

Phil 2:12-30
Transformed by Christ
Tim Anderson 9/7/17

Graham Cole was Principal of Ridley when I was studying there nearly twenty years ago.

He is one incredibly smart cookie.

He would lecture away about theology.

And if you asked him a question about something he was telling you.

Then he would tell you where to find the information in a book.

Including what page to find it.

Off the top of his head.

It wasn't in his notes.

I choose not to compare myself with people like that.

I'm just thankful that God has blessed his church with some of them.

Anyway, Graham Cole said a few things that have stuck in my memory.

Unlike him, I can't remember piles of quotes including their sources.

So I have to hold on to the few things that really stick.

One of them was this.

The way we are trained to think in the West is 'either / or'.

Either I will drive to work today or I will catch the train.

Either I will have wheatbix for breakfast or I will have porridge.

But for many types of questions 'either / or' doesn't work.

We need to think about things as 'both / and'.

And our Western thinking

doesn't train us well to give 'both / and' answers.

Should I concentrate on having a healthy diet or getting exercise?

Bad question.

I should do both.

Is Jesus God or a man?

Bad question.

He is fully God and fully man.

Should I be devoted to studying the Scriptures to know God

or experiencing God personally

through prayer and the witness of the Spirit?

It's not an 'either / or'.

I should *both* study the Scriptures *and* experience God personally.
Many of the divisions in Western Christianity
come from people taking one side of an 'either /or'
when we should take 'both / and'.

Reformed evangelicals like me tend to choose studying the Scriptures.
Charismatic evangelicals like people up at Hillsong
tend to choose experiencing God.

Only the truly great ones from Church History like Jonathan Edwards
manage to do both.

But that is what we must aim for.

Don't settle for 'either / or' when the question is 'both / and'.

Today in Philippians we run into one of the great 'both / and' questions.
Who is going to do the work to transform me,
so that I become more like Jesus?

Is it God who does the work, or is it me?

Bad question.

It's both God and I who work.

"Therefore my dear friends, ...
continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling."

We begin with us at work.

Work out your salvation.

You need to work,

so that you become more like Jesus.

Notice that Paul says 'work out' your salvation not 'work for'.

We are saved.

As Paul told the Philippians back in chapter one,

'he who began a good work in you

will carry it on to completion.'

The saving part is done.

But because we are saved people,

we need to work hard to behave like saved people.

Imagine a Hollywood film star
adopts an impoverished child from Eritrea.

From the day the adoption papers go through,
that child is fantastically wealthy and privileged.
But they might still go out and play mud pies in the garden,
because that's the only game they know.
They might get around in bare feet
because they aren't used to having shoes.
We have the wonderful inheritance of saved people.
We are adopted children of the king of the universe.
But there's a temptation for us to return to our mud pies.
To go back to the foolish things we used to get excited about
before we had this wonderful status as children of God.
So we need to work out our salvation.
Or in other words,
put our salvation into practice.
Demonstrate the out workings of our salvation.
We are saved,
but how should a saved person live?
We need to live like that.
And that requires work on our part.
Old habits die hard.
So work out your salvation.

"with fear and trembling"
Paul is not talking about fear of God's punishment.
It's not like if you fail to work out your salvation properly,
that God is going to smite you or something.
Fear and trembling is the posture of a person
in the presence of a mighty God.
Moses was trembling with fear
when he went up Mt Sinai to receive the 10 commandments.
He wasn't worried about judgement.
He was just conscious that as a human being
he was stepping into the presence of God's glory.
It's not something you do lightly.
And yet we live in the presence of God.
He lives in our hearts by his Spirit.

We are just as much in the presence of God
as Moses was on Mt Sinai.

And so we should work out our salvation with fear and trembling.
Live every moment consciously in the presence of God.

I find that I need to remind myself often.

Life often feels a bit humdrum.

This week is a bit the same as last week.

You can feel a bit like you are cranking the handle
doing the same old same old.

But actually you are in the presence of God working out your salvation.

I need to remind myself to recapture the wonder of my salvation.

What an incredible privilege to be living today in the presence of God
the Almighty king of the Universe.

It's a bit like when you have kids.

When the baby first appears,
you are struck by the marvel of new creation.

The most matter of fact person can't help but be filled with delight.

But once you've been living with them a few years,
the delight can give way frustrations or even disinterest.

But actually they are just as much a marvel of God's creation then
as the day they were first born.

In the same way, the wonder of God at work in you
can be a mind blowing concept when you first come to faith,
and then can become a bit ho hum after a few years.

So let's work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

Let's maintain that conscious awareness
that we live each moment in the presence of God.

So work out your salvation with fear and trembling -
that means put your salvation into practice,
consciously aware that you are living in the presence of God.

Who is going to do the work to transform you
so that you become more like Jesus?
You are.

You are going to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

Who is going to do the work to transform you
so that you become more like Jesus?

God is.

"For it is God who works in you to will and to act
in order to fulfil his good purpose."

You see if it were just up to our hard work,
who is to say we would get it right?

Our hard work would be spoiled by our selfish attitudes,
or our longing to be seen as better than the next person,
or our inability to know the right direction to work in.

It's easy to work very hard and find out when you've finished the job,
that you were tackling the wrong project.

They don't like to advertise it,
but it can happen in hospitals.

The doctor has done a wonderful job of the amputation.

The stitching is perfect.

Unfortunately he amputated the good leg and left the diseased one.

That could happen if it were just our job
to work hard to make ourselves more like Jesus.

But it is God who works in you to will and to act
according to his good purpose.

If you are a Christian then God's Spirit lives in you.

And he's hard at work.

He's transforming you to make you like Jesus.

He knows what needs to change.

And he will do the necessary surgery.

And sometimes it will feel like surgery.

If the Holy Spirit is going to root out pride,
sometimes he will use humiliating failure to fulfil his good purposes.

If the Holy Spirit is going to crucify greed,
sometimes he will take away your stuff.

But however tough the surgery feels,
it's worth it.

The Holy Spirit never amputates the wrong leg.

The things he gets rid of are thoroughly disgustingly bad.
If God takes away your stuff to kill your greed,
never think to yourself,
I would have preferred he left me with my stuff and my greed.
No.

He knows what you need.

"For it is God who works in you to will and to act
in order to fulfil his good purpose."

If God is at work in us,
then should we just leave it up to him
and not worry about our personal holiness?
No. Not at all.

Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.
Intentionally put your salvation into practice.
Work hard at it.

But be encouraged that God is supervising the work,
and he will achieve his desired goals in us.

Work out your salvation.

That's a big job.

Which particular parts of their salvation
does Paul want the Philippians to concentrate on working out?
Do everything without grumbling or arguing ...

It seems there could be higher things on the list of priorities.
Is grumbling and arguing the biggest concern the apostle had?
Remember what Chris said last week?

It was all about standing together in Christ.

Paul wants the church working like a well oiled machine.

He wants them 'striving together as one for the faith of the gospel'.

He wants them 'like minded'.

He wants them 'one in spirit and of one mind'.

A champion team will always beat a team of champions.

A symphony orchestra sounds much different
when they play together than when they are tuning up.

The church will be effective in serving the Lord Jesus

when it works like a champion team,
when it works like a symphony orchestra.
And what's the great threat that cohesion,
that unity of purpose and action?
Grumbling and arguing.

Do you remember the story of the Israelites
after their marvellous rescue from slavery in Egypt?
What marked the Israelites time in the wilderness?
They had seen the power of God at work mightily.
The plagues that came upon the Egyptians were great miracles.
But then as they walked through the desert to get to the promised land,
what did they do?
They grumbled.
"We're thirsty."
God gave them water from a rock.
"We're hungry."
God gave them manna from heaven.
"This manna is boring.
We want meat."
God sent flocks of quails.
"Moses has married a Cushite, we shouldn't have to listen to him."
God punished Aaron and Miriam for their rebellious hearts.
"The people in the promised land are too numerous,
we should have stayed in Egypt.
Let's go back to Egypt."
That cost them 40 more years wandering in the wilderness.
Grizzling, grumbling, arguing all the way.
God's people in the new covenant
need to be more effective than those under the old covenant.
We have the Spirit living in us.
The Spirit will make us more effective.
And that will happen through living without grumbling and arguing.
The Israelites thought they were grumbling to Moses.
Actually they were grumbling against God.
It was God who lead them out of Egypt.

God who brought them into the desert.
Any complaints are actually whinging about God.

The same is true in the church.
People might think they are complaining about their human leaders.
Actually they are complaining about the God,
who raised those leaders up,
and who put them under those leaders.
Fair enough, like Moses, they aren't perfect.
But if your mind is focused on their inadequacies,
you're not helping the church be a champion team.
When people grumble,
we are not one in spirit and of one mind.

So do everything without grumbling or arguing,
so that you may become blameless and pure,
children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.

Now if you do that,
you will stand out.
Grumbling and arguing are a core part of fallen human nature.
And no one likes to grumble about their leaders more than Australians.
So if we are of one mind,
If we strive together as one for the faith of the gospel,
then we stand out from our generation.
We will be like stars in the night.

Paul has told the Philippians how to work out their salvation.
But he doesn't leave it there.
He holds up two men as examples.
These are men who are working out their salvation.
They work alongside Paul like a well oiled team.
Their names are Timothy and Epaphroditus.

Now we don't have time to soak up
all Paul has to say about his loyal co-workers.

So I'm just going to mention one verse.

Verse 21 gives us a key characteristic of someone who is working out their salvation.

Paul says,

"everyone else apart from Timothy looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ."

Everyone else is interested in what will be fun for them, what will give them an easy life,

what will make them rich,

what will give them lots of time to relax,

but Timothy looks out for the interests of Jesus Christ.

But hold on.

What does that mean?

Jesus Christ has gone back to be with the Father in heaven.

How can you look after his interests?

You look after Jesus' interests by living for the gospel.

Remember a couple of weeks back?

For me to live is Christ,

and to die is gain.

It's about living for the gospel.

Does Timothy really want to drop what he's doing

and spend five weeks travelling,

so he can find out what's been happening in Philippi

and bring news back to Paul?

Well it's probably not high on his holiday agenda.

But in serving Paul and serving the Philippian church,

he is serving Jesus.

He's living for Christ.

He's looking out for the interests of Jesus.

He's working out his salvation with fear and trembling.

That's the kind of attitude that we want to cultivate too.

So what have we said this morning?

How do I become more like Jesus?

I need to work.
I need to work out my salvation with fear and trembling.
Living conscious of the presence of God.
While I'm at work,
God is at work too.
He's like a master surgeon,
amputating the parts of my character that don't fulfil his good purposes.
Anything in particular he wants to get rid of?
Grumbling and arguing.
They stop the team working together.
And we want to be united in gospel.
Living transformed lives together for Christ.