their Emancipator (Saviour) consequently, He is their Exemplar -- that’s the proper order (cf. Eph. 5:1).

6. Thank God, the Lord Jesus is also the Enabler of the believers. This is the focus in the word “now” of the text. A believer is saved from the practice and habit of daily sinning but he is also being saved unto the practice and habit of daily holiness. So, what are the exhortations of the now or unto salvation? Look at them:

1. OBEY

Here is one of the primary Christian characteristics -- obedience. It is stated of our Lord in His self-humiliation (v. 8). Elsewhere Paul refers to it as “obedient faith” (Ro. 1:5). Surely this is the message of the Word -- the faith that saves is the faith that obeys! All the texts teaching working faith suggest this (cf. James 2:14-26). The one who merely “believes” (hears), but does not “do” (obey) really deceives himself (James 1:22-25).

So long as Paul is in Philippi () the Philippians “always” obeyed. But that was not enough. There is the “now” of Paul’s absence () which required a “much more” obedience (cf. 1:27). A similar matter was in the days of the Judges (cf. Judges 2:16-19).

2. WORK

The verb is a present tense imperatival form in the plural. If ever there were a term that showed the Christian life being invested with responsibilities, this is it! Being enamored with the sheer joy of the Christian life, without accepting its serious side, is a grave failure.

Note these aspects of exhortation:

a. Work has a great Possession -- “your own salvation.” While it is His salvation (Eph. 2:8, 9) and we are to show it forth (Psa. 96:2), it is nevertheless ours by taking it from His pierced hands. Thank God, this eternally “your” salvation buries the past, changes the present, and insures the future.

b. Work has a great Program -- “work out.” ()
Simply, this means God works salvation in our lives so we can work it out by our lives. Strabo (b. 64-62 B.C.), a Roman, wrote in Greek about the once famous silver mines in Spain. He used the same Greek verb as here. The mines were “worked out.” The Romans exploited and got the utmost value out of the mines. So we are to mine salvation and gain the nuggets of personal character which are in our salvation.

c. Work has a great Passion -- fear and trembling. Actually, these terms are before the verb in this phrase. This does not mean a dread or shrinking from God, but a watchfulness and eagerness to think reverently and have constant consciousness of God’s presence (cf. 2 Cor. 7:5; Eph. 6:5; 2 Pet. 2:10).

3. BELIEVE

Here is a marvelous fact. It is not a possibility, but present sovereign activity of God in behalf of believers (beloved,). Look at these facets of the matter:-

a. God’s grace

It is the Almighty who continually works in believers (). The “for” is explanatory and not an argument. Surely “God” is emphasized because He is utterly the Sovereign. He worked on us to save us (John 16:7-11); He works with us to serve Him (1 Cor. 3:9); Hallelujah He works in us to sanctify us (Ro. 8:4; 1 Cor. 6:19; Gal. 2:10).

b. God’s gifts

Amazing and incredible -- God wills () and God does (work in,). These two verbs indicate huge problems. They are expressed in the battle of the believer’s natures (Ro. 7:15-25). Clearly no one can save himself and no one can live the Christian life. It is God Who wills and it is God Who works in! Peter expressed it (2 Pet. 1:3). Bible salvation is patently theocentric and not anthropocentric. Christianity is a Divine life (Col. 1:27).

c. God’s goal

Regretfully, the common version (KJV) misses the meaning of the preposition “of” His good pleasure. This particle () is better rendered for the sake of, in behalf of, for. This is the goal or intent for His in working. He will not fail to carry out His sovereign gracious purpose concerning believers (cf. Eph. 1:5, 9, 11). This is obviously the teaching of Scripture (Ro. 8:28-30).

Conclusion

The antinomy of these two views presented here has baffled many. To those who accept the fact of salvation being a work of God, there is no problem. It is for all who accept the sovereignty of God to appropriate that in His infinite wisdom. He so ordered His universe so as to include responsibility as an integral part of man’s being. Not only are there expectations from His creatures (Ro. 1:20), but believers are expected to respond obediently to His revealed will (Eph. 2:17-20).