

Philippians 2:12-18

Summary: After reminding the Philippians of the perfect humility of Jesus, Paul exhorts the Philippians to live their lives in that example

¹² So, my dear people: you always did what I said, so please now carry on in the same way, not just as though I was there with you, but much more because I'm not! Your task now is to work at bringing about your own salvation; and naturally you'll be taking this with utter seriousness. ¹³ After all, God himself is the one who's at work among you, who provides both the will and the energy to enable you to do what pleases him.

¹⁴ There must be no grumbling and disputing in anything you do. ¹⁵ That way, nobody will be able to fault you, and you'll be pure and spotless children of God in the middle of a twisted and depraved generation. You are to shine among them like lights in the world, ¹⁶ clinging on to the word of life. That's what I will be proud of on the day of the Messiah. It will prove that I didn't run a useless race, or work to no purpose.

¹⁷ Yes: even if I am to be poured out like a drink-offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I shall celebrate, and celebrate jointly with you all. ¹⁸ In the same way, you should celebrate, yes, and celebrate with me.

What might Paul mean when he tells the Philippians that they have to bring about their own salvation?

Paul has just recited a hymn glorifying the sacrifice made by Jesus. Paul begins this section with "So" (or "Therefore" in other versions), arguing that the grace shown by God in his sacrifice should cause the Philippians to rethink the ways they live their lives. While he credits God for offering this path of salvation, it is still the responsibility of the church to embrace it and live it out. The church itself is in charge of nurturing their relationship with God and bringing his light to the world. God will, in turn, provide them with the "will and energy" to do so (recall 1:6 "the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion").

Starting in verse 14, Paul uses imagery from the Exodus to describe the relationship between the Philippians and their pagan neighbors. Why does he do this?

During the exodus, the Israelites often grumbled and disputed with their leadership, causing many issues eventually leading to the 40-year wandering. Paul references Deuteronomy 32:5 in verse 15, which is describing those wayward Israelites as a "perverse and crooked generation". He may be trying to show the Philippians that they are the new faithful leadership (like Moses) and that they are now the leaders of a new exodus as they spread the message of Christ to their pagan neighbors. This time, however, they have the chance to work together on this end rather than bickering amongst themselves.

Paul compares his potential death to a drink-offering, a type of sacrifice performed by Israelite priests at the temple (who poured wine on the altar). Why does Paul use this imagery?

Paul is comparing his potential sacrifice to that of Jesus (who he just mentioned in the hymn as willing to "emptying himself"). Paul knows he

may die, but wants the Philippians to understand that if it occurs, it is done so on their behalf so that they can become the next generation of leaders. They, too, should aim for that type of life, where they can be confident that their own sacrifices will develop leaders in the following generation.

What can we do to manage the “grumbling and disputing” in our own church experiences?