

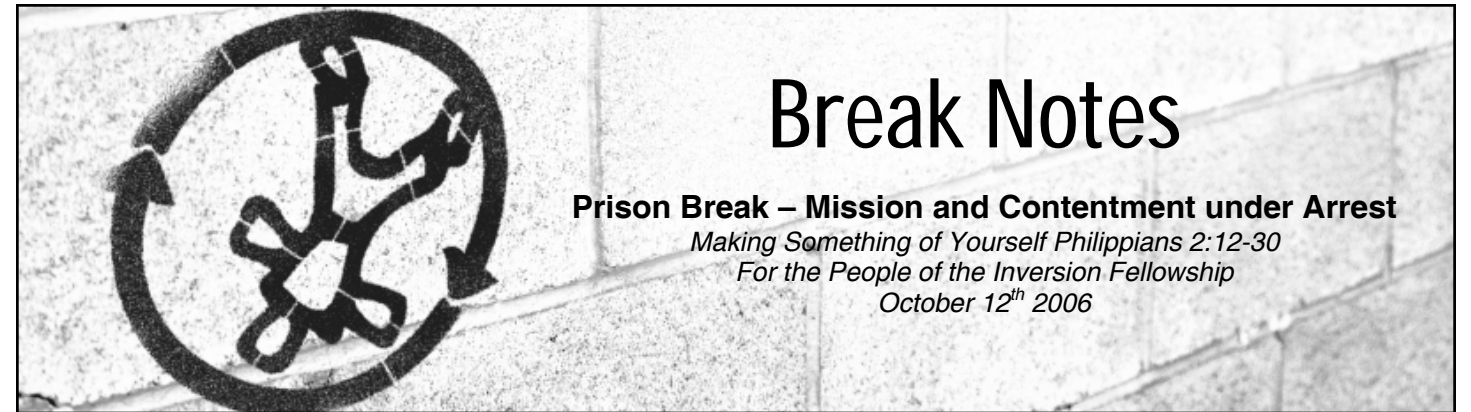
## My Notes: Philippians 2:12-30

<sup>12</sup>Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup>for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

<sup>14</sup>Do all things without grumbling or questioning, <sup>15</sup>that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, <sup>16</sup>holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. <sup>17</sup>Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. <sup>18</sup>Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

<sup>19</sup>I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. <sup>20</sup>For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. <sup>21</sup>They all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. <sup>22</sup>But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. <sup>23</sup>I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, <sup>24</sup>and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.

<sup>25</sup>I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, <sup>26</sup>for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. <sup>27</sup>Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. <sup>28</sup>I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. <sup>29</sup>So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, <sup>30</sup>for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.



## Prison Break – Mission and Contentment under Arrest

*Making Something of Yourself Philippians 2:12-30*

*For the People of the Inversion Fellowship*

*October 12<sup>th</sup> 2006*

### Philippians 2:12-30—Holy Bible, English Standard Version

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### Four Realities To Keep Before Us

#### *Our Lives—We Work Because He is Working*

We dare not try to become something for God, without first acknowledging that all we are and all we become is his work and not our own. Christians long ago used to say that “we work, because he is working” – Jesus work in us translates into a certain kind of life together, where it is now a joyful desire for us to love and obey him.

#### *Sticking Out as Lights*

The gospel of Jesus Christ is not just a fine story – it is the greatest news ever heard by human ears. This gospel, believed, loved, lived in a community, will make us a strange yet attractive people. This community is to be *among* the peoples of the world; not *removed* from it. There is a great contrast between the work of God in people and the standard self-righteous, self-interested, sinful stuff in the world. We will stick out in this world – some will find the gospel attractive, others will find it offensive...yet indeed, we will stick out.

#### *Making Something of Ourselves—Become an Apprentice*

Jesus has commanded us and given us the gracious invitation to “follow him” to be his disciples, to be his apprentices. This is a great privilege to have Jesus as our master, our shepherd, our leader, and our friend and life giver. Follow, love, obey, rejoice, be on mission with Jesus – therein lies the abundant life.

#### *We Should Honor Those Who Have Made Nothing of Themselves*

There are those in the Bible, in church history, and among you tonight *who are making nothing of themselves* in order to make much of Jesus. We should honor such people, respect them, and even sincerely imitate their faith.

## The Junk Drawer

### Work out your Salvation? For it is God who works?

There is a beautiful tension found in the Bible which is highlighted in Philippians two. The tension I am speaking of is between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Many in history have fallen to one side of this great mountain; either by asserting man's freedom and self generated moral ability (the error of Pelagius) or by emphasizing God's sovereignty to the point of neglecting man's duty to follow and obey Jesus (the error of Hyper-Calvinism). This debate is very ancient going back to the pay per view battle royals of Augustine vs. Pelagius, Erasmus vs. Luther, Beza vs. The Remonstrants, Whitfield vs. Wesley.<sup>1</sup> This tendency remains in us and with us today when we are confronted by the Bible.

Before we begin, I want to firmly assert that what God has joined, we should not separate. For indeed in Philippians 2:12, 13 we see both our duty and God's ultimate working lined up side by side flowing in the same line of thought. Paul did not hesitate to assert both truths in the Word of God; neither shall we. To examine this we will first look at each piece of the puzzle in turn, along with an associated error with holding one side of the coin while denying the other, and then move to a synthesis. I will say up front that my leanings are not towards the idea that man has *ultimate self-determination* over his life. My synthesis will be more in line with the reformed tradition, yet not in any way denying our responsibility to live life before God every day.

#### Verse 12—Work it Out

Work out your salvation with fear and trembling. Who is to work out their salvation? The Philippian church. In light of who Jesus is and what he has done, they are to live out that salvation in community in such a way that respects and honors the Lord. Paul makes it clear in the first part of verse 12 that we are to do this by obeying Jesus. Who is to obey him? We are. This is not controversial and it assumes that Christians can do this in their lives. But how do we do this? By what power is this accomplished in our lives? An ancient error in the church claims that human beings can simply do this of their own free will; by their own moral will power. We should not embrace this idea for it robs God of his glory and will only lead to us despairing in our failures. For the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. Rather, we should say "yes!" to following God and "yes!" to the way in which this actually occurs in our lives. For this Paul quickly appends verse 13 to his argument. Work it out! For it is God who wills and works in you according to his good pleasure.

#### Verse 13—It is God who wills and works

Paul makes it very clear that the working in us is the working of God. For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work according to his good pleasure. The point Paul makes is that both the will to/want to/desire to and the power/energy to follow through come ultimately from God. He gives us a desire to obey Jesus and then, in his grace, he also gives us the power to carry it out. John Calvin, in commenting on this verse, makes this clear:

*There are, in any action, two principal departments — the inclination, and the power to carry it into effect. Both of these he ascribes wholly to God; what more remains to us as a ground of glorying? 2*

Who gets the credit for the inclination and the power to carry it out? God does. God does. All glory and praise and wonder for the reality that our lives are transformed goes to God alone. We revel in the fact that our community might live in humility like the Lord Jesus. We are amazed that our desires have changed from sin and self to God and others. The error on this side lies with thinking God is sovereign therefore I do not have any responsibility. This is a fatalistic view which is absent from the Bible. If God is in control and giving us the desire and power to live out our faith, it does not translate into a call to inaction because "it is all up to God anyway." Those who have taken this view have made an equally serious mistake. God has called us to act and live, acknowledging his enablement, not to be a couch potato for the Kingdom because "God is doing his thing" We have looked at both sides of the coin, now let us look at the synthesis.

#### ☐ A synthesis of verses 12 and 13 "Because God works, we work"

The 20th century Scottish Theologian John Murray provides a wonderful synthesis of this passage so I will go no further to improve on what he has already so aptly said.

*God's working in us is not suspended because we work, nor our working suspended because God works. Neither is the relation strictly one of cooperation as if God did his part and we did ours so that the conjunction or coordination of both produced the required result. God works and we also work. But the relation is that because God works we work. All working out of salvation on our part is the effect of God's working in us...We have here not only the explanation of all acceptable activity on our part but we also have the incentive to our willing and working...The more persistently active we are in working, the more persuaded we may be that all the energizing grace and power is of God.<sup>3</sup>*

One last point must be made. It is our tendency to read things as referring only to *individual* salvation. Does this passage have implications for this? Absolutely! But Paul is writing this to a *church*, in the context of an exhortation to them to live a certain type of life together. The working out of salvation in fear and trembling and realizing that God is at work is well paraphrased by Gordon Fee in his commentary on Philippians: *In your relationships with one another live out the salvation Christ has brought you.<sup>4</sup>*

Combining the above synthesis along with a communitarian understanding of the working of the gospel in our lives provides a deep understanding for the church. In this understanding Jesus is the one who is glorified and not our own self-willed efforts. Our lives and our community is thereby transformed by the power of God. The result? We marvel and worship the God of our salvation— together. Then our lives shine like lights in a crooked and twisted generation so that others may see and savor and bow the knee to Jesus the unique savior of the world.

## Unlike The Exodus Generation

In the New Testament there are many, many direct allusions to themes and passages in the Old Testament. In fact, some are so shocking that they would jump up and bite anyone deeply familiar with the OT. In Philippians 2:14-17 we see just such a passage. Remember that the Philippian Christians were most likely Gentile converts, they were not Jewish. However, we observed in the planting of the church in Acts 16, that many of the first Philippian Christians were "God-fearers" before they heard the gospel. This meant they were believers in the God of the Jews and would have been very familiar with the Hebrew narratives of the Old Testament. Therefore, when the Philippians read verses 14-17 it would have registered powerfully with them as hopeful words in light of those stories. Let's look at the verse and highlight a few of these allusions and then treat them in turn:

<sup>14</sup> Do all things without **grumbling or questioning**, <sup>15</sup> that you may be **blameless** and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a **crooked and twisted generation**, among whom you shine as lights in the world, <sup>16</sup> holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. <sup>17</sup> Even if I am to be poured out as a **drink offering** upon the **sacrificial offering** of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.

**Grumbling or questioning**—This is the description used for the Israelites who, after the Exodus from Egypt, grumbled and complained against Moses and against God. In 1 Corinthians 10:6-10, Paul addresses this issue in the strongest of terms.

6 Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. 7 Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." 8 We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. 9 We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, 10 nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer.

The Philippians would know this narrative and would think—yes brother Paul, grumbling and complaining are bad things, bad things man, very bad things. When God is saving your butt, it is not a good thing to whine like a baby because you would like it done another way. When Jesus has died for you—gratefulness is the response. Grumbling is not fitting for such a people.

**Blameless**—The person to which all Jews trace their lineage is "Father Abraham" - you church kids know the song. Students of the Old Testament would know God's word to Him found in Genesis 17:1,2 *When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, 2 that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly."* The Philippians would have known—the way of the people of God is to "walk before him, and be blameless." By their own willpower? No, it is God who is at work. We live in grace, not trying to manufacture blamelessness into our lives. We are sinners being transformed, predestined to walk before a God who has made us blameless (Ephesians 1:4, Colossians 1:21) in his sight. How has he done this? By the death of his beloved Son Jesus...who being in the very nature God humbled himself to the point of death, even death on a cross.

**Crooked and twisted generation**—This is what Moses used to describe the stubborn disobedient generation of Israel who did not enter the promised land. Deuteronomy 32:5 reads, *They have dealt corruptly with him; they are no longer his children because they are blemished; they are a crooked and twisted generation.* Whereas the first generation of Israel after the Exodus is called crooked and twisted, the church is said to be the children of God without blemish in the midst of such a generation. This should greatly encourage the church. We are not the disobedient generation, but the ones purchased by Jesus, heading into the promised lands of God.

### Timothy—Young and Faithful Church Leadership

Timothy was one of the key leaders in the early church planting movement led by Paul the apostle. One thing I want you (y'all) to get is that he was a very young man. Commentators have varied in their understanding of Timothy's age. But one thing is sure, when he begin in ministry with Paul he was very young. At the end of Paul's life when his letters to Timothy were penned, he was still green enough to be called "neotēs" or young.<sup>5</sup> This should encourage us to see our lives as significant and useful to the Kingdom of God in this season of our lives. Listen, inversion, to a wonderful encouragement found in 1 Timothy 4:12

- Let no one despise you for your youth (ESV)
- Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young (NIV)
- Let no man despise thy youth (KJV)
- And don't let anyone put you down because you're young. (The Message)

Who do we need to become to fulfill the second part of this verse which reads: *Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.* Lead the church—lead the body of Christ, set an example of passion for Jesus and holiness of life, now, while you are young. No need to wait. Serve and lead my friends.

In his name,



#### Notes

1. Here is your church history fun for the week—Go to wikipedia.com and search all these names. Pelagius, Augustine, Erasmus, Luther, Beza, Remonstrants, George Whitfield, and John Wesley. Learn and be blessed.
2. John Calvin, Commentary on Philippians (accessed October 10 2006); available from <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom42>
3. John Murray, quoted in Moisés Silva, Philippians, 2nd ed., Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 123.
4. Gordon D. Fee, Philippians, The Ivp New Testament Commentary Series ; 11 (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 104.
5. The usage of this word would never extend past the age of 35 and usually represented people no older than 30. See G3503 in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-c1976), 4:897.