



CAPITOL COMMISSION

Are You Pursuing Spiritual Growth?—Philippians 2.12-18

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PHILIPPIANS: CULTIVATING A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE AT THE CAPITOL

Don Garner / PO Box 302703, Austin, TX 78703 / don.garner@capitolcom.org www.capitolcom.org

INTRODUCTION

What are the pursuits that dominate your time and attention? Your life is defined by your pursuits. Pursuit is also defined as the act of striving for something. Our nation's founders considered the pursuit of happiness to be an unalienable right. Pursuit is the act of chasing after something. What are you chasing? We are all tempted to chase after pleasure, riches, power and prestige. A pursuit can also be described as a pastime or hobby. Whatever interests you enough to garner your discretionary time and resources helps define you as well.

In Philippians 2.12-18, Paul moves from a discussion of the lofty and inspiring example of Jesus Christ's life to each individual believer's pursuit of spiritual growth. "Work out your own salvation..." is an imperative that is both practical and personal. One theologian points out that Paul "is not merely communicating to these Philippians truths for their creed, but precepts for their deeds." In this week's study entitled, Are You Pursuing Spiritual Growth?, we consider the work required for spiritual growth, the aim of spiritual growth, and the sacrifice and service which support spiritual growth.

Philippians 2.12-18—Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain. Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me.

I. IS SPIRITUAL GROWTH YOUR JOB OR GOD'S? (12-13)

"Work out your own salvation." Taken on its own, this phrase seems to give the job of spiritual growth to you and I as believers. Bring alongside other imperatives like, "put off the old man," "be holy as God is holy," and the believer's responsibility for spiritual growth is hard to escape. Yet Paul's next phrase, "for it is God who works in you," reminds us that God is the driving force behind any progress the believer realizes in the pursuit of spiritual growth. Our work is a reflection of or the product of God's work in us.

If the finished work of Christ has secured our salvation, what work remains then? Salvation has several aspects. I have been saved, I am being saved, and I will be saved. Christ's work has secured my salvation in every aspect, but not all aspects are yet realized. Justification by faith in Christ means I have been saved from the power and penalty of sin. As I walk through this life, I am being saved through the sanctifying work of God as I grow in the likeness of His Son. The work of sanctification or, in other words, the pursuit of spiritual growth, remains.

Fear and trembling reflect a reverent frame of mind which takes seriously the fact that God is working through every detail of life. He grants us not only the power to do His will, but the motivation or will to do it. Paul compels these Philippian believers to assume responsibility for pursuing spiritual growth with the assurance that God continues to work in and through them. God used Paul to bring them to a certain measure of growth, but it was God who was at work and continues to work, even in Paul's absence.

II. WHAT IS THE AIM OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH? (14-16)

So, it is God at work, even as we work out our salvation through the pursuit of spiritual growth. But what is the aim or goal of this pursuit? Three qualities that reflect the aim of spiritual growth are: humble submission, virtuous character, and a faithful witness.

BIBLE STUDIES (MEALS PROVIDED)

LEGISLATORS ONLY: WEDNESDAY @ LUNCH AT THE AUSTIN CLUB (11:30A.M. OR UPON ADJOURNMENT, WHICHEVER IS LATER) OR THURSDAYS @ 7:30 A.M. IN THE MEMBERS' LOUNGE (E2.1002)

CAPITOL COMMUNITY (ALL ARE WELCOME): FRIDAYS @ 8:00A.M. IN THE MEMBERS' LOUNGE (E2.1002)

Spiritual Growth—Philippians 2.12-18

YOUR HUMBLE SUBMISSION

The believer's pursuit of spiritual growth is to be untainted by complaining and disputing. Humble submission to the process is essential. You are to take comfort in knowing that God is ordering your life according to His commitment to your growth in the likeness of Christ. Complaints challenge His ability to meet your needs. Disputes challenge His wisdom in ordering your life so as to maximize every situation's value in your sanctification. He knows what He is about.

YOUR VIRTUOUS CHARACTER

Blameless, harmless, and without fault...Wow! Isn't this an intimidating list of qualities? God's plan is that you become all that these terms entail. These words describe the inner man. They describe an impeccable character. This is not about cleaning ourselves up on the outside, but being transformed from the inside out. Attitudes, motives, and every issue of the heart are brought into view by these qualities. When the transforming power of the gospel of Christ, the indwelling Spirit of God, and renewing power of the Word go to work in the believer's life, virtuous character is the outcome.

YOUR FAITHFUL WITNESS

Holding fast, or a better rendering, holding forth the word of life is another product of spiritual growth Paul lists here. The pursuit of spiritual growth is a faithful witness. Paul exhorts us to steadfast fidelity to the message of the gospel. Your virtuous character, untainted by complaints and disputes, will stand as a stark contradiction to the crookedness and perversity of this age. What a beautiful frame for the timeless message of the gospel, as you shine as light in a dark world.

III. DO SACRIFICE AND SERVICE SUPPORT SPIRITUAL GROWTH? (17-18)

Paul fully expects to rejoice over these believers and their pursuit of spiritual growth. He is confident that he has not run or labored in vain—he has not worn himself out for no good

reason. His service to Christ on their behalf and the sacrifices made all along the way, as well as those which lie ahead, are a cause for rejoicing to him.

Paul's allusion to being poured out as a drink offering arises from a common pagan practice of pouring a libation over a sacrificial animal as it burns upon the altar. The liquid is almost instantly converted to steam and then quickly disappears. The Philippian Christians are the sacrifice in view here, and Paul minimizes his impending execution as nothing more than a libation poured upon it. He rejoices to have any part, however small, in their sacrifice. The word for service here is the same from which we get our word liturgy and speaks of their faithful ministrations before God.

The fact is, each of us owes much of our progress in the faith to the service and sacrifice of believers who have gone before. God's program for our growth in Christ-likeness necessarily involves other believers. He likewise uses us to fuel the pursuit of spiritual growth in others. Countless believers throughout church history have sacrificed temporal things and at times even forfeited their lives for the progress of others. Our hearts should brim with gratitude at the thought of it and rejoice at the prospects that we will be used in such a way.

CONCLUSION

- What are the pursuits that most define your life at present?
- Does your outlook reflect reverence for God's work in your life?
- What are you currently doing to pursue spiritual growth?
- Are you humbly submitted to God or have you complained or reasoned against His workings in your life?
- Is God transforming your character from the inside out or do you work to keep up the appearance of godliness?
- Does the virtue in your life cast light upon a dark world?
- Are you willing that your life be 'poured out' for the spiritual growth of others?