

Bon Appétit Course 3: Main Course – Explain Philippians 2:12-16 **David Bawks - Pathway Community Church (Feb 21, 2021)**

Good morning! Welcome to week 3 of our series on how to study the Bible called **Bon Appétit**. This month we are comparing the experience of having a four course meal with our experience in reading the Bible. In this example, these **four courses** match with **four steps** in studying the Bible – 1) **reading**, 2) **understanding**, 3) **explaining**, 4) **applying**. The appetizer corresponds with reading, the first initial step, the very beginning both of an elaborate meal and the process of studying and living out the message of the Bible. Its main purpose is to get up your appetite for the real thing. Our first week we explored this step, and we noted that unfortunately many of us never get far very beyond this first step. This month we are working to change that and explore what each course looks like as we pursue the Bible on a deeper level.

Last week we did our second course in our four-course meal, the salad, which is the step of understanding what a passage actually says. This is often the longest and most difficult of all the four steps. But just like a salad, although it is not always the most appealing or exciting dish to eat, it is healthy and very rewarding. This step is a lot of work and thought, but it is well worth it. We looked at 5 questions of our text.

Today we come to the third course which is the **main course**, and this is **explaining**. Once we have done the ground work of figuring out what our passage is saying, exploring the words, the structure, the purpose and so on, then we have deeper questions to answer about what the passage means. We need to explain what the main point is, how it fits into the Bible's overall message, and what general truths we can learn from a passage. This is where a lot of the meat and the substance of a meal comes, and the same is true in studying the Bible.

Finally, we have our **fourth course**, which is technically not really a course on its own, but is a **take-away**. This is the **application** for **our lives today**, and this is in some ways the most important step. It is also one of the easiest steps to mess up. This will be our focus next week as we end the series.

We began by reading Philippians 2:12-16 in **three different translations**. I mentioned the importance of **praying** before we read, and of reading **slowly and carefully**. Last week we explored five questions that help us to understand a passage, 1) words, 2) genre, 3) context, 4) purpose, and 5) setting. Today we will use the results from our work last week to explain what our passage is saying.

Now let's turn to our passage for this month, Philippians 2:12-16:

12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

14 Do everything without grumbling or arguing, 15 so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky 16 as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. NIV

For today, we are seeking to explain as clearly as possible what this passage means. We are building on the work we did to understand what precisely it says, and today we have four questions (2 slides).

3. Explain – What does the passage mean?

- 3.1 What is the main point of the passage?
- 3.2 How does the passage fit into the Bible's overall message?
- 3.3 How does the passage compare with other Bible passages?
- 3.4 What general principles or theological truths does the passage set forth?

1. What is the main point?

To answer these questions, let's first identify a **few major themes** in the passage, so we are clear on what our main point will be about. The themes that come up in this passage are salvation, the connection between our work and God's work, doing everything without complaining, shining like stars in the world, and being able to say that our work wasn't in vain. Those are the things that the main point will be summarizing.

This passage is addressing **salvation**, especially looking at the **difference between our role** and God's role. There are a few things we need to note so that we understand the passage well. Last week, we looked at the words, but one thing I didn't mention is that all of the **verbs in this passage are plural**. This is a difficult concept to express in English, since we don't have an official way to give **plural commands**. Now of course in the **south** there's a way to say this. How many of us at Pathway are from the south? I can only think of a few people. So, I could say something like, "**Ya'll come back now**", or for our passage "**ya'll work out your salvation in fear and trembling.**" All of you! This command applies to all of us, as a group.

This means that Paul is not primarily talking about one's individual salvation. Instead, he is commanding the church to **corporately** "work out" their "salvation" or present deliverance by applying the truths Paul communicated about Jesus in 2:6-11, the hymn about how Jesus humbled himself by coming to earth. Paul also gives a hint about how we do this – by doing everything without grumbling or complaining. Then we will shine like stars – showing off the light of Christ in a dark place. Last week I read the first 16 verses of Philippians chapter 2, and it **follows a clear progression**, from being united with Christ (vs. 1), to the humble nature of Christ (vs. 7-8), from there to Christ's exaltation (vs. 9), to our salvation grounded in the work of God (12-13), and then to our new position of being pure and blameless because of that salvation (14-16).

Here is my summary of the main point of our passage: **As we work out our salvation, we must live in harmony resulting in lives of light and purity.**

Let's walk through this statement: **As we work out our salvation.** We need to realize that salvation is both a **gift** and a **task**. We don't earn salvation, but that doesn't mean we don't do anything. Imagine a **scenario**: I have bought you land, given you the deed in your name, I have brought in all the building supplies, dumped them out on the property, the stones, wood, the pipes, the wires, fixtures, the roof, even the furniture, it is all there. I've also gotten all the building permits, given them over to you as well. I take you to the property, and drop you off. Everything is sitting there. In this scenario – **is your house ready?** Can you move in right then? No! Of course not. You still need to build the whole thing! It isn't ready at all. But **have you earned the house? Did you pay for it?** Do you have anything left to

pay off? Also no! **You don't owe** anyone anything, and **you can't pay** for the house – both because there is nothing left to pay, and in this scenario, you couldn't have had enough money anyway. Now imagine it is not just a house – but also a church for all of us, represented by a physical structure that we are all building together. Now we do need to remember that the church is not a building, but is a family, each of us as people that make up the church. Our salvation is both personal and corporate, applying to us as a group.

This is what Paul is telling the Philippians – God has already worked in you, both to **will and to do of His good pleasure**. You don't need to buy anything else, get anything else, you have all that you need to live the Christian life. But you have to put it together! **Some assembly required**. Right now, it is incomplete, and your job, your role, is to build it with your life, your choices, your actions, your work, and your service. But remember this: **You can't work out what God hasn't first "worked in"**. God has already worked in you to enable you to work out your salvation.

Commented [BB1]: Can you put this in plainer language

The focus of Philippians 2:12-13 isn't primarily about initial salvation, what we call conversion, being born again, or being justified before God, declared innocent. It's about the Christian life after conversion—about **maintaining a healthy relationship with God** and with others as a converted believer. It's about reaching the finish line, because salvation is a race, a marathon that extends throughout our entire life.

We are given another clue about how we do this from verse 16, which says that is the **word of life**, the power of the gospel, which allows us to live the Christian life. **We must firmly hold onto that**, and never let it go. This brings us to the next part of our statement.

We must live in harmony. Working out our salvation is a matter of community. As a church here in Fremont, we must live in harmony together. We must figure out how to **love** each other, **forgive** each other, and **support each other** in our Christian walk. We must do all things without grumbling or complaining, without murmuring and whispering, secret talk about others and all their failures. That's what kills community, and sets people against each other. We'll never build a strong house if that is our foundation.

Grumbling and **complaining** doesn't primarily affect us, although it does, but its primary impact is on others. I know that this can have an effect, especially in those of you who serve. Disagreements and conflict with each other arise, but the question is how do we deal with it – do we go to the person concerned, or do we go to someone else? How do we put it across? We'll also address this more next week as we look at application, our take-away. This is a command for the church to think of others first, and to think of the needs of others before our own. Now we come to the last part of our statement.

Resulting in lives of light and purity. Paul commands the Philippians church to do all things without grumbling or complaining, and that this results in us being blameless and pure. Last week we looked at blameless and defined it as 'free from fault or defect, innocent, without guilt'. If we are working out our salvation as a community together, living in harmony without murmuring about each other, then we will have a blameless position in God's eyes, and those around us.

When Paul was writing to the Philippians, they were living in a Roman colony, a city that did not hold to the moral standards of God. He describes it as a **warped and crooked** generation, or a crooked and **depraved** generation. We also live in a crooked and depraved, warped and twisted generation. We

don't have to look very hard to find corruption, evil and depravity. For the Philippian church, they would stand out to their neighbors if they lived as a strong and healthy community, following the example of Jesus. They would stand out like a star does in the night sky, like a spotlight piercing the darkness.

That's our summary of question 1, what is the main point, which brings us to our second question.

2. How does the passage fit into the Bible's overall message?

As we are seeking to explain what any passage means, we need to always relate it back to the larger theme and message of the Bible. We don't want to become too caught up in one particular tree that we forgot we are in a larger forest. The Bible is clear that Jesus came to earth to save us, so that we would honor and glorify Him. God desires to draw all men to Himself, and that every tribe, nation and tongue would worship Him. We know that God desires to live an upright, holy life. We are to resist compromise and impurity, and live by the Spirit. This is the larger message that should always inform how we study and explain each individual book of the Bible, each passage and each verse. Our third question is similar.

3. How does the passage compare with other Bible passages?

Sometimes when we are interpreting passages, we have a **parallel passage** in other book, for example in the gospels when both Mark and Matthew tell the same story. It can be very helpful to compare the stories to see how they are similar, and how they are different. But even if we don't have a parallel passage, we almost always have another passage from somewhere else in the Bible we can use to compare whatever we are studying with. I'll share a few passages that relate to salvation, and are helpful for us to compare to Philippians 2:12-16.

Another famous passage about salvation, also from Paul, comes from the letter he wrote to the **Ephesians: 2:8-9** says that "For by grace are you saved through faith and that not of works; it is a gift of God." On the other hand, **James 2:18** says "Show me your faith without works and I will show you my faith by my works." Those passages hold up both aspects of salvation we must balance.

1 Peter 4:11—"Whoever serves, let him do it as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ." I serve, but in the strength that God supplies. This is how we can build the house and the congregation that God is asking us to build, with the material He has purchased and prepared for us.

I'll go through two passages that relate to grumbling: **James 5:9** "Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door." Finally, from **Ephesians 4:29** "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear."

4. What general principles or theological truths does the passage set forth?

Here are a few ways we can summarize the general truths this passage is teaching us. This is similar to what we did earlier in question 1, but is putting in broader terms. From this passage, we learn that **Salvation requires our effort but is dependent on Christ's prior work**. We have to keep both in

balance, without allowing either side to overwhelm the other. We can't say that God does everything, so that we move in a finished house and don't have to lift a finger. We also can't say that we earn our salvation, or that it depends on us and how much we can do, without needing God to first work in us.

I'll repeat once more what I said earlier: **You can't work out what God hasn't first "worked in"**. That is making the same point about salvation and the balance we strike.

We can also learn from this passage that **Being a Christian sets us apart**. We live in a dark world that has rejected and moved away from God, so when we follow Jesus we shine out in the darkness, like stars in the night sky. This is another general truth we can learn from this passage.

Conclusion

Ok, so we're almost done with our four course meal! We have sampled our appetizer, eaten our salad, and now finally had our main course. Next week we will finish we our take-away, the application we will live out. Let's take the next few minutes to debrief, to share how our meal has been so far. Let's break into groups of four, and discuss the following questions. After that we'll close in prayer.

Discussion Questions

1. What have you learned so far about the steps of studying the Bible?
2. What have you observed in Philippians 2:12-16?
3. **Explain** – What does the passage mean?
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