



# 2021 Weekly Devotions

Week of: August 23<sup>rd</sup> - 29<sup>th</sup>

Sermon: August 22<sup>nd</sup>





August 23

**John 13:35**

If I had to make a list of my favorite, most quoted, verses in all the Scripture, Philippians 1:6 would be at or near the top. I find the promise that Paul gives to the church to be one of the most reassuring and marvelous truths in all the Bible. It brings great hope and confidence that salvation will not be somehow forfeited or lost precisely because God is the One who is moving and working in our souls to complete what He began at our conversion.

While it is a marvelous truth that God is faithful to finish what He started, it is important to note that the statement that Paul makes assumes he makes about the church. How does the Apostle know that God started a work in the Philippians at all? I'm not sure if you have ever asked this question but it does bear mentioning. Is the Apostle assuming their salvation? If so, then his reason for confidence should be far less convincing than it would be otherwise!

In context, the passage makes far more sense as we read of the basis for Paul's statement to the church. His confidence in their perseverance is rooted in the fruit that he sees in their lives. They were partners with him in the Gospel and displayed great love and affection for him in his time of need. It was based on their evident commitment to the Lord and their unwavering support of Paul and his work in the Gospel that created the assurance that they were indeed believers.

Paul speaks of his love for the people in Philippi and he references their reciprocated love for him and our text for today reminds us that this love is not incidental to Paul's confidence in their salvation, in fact the Lord Jesus makes it quite clear that love for one another is the distinguishing mark of a true believer.

Notice how Jesus phrases His statement, "by this you will KNOW" (emphasis mine). Love for our brothers and sisters is not a good sign or a welcome piece of evidence that someone is a believer, love for our family in Christ is a piece of definitive proof of our conversion. In this case, the Apostle takes comfort in the conviction that God will finish the salvation He has begun in the hearts and lives of the Philippians and his comfort is based on real, meaningful evidence.

One point of application is warranted today. Folks, I meet many people who claim to be believers but have no love or affection for the people of God. They don't want to have anything to do with the church, they show little to no desire to serve others in the body of Christ, and they are content with living on their own as they look out for their own interests above all else. We must understand that this is not a mere personal decision, this is an unfortunate testimony of the heart of an individual who is not exhibiting a hallmark characteristic of Gospel conversion. By our love we will "know" that we are Christ's disciples, do you love Him and others? If so, there is good reason to take comfort in God's faithfulness to complete your salvation!

August 24

## Hebrews 12:2

Today's devotion will take another stab at explaining and expounding upon Paul's promise to the church in Philippi in Philippians 1:6. The text is striking when deeply considered as the Apostle tells us that "He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it." You will notice that the verse focuses, in its entirety, on the work of God for salvation in a believer's life. We could say it this way, the ground of Paul's assurance that believer's will ultimately be saved is solely (that's an important word) the saving power and faithfulness of God. Paul was sure that the Philippians would make it because He was confident that God would carry out His work of salvation in the lives of all those He chose before the foundation of the world.

Now, does this mean that we have no role to play in our own salvation? The answer is yes and no. Yes, we are to be faithful to follow the Lord as He has revealed His will in the Scriptures and through the testimony of the Spirit in our lives. God has ordained that the means of our salvation is personal faithfulness and submission to Him. Nevertheless, even our efforts which we are to yield to obedience to Him are sustained and even provided by Him such that we gain no credit whatsoever for our salvation. Stated succinctly, as we follow the Lord, we do so only with a heart that He gave us, eyes that He allows us to see through, a Word that He alone provides and an atonement that He alone provides. In this sense, God alone gains the glory for our salvation, and this makes sense considering passages like the one we are studying today.

You will notice that this text describes Christ as the "founder (some translations render the word "author") and perfecter of our faith." In this passage we see that both the very existence of a possibility of salvation and the sanctification that we experience is a product of Christ and Christ alone. Jesus is the "author" or "founder" of our faith. Simply stated, if there were not Jesus, there would be no Christianity. There simply is no other means of salvation save Christ! He deserves our praise as He alone is the sole reason for our salvation.

Jesus is not only the author of our faith, He is also the perfecter. This is what Paul means when he writes that God will be faithful to "complete" our salvation. When you and I are first converted, we are truly saved from the wrath of God, but we are nowhere near a finished product. There are great vestiges of sin still left in our lives and the journey of the Christian walk is largely one of eliminating those sinful habits and replacing them with righteousness in a process we call sanctification. Sanctification is not complete until we are taken from this planet, at which time we are immediately transferred into the presence of God in a state of glorification. This means that our entire life is one of being "under construction" and this process is the work of the perfecter of our faith... Jesus Christ. It is Christ's substitutionary work that makes possible our salvation at all and Christ's substitutionary work that clears the way for God to inhabit our souls and cleanse us from our sin through years of obedience to His power and revealed will.

Why does this matter? It matters because I am a very weak man! If it were up to me to perfect myself, I'd be sunk! Nevertheless, the responsibility to grow in salvation is overseen by a faithful, holy, all-powerful God who will not fail and who has promised goodness and ultimate triumph to me. This is great news, but it also means that God alone deserves the glory... which is exactly what the Apostle tells us in Philippians 1:6!

August 25

**1 Thessalonians 2:7-8**

As Paul expresses his love for the people in Philippi, one stated reason for his affection is rooted in their “partnership in the Gospel.” There are obviously many ways that the Philippians could have partnered with Paul in the Gospel. Certainly, they could have provided monetary support, or manpower or even seen many of their members raised up to be sent out to proclaim the Gospel like the Apostle. Regardless of the specifics of their partnership, Paul sees the church as an ally, but it is important to note that this partnership was two-sided.

Not only did the Philippians benefit Paul, but the Apostle also undoubtedly blessed the Philippians! This was a mutually beneficial and loving partnership. In fact, today’s text shows us the kind of love that Paul displayed towards the churches that he planted and/or ministered to on behalf of Christ. In our passage for today, we read of two components or characteristics of Paul’s ministry amongst the church.

First, they provided nourishment for the young believers. Paul employs a metaphor of a nursing mother to describe his tone and gentleness amongst the young believers in Thessalonica. He took care of these men and women by providing them truths from God’s Word and nourishing their souls in the process. This was done tenderly and with affection that was reminiscent of a young mother providing for the needs of her infant child. Paul loved these men and women and spent great amount of time making sure they had the spiritual food they needed to grow strong in the Lord.

Second, the Apostle partnered with the church by building relationships with them. The Bible says that he shared not only the Gospel but even his own self because of his love for the flock. Paul made disciples in the church by investing copious amounts of time with the flock. He nursed them along, allowed them to observe his life and gave of his resources in order to ensure that they were cared for and given every opportunity to mature as believers.

In this way, Paul was a true partner in the Gospel ministry, and he serves as a marvelous example to us of what it looks like to minister to others. Church family, have you anyone to nourish in the faith? Those of you who have walked with the Lord for years, are you pouring into someone else? Are you helping another brother or sister grow in their understanding of the Word?

Second, are you spending time with others such that you could honestly say that you have given yourself to them? Would other look at you and see a dedicated man or woman who is willing to go the extra mile, spend the extra time and invest in others to the point that your life becomes intertwined with the lives of those you are lovingly discipling? This is what true, Gospel partnership looks like and I pray it is commonplace in our midst!

August 26

**Romans 12:1-2**

Who does not want to know God's will? It is safe to say that everyone who claims to believe in God would give a resounding "absolutely" to the question. We would also most likely say that it is not always easy to discern what His will is for us or generally speaking. Yet, in pastor Joe's sermon this past Sunday, we read from Philippians, "...so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ" (Phil. 1:10). To approve, as it is used in this text, means to determine authenticity so as to know what is truly important so that we can establish right priorities. This is why Paul's prayer for the Philippians includes growing in knowledge and discernment so that their ability to discern rightly the things of God. This applies directly to our lives today as well.

Dear ones, as is always the case concerning Christian growth, it is not easy, and it does not come naturally. Sanctification, the process of being transformed into the likeness of Christ, is accomplished by the Holy Spirit but is also dependent on our efforts. Here me clearly, sanctification is a work of the Spirit and His grace; however, unlike justification, our works are directly linked to growth. When I say "works", I am referring to the spiritual disciplines that are necessary in a believer's life for spiritual growth and maturity. For example, if I don't read my Bible regularly or pray, or go to church, there is little reason for me to expect to grow in Christlikeness. If I never work at denying myself and bringing my fleshly desires under control, then I should not expect to sin less. If I don't take advantage of the means of grace that God has provided for my sanctification, then I will not be sanctified. How does this relate to Joe's sermon and my point to ponder today?

The text that was chosen for this devotion is a familiar one from the book of Romans. Chapter 12:1-2 says this, "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual (reasonable) service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." Do you not see it? If you want to prove (know) what is God's will and what is good and acceptable to God, you MUST discipline yourself to pursue Him and turn your back on the sinful things of this world. Why do so many people make this hard? This is not rocket science! If you want to know God, how He thinks, what is right and good in His eyes, you have to put down lesser, worldly things and strive to know Him.

Compare this absurdity to other areas of your life. If you want to lose weight but keep doing everything that causes you to gain but not lose weight, then what do you expect? If you want more money in your pocket but do nothing to either increase income or decrease spending, what do you expect? Then why do people think they can figure God out and "hear" from Him all the time when they are doing nothing to position themselves for growth in sanctification? You want to know the will of God and what He deems as good and acceptable? Stop letting this world conform you and instead let His Word, that you must read, transform you from the inside out.

August 27

### **1 Corinthians 8:1**

I find it interesting to note that Paul prays that the Philippian believers would grow in knowledge in light of what He wrote in 1 Corinthians 8:1 concerning knowledge. There he writes, "Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies." Many translations say, "Knowledge puffs up." The idea is that knowledge that is not guided by the love of God will be misguided and can lead to arrogance and pride. This is what he was dealing with in Corinth that prompted our passage for today. I certainly hope that your understanding of the full counsel of God's Word would bring you back to center and you would appreciate the value of biblical and godly knowledge.

The attribute that is contrasted with misguided knowledge is love. Paul said that love edifies. To edify is to build up. The point he is making is that for knowledge that leads to a right understanding or decision in a given situation should be demonstrated or carried out in love. The example that he is dealing with in Corinth relates to whether or not believers should eat meat that was formerly offered to an idol. The mature believer knows that there is no such thing as another true god so that which is offered to a meaningless concrete or wooden statue is still just a piece of meat. The idea is that eating it or not eating it is on one level unimportant. I know that the meat is good and is just meat that would be good to eat, satisfy my hunger, and could be good stewardship. Another person may not be able to get past that it was somehow connected to an idol and should be thrown away as somehow polluted or sinful.

The question that a mature believer must ask is, "What would love have me do in regard to my brother or sister?" Misguided and arrogant knowledge may lead a person to become judgmental and even cruel to the "weaker" person. Truly mature knowledge, coupled with godly love, would cause me to sacrifice for the good of my brother or sister because my desire would be to build up the other person – not get my own way because I may be right. Friends, surely you and I know that Paul's prayer for more knowledge in Philippians 1 is the knowledge that would lead to a right understanding of God and His ways for the sole purpose of walking and living more like Christ in this ever-darkening world to the praise and glory of God.

Allow me this opportunity to quickly address an issue that we face today as believers. This is not exactly the same thing as eating meat or not, but it is close enough. Dear ones, should we or should we not wear a mask? I would first of all say that I doubt seriously if any of us have enough real data to intelligently speak to the subject, but that doesn't really seem to matter to most people. Anyway, I want you to think about this in light of our text for today. Love edifies! Your decision to not wear a mask may keep another brother or sister from coming to church or Sunday School. Do you care? You may say that "I know" mask do no good and may even be harmful. Are you going to use your so-called knowledge to harm or help? Are you puffed up in your infinite knowledge of the pros and cons of mask wearing (sarcasm) or are you going to demonstrate an attitude of arrogance and pride and act as if your "rights" are more important to you than another person's soul? True knowledge of God will show itself in love that edifies not in knowledge that makes arrogant.

August 28

**Galatians 5:22-23**

The truth that God will finish in me what He started is a comfort and a promise that causes me to lean into God and His Word with great confidence and hope. As I worked through the text that pastor Joe preached on Sunday, I considered the impact of growing knowledge on my own personal life, and I was captivated. Paul writes that as a result of ever-increasing knowledge and love, not only will I be able to rightly discern what is excellent before God, but I will also be deemed as “pure and blameless” on the day of Christ when I am finally and completely glorified and rewarded as I stand before our great King Jesus. You see, genuine Christian knowledge demonstrates itself in love towards others and shows up in our behavior as pure and blameless. This fruit is produced by the righteousness of Christ in us and becomes the evidence of our salvation for His glory.

Note that the fruit of righteousness that Paul speaks of, “comes through Christ Jesus.” I believe what he means here is that it is a product of the union that the regenerate has with Christ. This fruit is a direct result of abiding in Christ. I am reminded of the beautiful passage found in John 15. It is written, “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:4-5). An illustration that helps here is a apple hanging on a tree. The apple does not need to strain to grow into a ripe delicious piece of fruit. All it needs to do is to hang on (abide in) to the tree. Everything that the apple needs to grow in is the tree. To pick the apple off the branch is to leave it useless and dead.

Friends, everything that we need to become overcoming, victorious followers of Christ is found in the Lord Himself. Our task is to do whatever it takes to simply hang onto Jesus. John calls it abiding in Christ. Now, let me be clear that to abide is to obey. As you grow in knowledge and learn to walk as He walked, you will absolutely grow in maturity and righteousness to the point where you will be pure and blameless when you stand before Him. Oh no, I am not saying you achieve this in your own strength. I am saying you will be pure and blameless because He promised to finish in you what He started which was your sanctification.

Let me close this devotion by reminding you of some of the “fruit” that the Holy Spirit produces in the lives of truly saved people – all of them! Galatians 5:22-23 list 9 characteristics of the redeemed and they are: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These are not suggestions or negotiables. It is true that some of them we be more evident in certain lives than others and in varying degrees. But, if a person says they are saved and none of this fruit is evident in their lives, there is no reason to believe they are saved. The Holy Spirit WILL produce these things in a child of God. As this fruit of righteousness grows in you and shows itself in your actions and behaviors, God is glorified, and you can know that you belong to Jesus, and should never doubt your salvation again.



August 29

**Isaiah 43:6-7; Ephesians 1:5-6,14**

The culmination of everything that happens in and through our lives is God's glory. We live to make much of Christ and as image bearers, to show the world images of God that glorify His great name. Our very salvation is for His glory and meant to bring Him praise. Paul said, "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Eph. 2:10). Matthew wrote, "Let your light so shine before mankind that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). The point that I want us to ponder today is that all of this information and truth that we have been giving you this week is supposed to end with God being praised and glorified because He shows Himself so faithful, true, and good in your life. As an ambassador for Christ (2 Cor. 5:20) you are to reflect and represent the King.

As I mentioned yesterday, the passage for Sunday ended with this phrase, "to the glory and praise of God." Again, everything Paul wrote about in relation to His love for them and their partnership in ministry, and his prayer for their spiritual growth was ultimately so that they would more effectively glorify and honor God. The passage I have chosen for today's devotion is from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Here he says that their very adoption into the family of God, by election, was meant to be for the praise of His glorious grace (Eph. 1:5-6). He concluded that portion of his letter by saying that the Holy Spirit was the seal and down payment of our inheritance in heaven "to the praise of His glory" (v.14). We are created to praise and honor our Creator. What a travesty when the creation is worshipped instead of the Creator. Cosmic treason indeed.

Oh, dear ones, the Bible is clear that we were created for His glory. Look at Isaiah 43:6-7 where it is written, "I will say to the north, give them up! And to the south, do not hold them back. Bring My sons from afar and My daughters from the ends of the earth, everyone who is called by My name, and whom I have created for My glory, whom I have formed, even whom I have made." I read some notes from a funeral service that John Piper preached for a little boy who only lived 10 minutes after he was born. Piper said, "God's designs for Owen were decided before he was born. He would exist for the glory of God. Ten minutes of that work would be on the earth. The rest will be in heaven. Who knows what was set in motion on earth by the birth and death and life of Owen?" I have a lump in my throat as I type this and great joy as I think of our little ones bringing glory to their God in heaven as they were created to do.

Beloved, are you living your life to the praise and glory of our God? Paul's prayers and those of our Savior were that you and I live our lives for that purpose. I am so saddened that so many have lost focus of why we exist. We are not here to save a temporary and dying nation. We are here to honor our God and Savior. He created us to do that, and I am not wasting my time for lesser things in this fallen world. My King deserves my allegiance, and I am far more interested and passionate about people kneeling before the cross of Christ than I am a flag. Just for the record, those two things are not equal and it's not even a close race.