

Main Reading: **Philippians** 2:12-20

Tonight's passage is about something we call **sanctification**.

I know it's a *really* big, 5-syllable word, but I don't want that to make you tune it out.

Say your doctor prescribed you a medication with a *really* long name...you'd probably go home,

Do some hardcore **research**, and before you know it,

You'll be able to tell *everyone* you know *all* about the medications you're on.

So, I would encourage you to do this:

Put as much **time** into understanding Bible words as you would anything else.

So, back to the word, sanctification. What does it mean?

Well, "sanctus" is the root word and it means **holy**. Holy means set apart.

In *this* context, we take it to mean set apart from sin.

When we say God is Holy, and the angels sing "Holy, Holy, Holy"

We are acknowledging that God has **no** sin in Him *at all*.

Sanctification is the process by which a Christian becomes *more* holy.

It's a process where you get further & further away from sin.

And more accurately, the word "sanctify" means to separate or **cut** apart. [[Paper & scissors illustration](#)]

While on earth, you will not be **sinless**; but, as a Christian, you *should* sin *less*.

So, in this passage, Paul is mostly covering how the Christian can live in a more **Christlike** manner.

[v. 12-13]

"My **beloved**" — a phrase that refers *only* to fellow believers. Yes, we **love** everyone, but...

Paul uses this language to address Christians in the Church rather than people in the **world**.

He's talking to people, who have *already* obeyed Jesus' command

to "**repent** and believe the **gospel!**" Found in Mark chapter 1.

He says that these people have obeyed, and I want you to get that...

The first step through the narrow gate to Heaven is a step of obedience.

And this process of sanctification—spiritual *growth*—consists of *several* steps of obedience.

I once saw a group of parents complaining online about how their child was to listen and obey...

They went online; saying, "Can you *believe* this?! My child is **not** some *animal* who needs to obey!"

And I thought, "How sad...If you are too proud to hear the words "listen & obey,"

then I don't see how you could ever get along with Jesus..."

*Salvation* involves *listening* followed by *obedience*,

and Christian living is a constant state of *obeying* God...

In fact, Paul *commands* us to "*work out* our salvation with fear and trembling"

Work out — we use this phrase today, and we are all familiar with it.

And I think Paul is saying that the Christian life *requires* a lot of *spiritual sweat*.

In fact, in 1 *Timothy* 4:7b, Paul says this:

The Greek word for 'train' comes into our language as *gymnasium*—a place where you *work out*.

I want to make it clear that this is not saying "work for your salvation" as that's impossible...

It is saying "work out"—what God has *already* worked *in* you, you now can work it *out*.

'*Fear* and *trembling*' — what could this mean?...After all, Jesus said, *many* times, "Do **not** fear!"

This is a different kind of fear...we might use the word "reverence"

One of my favorite places in the Bible is Psalm 19.

In it, David covers the 2 main ways that God makes Himself known: *Psalm* 19:1, 7

Psalm 19 speaks volumes about God's *creation* and then switches to God's Law—

a word that literally means "*written* instruction."

And one of the names that David gives to God's written instruction is "the *Fear* of THE LORD"

Why? When we read what God has written, it shows us the *proper* amount of *respect* that God

deserves—it's not a *trivial* thing to know God...it's very important and we should act like it.

Now, what about this “trembling” word? Trembling is the visual **evidence** that someone is in fear...

And the Bible uses this word in *another* places that will help us understand: **Isaiah** 66:2

If I were to summarize the phrase: “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling”

I would put it like this: “Grow in your faith by taking the Bible *seriously!*”

And that stings a little for me, because for *most* of my life, I **haven’t** been doing that...

But this study group was started for *that* reason—we are taking the Bible **seriously!**

And this is something that please God!

As we take what He has provided for us seriously, He is **pleased** to work in us.

**QUESTION**: How can a Christian enjoy knowing God and fear Him at the same time?

[v. 14-16 — re-read]

I had a conversation with a coworker recently, and he said: “You know, out of everything in the Bible, the one thing I just couldn’t understand was Revelation. It’s just so hard to accept it.”

Some of Jesus’ listeners once said “Your teaching is hard. How can we accept it?”

Well, as I’ve been thinking about it, I believe the hardest parts of the Bible aren’t the poems, or the abstract words and parables...it’s the stuff that is so **straightforward** that you can’t deny it.

“**Stop** complaining!” ....none of us can misinterpret this command...

The Israelites in the Old Testament, became famous for complaining...

They grumbled in **Egypt**, they grumbled when they escaped Egypt.

They grumbled when there was no food, and they grumbled when God gave them **food**.

We shouldn’t participate in this type of grumbling...where we keep finding things to **dread**.

**QUESTION**: When are you most likely to grumble and what would it sound like to praise God in those moments instead?

This is one of two steps that Paul lists for the spiritual growth of the Philippians.

Number 1. Stop **grumbling**, complaining, and arguing.

Number 2. Hold fast—cling to—the **word** of life.

In Ephesians 6, Paul presents what he called the “Full **Armor** of God”

There are many pieces of protective gear: a shield, a helmet, a belt, etc...

But there is only one offensive weapon...He calls it the sword of the Spirit. **Hebrews** 4:12

If you are carrying a Bible, you are armed with a **sharp** object.

You are commanded to cling to this book, and in the OT, there’s a story that I think gives us a

visualization of what this should look like: 2 **Samuel** 23:9-10

Eleazar was only a good soldier because of his firm grip on His sword.

God blessed him with victory as he **held** onto his weapon.

Could you imagine if he had dropped his sword? He’d be toast.

In the same way, if a church or a Christian drops their Bible, they have become as good as **dead**.

[v. 17-18]

“Drink offering” — when the Israelites would burn an animal,

it was a *physical* substance being sacrificed in front of their eyes.

A Jew could look at the burning animal on the altar and see what their sin had caused—

death and the loss of something valuable...

While the offering was lit, they’d **pour** wine near the fire, which displayed something *different*.

The wine would evaporate and they would see the **vapor** heading to the sky.

And this symbolizes that their sin was against *God*, and they needed to ask *Him* for forgiveness.

Now, fast forward to the Philippians. Here’s what had happened:

The Philippians had sent money to Paul—a *sacrificial* **gift** meant to support His ministry.

In return, Paul keeps the Philippians in his prayers.

So, the amount of **money** that the Philippians gave is like the burnt offering.

Something that they could give up and see with their eyes.

And Paul's **prayers** for them are like the drink offerings; vapors that head towards God in Heaven.

So, he's using an Old Testament reference to provide a **picture** of their teamwork.

**[v. 19-24]**

Paul does not want his work with the Philippians to be by letter *only*.

For one, he wants to send **Timothy** to them.

Now, Timothy was one of Paul's *best* students. 2 **Timothy** 3:10

Paul had some *really* good apprentices: Mark, Luke, and Titus to name a few...but Timothy is identified as Paul's **son** in the faith—they had a really tight relationship.

Paul eventually installs Timothy as the pastor of the **Ephesian** church, and writes him 2 **letters** that we still have today.

**[v. 25-30]**

In this section, Paul talks about another one of his students: Epaphroditus.

He was close to the Philippians *and* to Paul, so he served as the **liaison**—the go between.

Epaphroditus is the **messenger** who delivered the gift from the Philippians to Paul.

And Epaphroditus would have likely delivered *this letter* to the Philippians.

But, on his journey, Epaphroditus gets *terribly* sick.

And this is a fact of life: people get **sick**.

Some will tell you that, if you get sick, it's because you have **sin** in your life, or because you don't have *enough* **faith**. Others have even said that sickness is a sign of **demon** possession.

But it just isn't true...

Epaphroditus was a *devout* believer sick he got sick—almost to the point of **dying**...

And you may ask, why didn't Paul just heal the guy? After all, Paul healed *many* people...

Well, there's a pattern in the Bible, where God gives **confirms** his messengers by giving them the ability to perform miracles. **Hebrews** 2:3-4

Moses—a messenger of God—performed miracles when He brought a message to Pharaoh. He also wrote Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—187 chapters (20% of OT)

The next miracle workers in the Bible were Elijah and Elisha.

What made *their* message so important?

Well, for one they are a foreshadowing of John the Baptist and Jesus—a big deal...

And they were the leaders of a ministry called the "Company of the Prophets"

Young men, like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah, & Zephaniah, would have been involved in this ministry.

Together, they wrote or contributed to 245 chapters in the Old Testament (almost 30%).

And their message was confirmed by the miracles that God did through Elijah and Elisha...

The next miracle workers were Jesus and His apostles.

They carried the most important message of all, and spread it all over the world.

Jesus would perform miracles to prove that His preaching was from God...

However, people were still **not** believing Him, and He would stop providing miracles. Luke 11:29

So, when Paul's friends got sick—at least 3 of his friends that had ailments—

I think we can know the reason why *he* didn't heal them.

Paul's God-given, miracle-working ability was for the purposes of evangelism (acc. to Hebrews 2)...

His hearers should've heard the message, seen the signs, and believed in Jesus.

And we are supposed to read these stories and believe. John 20:30-31

So, many people today will claim something like this:

"If God does a miracles for me, I will become a Christian!" —No they won't. [Rich Man//Lazarus]

When the Rich Man *begged* for a sign to be sent to his brothers, he got this response: Luke 16:31

Moses and the Prophets? Remember those guys who we just said wrote 50% of the Bible?

Yeah, if someone won't believe what the Bible says, and they won't believe the stories of

Moses, Elijah, and Elisha, they won't believe if a miracle was done right in front of their face...

See, the person who demands more evidence from God, might not ever get it...

You might never see a miracle—in the truest sense of the word—in your life...

And here's what Jesus says: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

So, no...Paul did not do a miracle and heal his friend, Epaphroditus.

Instead, God intervened by Himself.

It does not say whether he became *instantly* well, or if he made a *typical recovery*.

But, I want you to understand, that God gets the *credit* either way.

God heals miraculously ✓

God heals by giving people the ability to develop and administer medicine ✓

And God heals by giving you an immune system ✓

None of these things work on their own...medicine *only* works because God is behind it.

Science and Doctors know how to practice medicine *only* because of God.

So, in *any* situation, God gets the credit for working things out.

When you get sick, go to the *doctor*, and take a *prescription*, God gets the credit.

When you put in the sweat required for spiritual growth,

and you start to win more and more *battles* against sin, God gets the credit.

Because *all* of this is *impossible* without Him.