

Introduction: I will say it up front: This passage, and this message, is addressed to the family of God – The Church of Jesus Christ. However, even if you are not sure where you stand with God and His Church; or, even if you have not surrendered to God through Jesus in humble, obedient faith (turning from yourself and your way to God and His ways) to be baptized into The Church by The Holy Spirit, I believe there is something for you in this passage, and in this message. *** The main point of this passage is how the children of God IN Christ are to apply the salvation they have received to become a family; then together they witness to the light they have received in the dark and perverted world; while they hold out The Gospel of Life; and all the while they rejoice in whatever sacrifices they have been called to make for applying their salvation IN Christ. *** Notice all the plural nouns and pronouns in this passage. This means The Gospel witness must be a family endeavor. God never intended The Mission He assigned to His Son's Church to be an individual task! In our passage there are twenty-one plural nouns and pronouns concerning the local church in Philippi. The only singular nouns and pronouns apply to the apostle Paul and God. It is the dark and perverted world that exalts individuals. The ONLY individual God's people are to exalt and follow is THE God-Man, Jesus, The Savior. *** Aside: This is why I believe it will be a long time before God raises up another Billy Graham. He was faithful to do what he was called to do. However, too many Christians got lazy because of his 'success' and did not do the work God was calling them to do in their local churches. This is because Americans worship successful individuals, to the point of not doing their own duty. One cliché I do not like is: 'One man (or one woman) can make a world of difference'. Yes, but ... truly effective movements are established in communities of people working together for one goal. *** So, as we work through this passage, keep this in mind: The Church must be a strong counter-cultural balance to the ungodly American 'cult of the individual'. Let us be asking ourselves how we, as a local church in the world-wide Church of Jesus, can work together to fulfill The Great Commission – even in the 'social distancing' of COVID-19.

I. Paul commands his beloved church to obediently live out the Gospel work God is doing in them. (Verses 12-13)

A. So, my beloved, as you obeyed when I was with you, now I am absent, with fear and trembling, the salvation you received: live it out! (Verse 12)

1. So then my beloved, just as all of you have always obeyed, ... (Verse 12a)

Beloved: This is the first of three times Paul uses this expression of endearment to this church. He used it once each as he wrote to the churches in Rome and Thessalonica, and four times (but over 29 chapters) to the church in Corinth. Clearly he loved these Christians in Philippi.

Obeyed: Paul knew the members of this church were consistent in the obedience of faith, despite some problems addressed in this letter.

2. ... not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence ... (Verse 12b)

First visit: Paul had planted this church (Acts 16, in 51 AD).

Now: He is now under house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:16-31, in 61 AD) and he is transitioning from what he had observed in them to a command for them.

3. ... with fear and trembling, the salvation of you all must be lived out in what you do. (Verse 12c)

Faith and human fear: The fear of God is linked with faith from the days of Noah: 'By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith' (Hebrews 11:7, NIV).

Ethics-morality: What Paul is commanding here is that all followers of Jesus must live according to Biblical morality in the power of The Holy Spirit of God.

B. Because God is working in you all to the result of the 'good thinking'. (Verse 13)

1. Because God is the one working in you all. (Verse 13a)

God's work: God is the initiator and completer of our salvation (Hebrews 12:2), but we have the responsibility to cooperate with what He is doing in us by faith.

Application: So, let us commit to living out our salvation together under the assurance that God is working in us to enable and empower us to do His will.

God's children cooperate with His good work in them

2. [He is working in them] both to will and work for [His] 'good thinking [pleasure]'. (Verse 13b)

'Good thinking': When people respond to God's work in them with faithful obedience, God is pleased His Plan of Salvation is being fulfilled. The text says 'for good thinking-pleasure'. Is it correct to infer His [God's] good pleasurable thoughts? If yes, notice it also brings Him Glory that Christ brought Him, as in the last phrase of the previous passage (2:11).

II. Paul commands they do all things as blameless children of God, as lights in the world, holding out The Gospel Word so Paul may boast on The Lord's return. (Verses 14-16)

A. Do ALL without murmuring, blameless children in a perverted generation, lights in the world holding out The Word of Life. (Verses 14-16a)

1. You all must do all things without murmuring and arguing. (Verse 14)

Murmur: This is a word that sounds like what it means, and is not fitting for a child of God.

Torah: The pair of words was used of the Israelites under Moses, particularly when they complained about the lack of food (Exodus 16) and when they murmured against Aaron as priest (Numbers 17).

2. That you may be blameless and innocent children of God. (Verse 15a)

God's children: God's children neither complain about food or His chosen leaders, nor will they be corrupted by the world.

3. Unblemished in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation. (*Verse 15b*)
Deuteronomy: In the song Yahweh had Moses teach His people the same phrase is used as a warning: ‘They have acted corruptly toward Him, They are not His children, because of their defect; But are a perverse and crooked generation’ (*Deuteronomy 32:5, NAS*).
4. In whom you are all being made to appear as lights in the world. (*Verse 15c*)
Daniel: This may be drawn from the last chapter of Daniel; ‘And those who are wise will be shining like the light of the outstretched sky’ (*Daniel 12:3a, BBE*).
5. As you all are holding out The Word of Life. (*Verse 16a*)
Gospel witness: Finally, they are holding out The Word of Life (*Acts 5:20, KJV – plural*) to all people (good and bad) of their generation. This is how Jesus’ Great Commission will be fulfilled. We are all to have faith God will work in us to make us fit to carry the ‘good news’ (gospel) of forgiveness and reconciliation to God for all who turn from themselves (repent) and to God. May we seek God in prayer to work together as lights in a dark world, and together hold out The Words of Life to people.

God’s blameless children cooperate with His good work in them

B. So Paul may boast in the Day of Christ he did not run or labor in vain. (*Verses 16b-c*)

1. With the result I boast in The Day of Christ. (*Verse 16b*)
Last things: Paul is thinking ahead to when Jesus returns to judge the living and the dead. (*Acts 10:42; 2 Timothy 4:1-8; 1 Peter 4:1-8*)
2. That I did not run in vain, nor did I work hard in vain. (*Verse 16c*)
Athletics: Paul also used athletic imagery with Christians in Corinth (*1 Corinthians 9:24-27*).

III. Paul commands them to rejoice with him, even in sacrificial ministry of their faith. (Verses 17-18)

A. But if also, he is ‘poured out’ on the sacrifice and service of their faith, he shares his joy with all of them. (*Verse 17*)

1. But if also I have been poured out as a drink offering ... (*Verse 17a*)
Sacrifice: The priest offered morning and evening burnt offerings (signifying total consecration to God of the worshipper) on behalf of all Israelites – and each sacrifice was accompanied by a drink offering that was poured out before Yahweh (*Numbers 28:1-10*). Paul is totally consecrated to God. And, he is not the lamb of the burnt offering, but he is the necessary accompaniment; just as God works in us and we must cooperate with His work in us by obeying all Jesus commanded (*Matthew 28:16-20*) – by grace through faith (*Ephesians 2:8-10*).
2. ... upon the sacrifice and ministry (service) of your faith. (*Verse 17b*)
Ministry service of faith: Paul is referring back to the partnership they have always had with him in The Gospel (*1:3-6*). All ministry and service we do for God must be by faith in His gracious gift of His Son – Jesus Christ! (*2 Corinthians 9:6-15*)
3. I am rejoicing, and I am sharing my joy with you all. (*Verse 17c*)
Joy in mutual sharing of The Gospel: At the end of this letter we will see that Paul’s sharing of Christ with Caesar’s household has borne fruit (*4:21-23*). And, he is encouraging them to share with others all Christ has done for them so they may rejoice together of the fruit The Vine is producing in them as branches. (*John 15:5-17*)

Joy comes when we share Christ together

B. But he also commands them to rejoice with him. (*Verse 18*)

1. In the same way, you all must be rejoicing! (*Verse 18a*)
Command: With this command, Paul moves spells out specifically what he has just inferred.
2. And I am sharing my joy with you. (*Verse 18b*)
Shared joy in suffering: Think of this radical statement. Paul is chained to Roman soldiers. Yet he knows the source of joy is remaining IN Christ to bear much fruit for Jesus Christ. And, this is the joy he shares with them while suffering confinement in Rome. Paul is following Christ. And we should follow him together in teams of two, three or more; because as individuals the work God has called us to do IN Christ is too hard!
Bottom Line: We must accept that just as The Savior sacrificed Himself for The JOY of all who would become His brothers and sisters (*Hebrews 12:1-3*), so too we are called to be joyful in the sacrifices and suffering we endure for The Glory of God, as we cooperate with Him IN His Mission.

God’s blameless children cooperate with His good work in them

Conclusion: Paul commands his beloved church in Philippi to apply the salvation they have received from God as a family. In all they do, they must be led to witness together in a dark and perverted world to The Light they have received, holding out The Gospel of Life to all. Finally, they must do this while rejoicing in whatever sacrifices they are called to make.

God’s blameless children cooperate with His good work in them