

**Joy When Life is Tough - Philippians**  
**Part 4**  
**“Working Out What God Works In”**  
**Philippians 2:12-13**  
**Pastor Charles Price**

Good to see all of you this morning. We've been looking for the last five weeks, I think it is now into this letter of Paul to the Philippians, we are going to have ten sessions altogether. So, we will be halfway through after today and we're going to turn to that section that we had read to us just a few moments ago. Before we look at the text itself, let me just point out that there are certain words in the Christian vocabulary that most of us like, words like love, joy, peace fellowship, compassion, rejoicing, forgiveness. These are good words, salvation, contentedness, riches.

All of these are good words, they encourage us, they make us feel good. They are all important ingredients in the gospel, and they explain why most of us here this morning are probably already Christians, and all those words are found in the book of Philippians. Most of them in Philippians 2.

However, there are other words found in this chapter, which are equally important and vital to the Christian life which aren't quite so attractive to us. Words like obedience. Words like fear and trembling. These are not the kind of words that give us a nice, warm feeling. For some of us, these are the kind of words that have negative connotations, and there may be all kinds of reasons in your history that gives you that kind of response to those words.

But they are actually words that are vital to our understanding of the gospel. And I'm going to base what I have to say to you this morning on [Philippians 2:12-13](#) that we had read to us. I'll read them to you again.

"Therefore, my dear friends", says Paul, "as you have always obeyed. That's the first word. Not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling. Why? For it is God who works in you, to will and to act according to his good purpose." Now, the key to that whole section is Paul's statement, 'as you have always obeyed, so now continue to obey as you work out your salvation with fear and trembling.' I want to talk about three things this morning from this passage.

I want to talk, first of all, about the command to obedience. And it's a very interesting one, because the command to obedience is to work out your salvation, whatever that means. Then secondly, we'll talk about the conditions to obedience.

How do you work out your salvation with fear and trembling! That's a condition to obedience. And then thirdly, the consequences of our obedience, because he said, 'God works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.'

The consequences, God's good purpose is being accomplished and fulfilled. Let's talk about those one by one, first of all, the command to obedience. And Paul says what I want you to do. And the earlier section of this passage is talking about how Christ, although by very nature, God made himself nothing as it says, 'took upon himself the form of a servant and became obedient to

death.' He talks about the obedience of Christ and the dependency of Christ on his father. And in that context, he says, therefore, when you find the word therefore in the Bible, it's always a good rule to ask yourself, What is it, therefore, because the therefore is there for a good reason. It links what's gone before. I've talked to you about Christ, I've talked about having this mind in you, which is in Christ. I've talked about his humility, his dependency on his father, his obedience to his father.

Therefore, because this is true of Christ, you need to 'continue in this spirit of obedience to work out your salvation.' Now what in the world does it mean to work out your salvation? Does it mean, if I work long enough and hard enough and conscientiously enough, I will become sure of my salvation.

Does it mean if I just keep on obeying the rules, loving my neighbour as best I can? Going to church? Putting money in the offering? Being a good citizen? Eventually, when I stand before God, he'll say, 'My, you were pretty good. I think you have worked to such an extent. I'm going to reward you with salvation. Congratulations!' Is that what it means? Well, I think there are some people who are hoping that's what it means, because they are very reliant on their own ability, but that isn't what it means. Because that would contradict everything else Paul writes about salvation in the Book of Ephesians, for instance, in the verse(Ephesians 2:8-9), many of you know, he says, "it is by grace you have been saved through faith. This is not from yourselves, it is a gift of God. It is not by works, so that no one can boast." There is no grounds which anybody can say to someone else, you know what? I have become a Christian.

Don't you think that's pretty good of me? No, no, he says, it has nothing to do with what you do for God. It's exclusively to do with what God does for you. That's the basis of our salvation. So, Paul isn't contradicting that and saying, now you better work this out. Man, you Philippians, you're going to die one day, you better make sure between now and then you work this thing out to be sure of your salvation. Now, what Paul says here has nothing to do with becoming a Christian. It has everything to do with being the Christian you have become.

You see he says to them, 'it is God who works in you', he's explaining to them that you're already Christians. God is already at work in you. But with God being at work in you, you need to work out the consequence of God working in you; and that raises two questions. First question.

What does God work in me first of all? And if I understand that, what do I have to work out in this command to obedience that he's giving to them? What does God work in us? Well, the verse says, [Philippians 2:13](#) says, "it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."

God works in you to will. That is, God creates within you an appetite, a willingness, a desire for what is good. Not only does he give you the desire, because if that's all he gave you, that would frustrate us. He works in you to will and to act, he gives the dynamism, the power to accomplish it. Now, if God works in you to will, the first thing God does in you, one of the first evidence's is that we are real Christians - is he changes our desires.

We begin to, in the words of Jesus, hunger and thirst for righteousness. You see, righteousness is alien to us. Naturally, the word righteousness, and we'll talk about this next week, because Philippians 3 talks a lot about righteousness. Righteousness is not some smug sort of self-sufficient, holier than thou attitude. Righteousness is standing and our ability to live, that is derived from the presence of God within us. He gives us in the first instance new appetites, a hunger and a thirst for righteousness. You see, the one thing about the Christian life is we don't live the way we are called to live because God has some big stick and says, 'you had better do this.' Pow. 'You better do that.' Pow. Now, if that's your sense of your relationship with God, something fundamental is going to happen. Because the marvelous thing is what happens, is when God gets to work in your life, suddenly things that you didn't have any interest in before, you suddenly begin to have an appetite for, a hunger for.

You see, hunger and thirst, appetite is not something that you choose, you don't say, 'the time is just gone 12 o'clock, I better decide to be hungry,' because there's going to be lunch coming at least somewhere, hopefully sometime. You don't need to make that decision. You don't decide your appetite. In fact, you can spend half your life fighting your appetite sometimes, if you don't want to eat as much as you eat. It's a natural result because you had breakfast whenever you ate it and it's worn off now.

You've got an appetite, there's a hunger. When I have the joy of seeing people come to Christ and leading people to Christ, I always look, as an evidence that God is really at work in their lives, for a hunger and a thirsting, a beginning to desire things they never desired before.

I remember some time ago. Back in England, a friend of ours, a good friend in his mid-twenties, came to Christ. We'd been praying for him and that was actually while I was away, I was in Germany at the time, my wife called me and said, "You'll never guess what's happened?"

So-and-so has become a Christian. And it was a marvellous answer to prayer. It was not something we were expecting, though we were praying for it. God did a great work in his heart. And I came home from Germany at the end of that week, and on the Saturday, I remember I was going to speak at a university down in the southern part of England. And so I had to drive down there and I called him and said, "Are you free Saturday night? Would you like to come with me?" And we drove together, and in the car we talked, and he said to me, "You know, I've been involved in some things at work that have not been honest."

He was a partner in a family business, a construction business. I said, "Is it obvious you have to put this right?" He said, "Of course it is." "Was it obvious when you did it that it was wrong?" He said, "Actually, when we did it, it was smart. We thought, this is clever, we can get away with it." I said, "why do you think it's obvious now that it's wrong and it was smart then when you did it?"

He said, "I don't know, it's just obvious." I said, "I'll tell you why it is. If I needed any more evidence, this is it. Earlier this week, last Monday night, Jesus Christ came to live in your life and suddenly things that were smart, you now see them for what they really are and you have a hunger and a thirst for righteousness." And that guy is now leading young people to Christ

working amongst them. He didn't change his mind and say, I better start doing things that are right now.

Come on, do what's right? Hey, look at those things you did, boy, I better put those right. No, there was a hunger. You know, Augustine said something in the fifth century, and you can't say it better than Augustine said it.

And he said, “if you love God, you can live as you please.” What he meant was this. if you love God with all your heart and soul and strength, what pleases you, will actually be what pleases God. It's a great way to live, you can live as you please. Because you'll love the things God loves and you'll hate the things God hates. You will have compassion for the things God has compassion for, and you will deal firmly with the things that God rejects.

You see, when God works in us. He works in us to produce his own character, that's basically what it amounts to. Paul, elsewhere, calls this the ‘fruit of the spirit,’ not the fruit of Christian discipline, but the fruit of the spirit.

This is something supernatural, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control and these qualities if you examine them carefully all have to do with our relationships with others. Even joy has to do with our relationships. You hang around someone who's miserable and you know what a difference that makes in a relationship.

You see, I think what God does in you and me is not designed that you and your small corner and mine can be all holy. Although, we can live lives that relate better and more godly. That's why relationships is a theme that runs through this chapter.

Actually, back earlier in [Philippians 2:3-4](#), he says, "do nothing out of a selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility, consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your interest, but also to the interests of others."

Now, says Paul there, instead of living selfishly, which is the way the natural person apart from Christ, is always being tempted to live. We've been tempted that way too, of course, but as we give way to the spirit of God, instead of living selfishly, don't do things out of selfish ambition and vanity, but consider others better than yourselves. Look after the interests of others and later in [Philippians 2:14-15](#), he says, "do everything without complaining. Without arguing, so that you may be blameless and pure children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation in which you shine like stars in the universe."

And he says there will be no complaining. Man, wouldn't that revolutionize some of our lives? No arguing. That in a crooked generation, there is a purity and a wholesomeness and a kindness and a love. You know, Jesus said that would be the evidence that you're a Christian, [John 13:35](#). "By this", said Jesus, "shall all men know that you are my disciples, that you love one another." Francis Schaeffer has said, 'that Jesus Christ gave the world the right to judge the validity of anybody's claim to be a Christian, not by their doctrine. But by their love.' You can dot your



doctrinal "i"'s and you can cross your doctrinal "T"'s and it means nothing at all to God, unless the consequences that flows out of your heart, love!

You see God works in us to will his purposes, to put the right desires and the real evidence of the work of God in our lives is not in our ability to quote scriptures, but our abilities as husbands to love our wives properly, wives to love our husbands properly, as parents to love our children, as children to love our parents, to love our neighbours. And believe it or not, said Jesus, to love your enemies.

That's the mark of God working in you. Well, if that's our first question, 'What does God work in us.' The second question is, 'What do we work out?' Because you work out what he works in. What God works in us are a result of promises he makes towards us. What we work out are the result of commands that he tells us, but the interesting thing is this, God's promises are also God's commands, they are the same things, for instance, love is a promise.

Sorry, the fruit of the spirit is love, that's a promise. It's the fruit of the spirit. You allow the spirit to fill your life and you begin to love. But at the same time, Jesus said, a new command I give you, love your neighbour as yourself. That's a command. Now, of course, we like promises, because when somebody makes you promise, all the onus of responsibility is on them. If somebody has promised you today after this service, meet us and we take you for lunch Man, you've had a nice, relaxed morning.

You didn't even bring your wallet with you or your credit card. You just meet them in the foyer and off you go and it's their responsibility, it's their resources, everything belongs to them as far as the responsibility of the promise. It's great when people make promises.

When people give commands, you meet me for lunch and you pay. But the thing is this when God makes promises about the qualities he is going to produce in our lives, he also gives commands about the same promises. Peace is a promise, it's also a fruit of the Spirit. It's also a command! 'Do not be anxious about anything,' that's a command. In Philippians 4, we'll look at that in a few weeks. Now, how do you put these two together?

Well, the basis on which I receive what God promises is that I obey what God commands. And as I obey what God commands, I discover he works in me not just to will, but to act. The dynamism. He fulfills it.

So how do you love your neighbour? Sitting at home praying for your neighbour? No, go and do something nice to your neighbour. How do you love your enemies? Make some deliberate attempt to cross that bridge and get in touch and send them something or whatever it is that you might do to break down those barriers and you'll discover as you begin to act in obedience, God works.

When I was a student, there was a fellow student that nobody liked, and I certainly didn't like him. And in one term we were in dormitories, we had several people in a room at this particular time. And he was put in the same dormitory as me. And I thought of all the people in this place,

he is the last person I want to spend any time with at all. So, what do I do about this, because he really irritated me as he did lots of other people for all kinds of reasons. I thought, do I just say to him, look, I have a problem with you, I can't stand you, let's pray about it or something. But I didn't have the courage to say that.

Nor would it have helped anyway. So, I said, 'Lord Jesus, I don't like this guy at all. He irritates me immensely. I'm supposed to love him, I don't know how to love him, please love him through me, would you.'

And for the rest of that term, it was a terrible time. I just didn't get on with him at all. At the end of that term, on the last day everyone was leaving, he came to me, put his hand to shake mine, and he said, 'Thanks for being my best friend.' I said, 'Your best friend?' He said, 'I'm a difficult guy, nobody likes me and I know why.' It's because of this, he had a whole history of abuse and mess, a very insecure guy. I said, 'Shall I be honest with you, I haven't enjoyed your company this term at all. But I asked God to help me to love you.' He said, 'You are my best friend here.' I had no idea of that, but I was really excited. God this is amazing, I didn't have to feel loving about him. Love is not an emotion anyway.

I mean, it is, of course, in one sense, but this word love is a love we use in all kinds of ways, it's not just an emotion. Actually, the best definition of love, I think, is in these verses in [Phil 2:3](#) that is early in the same chapter. "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, in humility consider others better than yourselves." Now I prefer the new American standard on this. It says

“in humility, consider others more important than yourself.” ‘Considering others better’, may imply some value judgment.

He, she’s, better than I am. That may or may not be helpful. But this is more important, in any given situation this person is more important to me than I am, whether I like them or whether I don't is irrelevant to that.

Well, if it's some anonymous person at the checkout counter in the local supermarket and I'm buying a tin of beans or something, it doesn't matter, just be kind. She's more important than you are. This is a command, but it's also a promise, meaning that as we act in obedience, the resources are available.

God works in you to will and to act to enable you and you begin to love. That's the command to obey. The command to obey is to work out what God works in, and what God works in, is that ability to begin to relate, and I'm seeing more and more clearly that the Christian life is tested as to its validity. Not in the, if I may call it the vertical relationship with God, but in the horizontal relationship that is the working of that relationship. But the command to obedience then is to work out your own salvation, because God works to will, to give you the right appetite's, the right desires, which are going to be relational in their application.

But the conditions to obedience very quickly is "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling", he says there in [Philippians 2:12](#). Now we don't like to use these words fear and trembling because they carry negative connotations. And of course, they can have negative

connotations, but actually in the New Testament and in the Old Testament too, the fear of God is a vital ingredient in wholesome, healthy Christian living. In the Book of Proverbs, it says “the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.” You don't really begin to be wise if the fear of God is not of the cornerstone of your life. The fear of God is the beginning of knowledge, it says in the Book of Proverbs, it says ‘to fear God is to shun evil.’ The fear of the Lord adds lengths to life.

[Proverbs 14:26](#), "He who fears the Lord has a secure fortress and for his children, it will be a refuge." That's a marvellous verse, an important verse in the Book of Proverbs. Those of us who are parents need to fear God to give our kids security. ‘The fear of God is a fountain of life.’ ‘The fear of God leads to life.’ ‘A wise man fears the Lord,’ these are all quotations from Proverbs, and ‘blessed is the man who always fears the Lord.’ Now the book of Ecclesiastes sums it up. ‘Fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man.’

What's the problem with many of us? I'll tell you what the problem is, we don't fear God. I'll tell you why we don't fear God, because often our understanding of God has been so domesticated, we have so softened God, we're so pulled his teeth, he's just a big pal in the sky. And any idea that God gets angry is alien to us. But he does. It tells us in the Book of Psalms that God is angry every day. The notion of the wrath of God, which is as real in the scriptures as the love of God is in the scriptures.

The marvellous thing, of course, is that we can come into his love and we live within that relationship of love. But nevertheless, the fear of God is to be a feature that characterizes our lives. But what is the fear of God, is it cowering in fear? The best commentary on the Bible is

always the Bible itself, it's also the cheapest and it's also the most reliable. And it's always good to ask, what else does the Bible say about this?

The law of first mentions, some people talk about. That is, find out when something first occurs in the Bible, you often get within it a very clear definition of what it is. It doesn't always work, but it's a good rule of thumb. The first time the fear of God appears in the Bible is in Genesis 22.

Let me tell you the story. Abraham had come from Ur of the Chaldeans, present day Iraq. God had led him from there to Canaan. When he reached Canaan, God said, 'Look at the stars in the sky. I'll give you as many descendants as the stars you can see in the sky, because your wife will give birth to a son, and from that son will come a nation, and that nation is going to bless the world.' Now, Abraham was 75 years of age, his wife was 65 years of age. They had no children, so it was already an impossibility because she was past menopause.

In any case, it says she was barren, but he believed God. God, you said it, I trust you. For 25 years nothing happened, after 25 years Sarah, his wife gave birth to a baby boy. They called him Isaac and Abraham must have been thrilled to bits. Anybody who fathers a child knows the thrill and joy at becoming a parent. But when you're 100 years old and you've been waiting all these years, this must be fantastic. Probably almost gave him a heart attack and sent him off.

But this little boy was born. Not only was this a little boy now that I can call my own after all these years, but this is the boy to whom God said, I'm going to bring a nation through this boy and the world will be blessed through this boy. This child is going to be one of the most

significant children in the history of the human race. Now what a sense of pride in his son Abraham must have enjoyed. That precedes Genesis 22, says this, the first verse says. I'll read it to you, because suddenly something is introduced that changes everything.

[Genesis 22:1-2](#), , "God tested Abraham. He said to Abraham, "Abraham." "Here I am." he replied. God said, "take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love and go to the region of Moriah, sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about." Abraham, take your son, and God seems to rub some salt into this little wound he's going to create by saying, your only son whom you love. I know Abraham, that all the love of your heart is channelled into this boy. Take this son, go to the region of mount Moriah and offer him as a sacrifice to me. Put your son to death. By the way, in Abraham's day, that was a common, barbaric event, it wasn't unusual for people to sacrifice their children to their gods.

Now God tests Abraham. Abraham doesn't know it's a test, we know it because it says, God tested him. Abraham left early the next morning, it says, and for three days they walked in the direction to Mount Moriah, that would have been three very long days for Abraham.

I wonder what he would have talked to Isaac about on the journey. I wonder when Isaac said, Dad, what are we going to do? What would he tell him? I wonder what he said, when he said Dad, when are we coming home? What he would tell him. I wonder what he said when he asked, Dad, what are we going to do on my birthday next year? I wonder what Abraham would say, because there won't be a birthday son. And they got to the foot of Mount Moriah, left the servants that had come with them and they walked up the hill.

And Isaac in his trusting relationship with his father, helped his father build an altar, let's collect some stones, let's collect some wood and we'll lay the wood on the altar. And Isaac asked the question, where is the lamb? Abraham said God will provide the lamb. And in Isaacs' trust of Abraham, he allowed him to take some rope and tie him up, lay him on the altar. Took his knife in his hands, raised his knife, and it says his knife was in the air. And I imagine Abraham probably wouldn't see his son, his eyes would be clouded with his tears and in sheer obedience, this is what God told me to do. He was ready to plunge the knife when suddenly got intervened in.

"Do not lay a hand on the boy, said God. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me, your son, your only son. Now, I know you fear God." ([Genesis 22:12](#)) Why? Because, Abraham, you've adopted to me that attitude of unquestioning obedience, irrespective of the consequences.

Now if you know the story of Abraham, you'll know that Abraham had blown it earlier because he was concerned about the consequences of his obedience, and so he edited his obedience and did what he thought was best and produced another son called Ishmael. You know that story. Now God is testing, because Abraham, I've got to get you back on track. Now I know you fear God. Why? Because you didn't question my instructions. You see, the fear of God involves a refusal, a refusal to exercise any right of veto over the will of God and the commands of God. You see, some of us will obey the good things that God wants us to do because they're good.



If it's convenient for me, it's wonderful that God is going to show me something that's going to be good for me.

But the fear of God is our attitude towards God that says, God, when you lead me down a road I don't understand and you lead me to a destination I don't want to go to, when you bring into my life events I didn't plan, I didn't want and I don't welcome. It's in that situation, I say in humility, your will be done. See God can do anything with a man or woman like that, but he can do nothing with somebody who says, I'll do the good bits God as long as you give me the good bits to do.

I'm not going to bring your will into my finances because I know a smart way of cheating. I am not going to bring your will into my relationship with my wife, because you see I might have found a better one now, and I want to get out of this one.

If you don't bring the will of God into your business life and your work life, then, you know nothing of the fear of God. And the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. The fear of God is the beginning of knowledge. The fear of God provides a secure fortress for your children. The wise man fears God. So, you work out your salvation. Why? Because God works in you. You work out what he works in you what from God are promises in you become commands you work out, and you do it with fear and trembling. No editing, no right of veto, no compromise. And lastly, and very importantly, the consequences of obedience, because he says in [Philippians 2:13](#), just very quickly. 'God works in you to will and to act, according to his good purposes,' his good purpose.

The end result is what's to come is God's good purpose. What is God's good purpose, is that you and I find satisfaction in obedience to his will. That is true, but it's something more than that. It's that you and I are made successful. Well, that may be true, but it's something more than that. He tells us. [Philippians 2:14 -15](#), "so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation in which you shine like stars in the universe, as you hold out the word of life." He says God's good purpose is, 'that you become to shine like stars in the universe.' That is, in the dark, dark night sky, you'll be like the stars that light it up. You see we live in a dark world; he describes it as a crooked and depraved generation in that verse. That's the world we live in. And God's good purposes in the world we know is crooked and depraved, that we know is dark.

But all across this city of Toronto, there are pinpricks of light that shine in the darkness. In homes, in streets, in apartment blocks, in offices and factories and schools and colleges and retirement villages all across this city. There are lights being switched on, here and there and all across the province of Ontario. Where Christian men and women and boys and girls mean business with God, lights will be switched on, you are the light of the world, said Jesus. And right across this great nation of Canada lights will be switched on.

Why does he say you're like stars in the universe? I'll tell you what this means. For centuries and centuries the stars in the night sky were the only means by which lost people could find their way home. They simply took that direction from the stars as the way men have navigated throughout history. And there may be folks who may live in your street, may live in your apartment block,

the folks who may work in your office or your factory, or may attend your school or your college or university.

It may be folks you sit next to when you go down to buy a doughnut, who are lost in a dark world. They need the lights like the stars in the universe that lead them home.

How are you doing with the command to obedience? Are you working out what God is working in you, deliberately and conscientiously? What about the condition to obedience? Are you doing this in that spirit of the fear of God? What about the consequences? Have you got your eyes off where the life is working out well for you and begin to ask is God making my life a blessing to somebody else?