



Kingdom Living: Shining

Philippians 2:12-18

As we noted last week, a striking feature of the letters of Paul is the connection which he constantly makes between what we believe about God, and how we live for God. For Paul, theology is never an abstract subject to be separated from practical advice on lifestyle. Philippians 2 is a perfect example of this pattern, with all of Paul's advice on how the Philippians are to live rooted in the example offered to us by Christ.

Paul, in seeking to encourage the Philippians to 'regard others as better than yourselves,' (2:1) reminds them of the story of Christ, exploring how in Christ we see a revelation of the self-giving nature of God. He follows the famous Christ hymn of 2:5-11 with a 'therefore' in 2:12. Once again, Paul is keen to consider how the rubber hits the road. This week's passage also builds on what Paul has written at the end of chapter 1, when he reminds the Philippians about the importance of unity and 'striving together as one for the faith of the gospel' (1:27), with a determination which is, in itself, a sign to the world of how God will eventually save his people.

It's worth noting that Philippians 2:12 provides another example of Paul's confidence in the Philippians and his strong relationship with them. He knows this is a church which is already committed to living well for God. He asks them to conduct themselves 'as you have *always obeyed*,' before urging them to '*continue* to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.'

The verses which follow are rich in terms of the imagery used, with Paul drawing upon a wide variety of phrases from the Old Testament. The Philippians are urged not to repeat the 'murmuring and arguing' which was so typical of Israel in the period following the Exodus (see Exod 16:12). In asking them to live blameless lives, Paul repeats the language of Deut 32:5, where in the song of Moses Israel is judged on account of its rebellion as 'blameworthy children, a crooked and perverse generation.' However, on this occasion, Paul turns around the use of his language, instead describing the people who oppose the church in Philippi as the ones who are crooked and perverse. Finally, he uses an image found in Daniel 12:3 which speaks of Israel's ultimate hope for history, a time when 'those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.'

It is telling that the only specific command found in these verses is that concerning bickering and arguing. Gordon Fee has commented that, 'Because so many of us are prone to such behaviour, it is easy to dismiss this as a very "mundane" matter, but the very fact that Paul spends so much energy giving biblical and theological support to it suggests otherwise. This is spoken in the context of their – and our – being God's children in a very fallen, twisted world. Our corporate behaviour,

especially as that is reflected in our attitudes toward one another, goes a long way in determining how effectively we “hold firm the word of life” in such a world.’¹

For discussion

1. In verse 13, Paul writes that ‘it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose.’ In the original Greek in which he wrote, the word *purpose* carries a sense of delight or pleasure. In what ways does it change your view of Christian service to think of God taking satisfaction in what you do?
2. When you join together with others from SBC and you start to talk about church, is it your default to be thankful or to complain? What practical steps can we take – as a house group or as a church – to work together to reduce the problem of ‘murmuring and arguing’?
3. Can you think of someone you have known, or know now, who provides a good example of ‘shining’ for Christ in the place where they work or live? In what ways can we learn from their example?
4. The sociologist Christopher Lasch has said that we live in a time when, ‘What was waned... is the sense of living a world that existed before oneself and will outlast oneself.’² But an important part of Paul’s thinking is the long-term perspective he has, the hope that one day he will be able to boast that he has not ran or laboured in vain. How can we help each other develop this longer-term perspective, this appreciation that one day all the things we have and own now will give way to something better that God has in store?
5. Morna Hooker has written on these verses: ‘We are sometimes tempted to wish that Paul had given more precise advice on just how Christians should live in particular circumstances. But Christian obedience does not mean living with a set of rules; rather it means responding in the appropriate way to the self-giving love of God.’³ Do you agree? Do you find rules to be helpful or restrictive in your faith?

¹ Gordon Fee, *The International Commentary on the New Testament: Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 1995, 257

² Quoted in Roy McCloyhry, *The Eye of the Needle*, 1990, 33

³ Morna Hooker, *The New Interpreter’s Bible: Philippians*, 2000, 516