

Text: Phil. 2:12-18

Title: "Some keys to local-church gospel victory"

Time: 10/10/2021 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: The announcers prior to sporting events will often list off a series of keys to victory for their team over their opponent. A typical list I have seen may include things like (1) the pitcher has to keep his curve ball down, or (2) the cleanup hitter has to come out of his slump. A lot of time and energy is spent by these analysts to figure out what must happen in order for their team to win.

Paul is doing something very similar in our passage when he tells this church to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (v. 12). He then gives this church some important keys to gospel victory over their enemies.

This verse has been a favorite of Roman Catholic theologians since the advent of the Protestant Reformation. Their Douay-Rheims Bible includes a note next to the words "with fear" in this verse that says, "This is against the false faith, and presumptuous security of modern sectaries." When the editors of the Douay-Rheims version of the Bible wrote "modern sectaries," they meant us Protestants. And when they talk about our "false faith" and "presumptuous security," they are referring to our doctrines that sinners are saved by faith, not works, and that their eternal security depends on the power of their Savior and not on their own power.

Roman Catholicism teaches that a sinner's prospects for eternal life depend on the sacraments and ongoing intercessions of the church, not on Christ alone. They believe that our hope of heaven is presumption and that purgatory is

next for us. They use this phrase, “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” to support their view.

The Bible’s doctrines of justification by faith alone and eternal security teach that eternal life is a gift that must be received by faith, not an accomplishment that must be earned through good works (Rom. 6:23). Once the gift of eternal life is received by faith, it lasts forever by definition. God’s promise is that all whom God justifies He shall one day glorify (Rom. 8:30; 1 John 5:10-12, “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life”; Psalm 23).

Jesus is the Good Shepherd of Psalm 23, who gave His life for His sheep. He promised: “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand” (John 10:28-29).

So when Paul says “work out your own salvation,” he is not talking about all the works we have to perform to earn our salvation. Instead, he is talking about the same kind of salvation that he was talking about the other two times he uses the word *salvation* in Philippians (1:19, 1:28). That kind of salvation is not salvation from sin, but rather salvation from gospel opposition. Paul is still concerned about the opposition believers face in this context (vv. 15-16).

Another important detail about this key phrase of the passage is that the word translated *your own* is plural, but the

word translated *salvation* is singular. So Paul is not telling each individual in the Philippian church to work out their separate salvations, rather he is commanding the church to accomplish together their common victory over the opposition to the gospel that the enemy of souls hurls at every gospel-preaching, Bible-teaching local church.

So, in support of that concern, local-church victory over opposition to gospel ministry, Paul gives some keys to this victory. I see at least four in the passage I would like to emphasize this morning.

I. Consistent obedience is a key to local-church gospel victory (v. 12a).

Illustration: When Paul says, “not as in my presence only,” it makes me think of some of the study halls I remember from high school. The rule in a study hall was that there was to be no talking. That worked very well so long as the teacher was in the room ready to hand out demerits for violators. But as soon as the teacher left the room, a whisper would begin, and then a low rumble, and soon the clatter of full-blown illegal fellowship. We would obey when the teacher was around, but not when he left. We were like that because we were immature kids.

Application: Paul commends the consistent obedience of the Philippian church. They had obeyed God’s Word, not only when Paul the Apostle was with them, but also when he was absent from them. That consistency was the foundation of the keys to victory, which Paul communicates here.

Illustration: Sometimes we complicate this key to victory over opposition to the gospel. Football teams can do that. They can think that the key to victory is some creative trick

play on offence or an 11-man blitz on defense or a surprise fake punt on special teams, when the real key to victory is to not turn the ball over on offence and finish your tackles on defense – simple things.

In our work of gospel ministry, conquering the opposition is really about doing what we know we can do and ought to do. The opposition is far greater than we are, but the Lord does not ask us to come up with the ingenious trick play that fools Satan. He simply asks us to obey Him. Do what we know He has told us to do. He has told us to get baptized, to join our local-church and serve Him there, to read our Bibles and pray, to share the gospel with our lost loved ones and neighbors. These are simple things we can do, and if we do them consistently for the Lord and not to please men, they will be an important key to gospel victory.

II. Godly motivation is a key to local-church gospel victory (vv. 12b-15).

Application: You may notice in our KJV translation that the word *his* at the end of verse 13 is in italics. When our translators do that, they are telling us that this particular word is not in the original Greek, but they are adding it to help us ascertain what they believe the verse means.

In this case, the phrase *good pleasure* is the same in the original as the phrase *good will* in 1:15, where Paul highlights two very different possible motives for gospel ministry. On the one hand, some were preaching out of envy and strife in competition against Paul, and on the other, others were preaching out of good will in support of Paul. Paul is referring to this positive good-will motive in our verse.

So, when Paul is saying that fear and trembling are keys to local-church gospel victory, he tells us that the reason they

are is that God is at work in us as a local-church so that we become a body of believers who desire what we desire and do what we do with good-will motivation. In other words, the Lord deals with us as a local church in blessing and chastening until our motive for gospel ministry is the good-will demonstrated by the preachers of 1:15.

And that is why he immediately says next that murmuring and disputing cannot be a part of our ministry (v. 14), and that once these are eliminated we will shine as lights in the world with motives that are pure and innocent (v. 15). The world is crooked and perverse – full of strife, envy, murmuring, disputing, divisive politics, competition, pride, and complaining. When our gospel ministry is filled with good-will, we shine brightly in a world like that (see 1 Cor. 13:13).

Those who fear and tremble before their God do not murmur and complain about God's people. They understand that God is working with blessing and discipline in a gospel ministry so that it will desire and do for the right reasons. They want to be a part of that ministry of good will.

III. The Word of Life is a key to local-church gospel victory (v. 16).

Illustration: My football career ended when I was 12 years old. I never progressed beyond the Pop Warner stage. At that level of play, some things go terribly wrong with the coach's game plan at times. I can remember one time, one of our players got hit and spun around and then ran the wrong way for what he thought was an uncontested touch-down, when in reality it was a safety for the other team.

Application: Paul's term for that kind of mistake is "running and laboring in vain." A lot of work goes into preparation for a football game, but when the player runs

the wrong way and scores for the wrong team, all that hard work is in vain. For Paul, a church that no longer held forth the Word of God would have been a lot of hard work that was in vain. Paul worried about this possibility at times (note these twelve passages – 1 Cor. 15:2, 15:10, 15:14, 15:58, 2 Cor. 6:1, 9:3, Gal. 2:2, 3:4, 4:11, Phil. 2:16, 1 Thess. 2:1, 3:5). We live in a day in which we are told that we have to deemphasize our Bibles, that the study of the Word of God gets in the way of a victorious gospel ministry.

But Paul calls God's Word *the Word of life* because of the truth of Heb. 4:12, "For the word of God is quick [living], and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Paul believed that faith came by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). The gospel of the Bible, which is that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and He was buried, and He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures," is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 15:1-4).

We can lack a piano player and still have a victorious gospel ministry. But the day we lose our faith in the power of the Bible and the preaching of the Word is the day we begin to run the wrong way, to labor in vain.

IV. The joy of worthwhile sacrifice is a key to local-church gospel victory (vv. 17-18).

Illustration: At a pastor's meeting last Monday morning, I learned about the Free Burma Rangers. That is a humanitarian group that seeks to help internally displaced people in war zones. It was founded by a brother in Christ who is a

special forces veteran, and there is a documentary about how he and his wife and their three kids have spent their lives helping victims of war zones. Their sacrifices have been great, including the endangerment of their lives at times, but the joy they expressed in a documentary film about their dangerous work was even greater.

Application: Paul knew about the joy of worthwhile gospel-ministry sacrifice. He includes this joy among his keys to victorious gospel ministry. He tells the Philippians of the great joy that giving his life and labor to their faith had brought him. It is a joy to see the faith of some whom we have had a part in helping to believe. Jesus focused on that joy when He endured the cross for our sins (Heb. 12;2). Paul said that his crown of rejoicing would be Thessalonian believers with him in the presence of their Savior someday (1 Thess. 2:19). That is the rejoicing we long for.

Conclusion: So, do we know the keys to a local-church's victory over gospel opposition here at New Boston Baptist Church: simple, consistent obedience; the right motivation; holding forth the Word of life; and the joy of worthwhile sacrifice? We are not a large church, but I do believe that we are a church that possesses a powerful world-changing Pauline list of keys to gospel victory.

I am often encouraged by remembering what Jesus said to the church of Philadelphia about their opportunity for gospel victory. He told them, "These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name" (Rev. 3:6-8).

He knows our works too. We have just a little strength. If we keep His word and do not deny His name, He will set before us the open door of gospel victory, that no man can shut. Let us determine to trust Him courageously and faithfully, and look for that gospel victory in our families, our town, our region, our nation, and beyond by God's grace.

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*