

In's and Out's of Christian Living

Be opening your Bibles to Philippians 2 as we consider the Ins and Outs of Christian Living. Mark Twain wrote "*Few things are harder to put up with than the annoyance of a good example.*" While admiration for a great person can inspire us, it cannot enable us. It takes more than an example on the outside; it takes power on the inside to measure up to the standard of a good example.

In the first part of Philippians 2, Paul presented Jesus Christ as our great example of the submissive mind. We read it, and we agree with it, but how do we go about practicing it? Fortunately, Paul sets before us the divine pattern to accomplish the submissive mind that God expects. ***It is God which worketh in you (2:13).*** I have said that the Christian life is a series of ups and downs, and it is; but it is also a process of 'ins and outs.' God works in, and we work out." We cultivate and develop a submissive mind by responding to the divine teaching God has provided for us.

1. There is a purpose to achieve (v12, 14-16) *Work out your own salvation (v. 12).* This does not suggest "*Work to earn your own salvation.*" Paul is writing to people who are already saved. The verb "*work out*" carries the meaning of "*work to full completion,*" such as working out a problem in mathematics. In Paul's day it was also used for "*working out a mine,*" i.e., getting out of the mine all the valuable ore possible; or "*working out a field*" so as to get the greatest harvest possible. The purpose God wants us to achieve is Christ-likeness. Paul presented this same thought on another occasion when he said (***Romans 8:29***) ... ***to be conformed to the image of his Son.***

One of the wonderful things about being a Christian is the knowledge that God has a plan for our lives. (***Ephesians 2:10***) ***For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*** No two flowers are the same, no two snowflakes are the same and no two Christians are the same. We are all unique with different levels of ability. Yet, we all are to be imitators of Christ. Remember the words of Paul, ***Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1).***

In verses 14-15, Paul contrasts the life of the believer with the lives of those who live in the world. Unsaved people complain and find fault, but Christians rejoice. Society around us is "*twisted and distorted,*" but the Christian stands straight because he lives by the standard of God's Word. (***v14***)***Do all things without murmurings and disputings: (15) That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.*** The world is dark, but Christians shine as bright lights. V15 calls us "*the sons of God.*" As we allow God to achieve this purpose in our lives, we become better examples to a world that desperately needs Christ. It is important to note that this purpose is achieved ***in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation (v15).***

The reason we are not spiritual hermits is for us to become more like Christ. We must be confronted with the needs/problems of real life, including the needs/problems of others. The Pharisees were so isolated and insulated from reality that they developed an artificial kind of self-righteousness that was totally unlike the righteousness God wanted them to have. In Jesus day, the Pharisees forced a religion of fear/bondage on the people, and they crucified Christ because He dared to oppose that kind of religion. It's by ministering to the world that we see God's purpose fulfilled in our lives. **There is a purpose to achieve**

2. There is a power to receive (2:13). *For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.* The principle Paul lays down is this: God must work *in* us before He can work *through* us. This principle is seen at work throughout the Bible in the lives of men like Moses, David, the apostles, and others. God had a special purpose for each man to fulfill. For example, it took God 80 years to bring Moses to the place where He could use him to lead the people of Israel. As Moses tended sheep for some 40 of those years, God was working in him so that one day He might work through him. GOD IS MORE INTERESTED IN THE WORKMAN THAN IN THE WORK. If the workman is what he ought to be, the work will be what it ought to be.

There are three "tools" used to help us in this work: (1) THE WORD OF GOD, (2) PRAYER, AND (3) SUFFERING.

Let's consider first **THE WORD OF GOD** - *For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the Word of God, which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe (1 Thessalonians 2:13).* God's divine energy is released in our lives through His inspired Word.

We have a responsibility to:

(1) appreciate the Word, and not treat it the way we treat other books. The Word of God is unique: it is inspired, authoritative, and infallible. If we do not appreciate the Word, then God's power cannot energize our lives.

(2) appropriate the Word – "*receive it.*" This means much more than listening to it, or even reading and studying it. To "*receive*" God's Word means to welcome it and make it a part of our inner being. God's truth is to the spiritual man what food is to the physical man. Paul told Timothy to *(1 Timothy 4:15) Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all.* Meditation implies continually thinking about. Have you ever had a tune stuck in your mind and you go around most of the day humming that little jingle. That tune is on your mind, you think about it – you meditate on it. To meditate on scripture is to have it fresh on you mind at all times.

(3) apply the Word; that means to believe and obey it. When we trust God's Word and act upon it, then God's power is released in our lives. On one occasion, the angel's made this promise to Mary in *(Luke 1:31) For with God nothing shall be impossible.* We see this truth operating in the life of Jesus. He commanded the crippled man to stretch out his hand, and the very command gave him the power to obey and be healed (Matt. 12:13). He commanded Peter to walk to Him on the water, and the command enabled Peter to do so, as long as he exercised faith (Matt. 14:22-33). It is faith in God's promises that releases God's power. Faithful obedience to His commandments enables this power to work.

PRAYER (second tool) - So, if we want God's power working in us, we must spend time with the Word of God. But we must also pray. *Prayer* is the second "tool" God uses to work in the lives of His children. *Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us (Ephesians. 3:20).* Unless the Christian takes time for prayer, God cannot work in him and through him. Notice that in the Bible and in church history, the people God used were people who prayed.

SUFFERING (third tool) - God's third "tool" is suffering. The Spirit of God works in a special way in the lives of those who suffer for the glory of Christ. The "*fiery trial*" has a way of burning away the rubbish and empowering the believer to serve Christ. Paul himself had experienced God's power in that Philippian jail when he was beaten and thrust into the stocks in the inner prison; for he was able to sing and praise God in spite of his

suffering (Acts 16:19-33). His "fiery trial" also enabled him to teach the jailer. It was not the earth-quake that brought conviction to the man; the earthquake almost led him to suicide! It was Paul's encouraging word, "Don't do it! We are all here!" This kind of attitude touched that man's heart, and he fell before Paul asking how to be saved.

The Word of God, prayer, and suffering are the three "tools" that God uses in our lives. As the Christian reads the Word and prays, he becomes more like Christ; and the more he becomes like Christ, the more the unsaved world opposes him. This daily "fellowship of His sufferings" (Philippians 3:10) drives the believer back to the Word and prayer, so that all three "tools" work together to provide the spiritual power he needs to glorify Christ. This is God working in us

Joy comes from submission (v16-18). *Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain. (17) Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all. (18) For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me.* Some have the view that joy comes from aggression: fight everybody to get what you want, and when you get then you will be happy. The example of Jesus is proof enough that the world's philosophy is wrong. He never used a sword or any other weapon; yet He won the greatest battle in history-the battle against sin and death and hell. Notice some of His attributes:

- He defeated hatred by manifesting love;
- He overcame lies with truth.
- Because He surrendered; He was victorious
- He humbled himself as a servant; was exalted as Lord

There is a two-fold joy that comes to the person who possesses and practices the submissive mind: a joy hereafter (v16) and a joy here and now (v17-18). In the hereafter God is going to reward those who have been faithful to Him and the joy of thy Lord is going to be a part of that reward. The faithful Christian will too discover that his sufferings/works is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58). It was this same kind of promise of future joy that helped our Savior in His sufferings on the cross. (**Hebrews 12:2**) *Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

But we do not have to wait for the return of Christ to start experiencing the joy of the submissive mind. That joy is a present reality (v17-18), and it comes through sacrifice and service. It is remarkable that in two verses that discusses sacrifice, Paul uses the words joy and rejoice-and repeats them! Most people would associate sorrow with suffering, but Paul sees suffering and sacrifice as doorways to a deeper joy in Christ. (**Philippians 2:17**) *Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all. (18) For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me.*

It takes faith to exercise the submissive mind. We must believe that God's promises are true and that they are going to work in our lives just as they worked in Paul's life. God works in us through the Word, prayer, and suffering; and we work out in daily living and service. God fulfills His purposes in us as we receive and believe His Word. Life is not just a series of "ups and downs." Rather, it is a sequence of delightful "ins and outs." God works in-we work out and the result is-JOY.

Invitation