

**Title:** What's the Greatest Testimony a Christian Can Have?

**Text:** Philippians 2:12-18

**Date:** March 24, 2019 at FBCW

**INTRO.** In 1964, US Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart was asked to describe his threshold for an obscenity in the case *Jacobellis vs Ohio*. Justice Stewart retorted, "An obscenity, an offense, can be hard to describe...however, I know it when I see it."

*"I know it when I see it..."*

**Background.** Paul had just described what a citizen of heaven looks like – we'll know it when we see it!

Phil 1:27, *Just one thing: as citizens of heaven, live your life worthy of the gospel of Christ.*

Despite persecution. Despite hardship. Despite your leader (Paul) being incarcerated for his own faith in Christ...Paul challenges the Philippians to:

- Live worthy of the Gospel (1:27).
  - Seek unity with our Christians (2:1-2).
  - Do not be selfish or conceited (2:3).
  - Consider the interests of others as more important than your own interests (2:4).
  - Cultivate the same attitude/mindset of Jesus (2:5).
- (Notice Jesus' descent...his humility...his death on the cross...)

Phil 2:8 is key → *"Jesus humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death – even to death on a cross..."*

- Jesus was willing to let his obedience take him to the very bottom rung in the ladder.
- Jesus came all the way down to the most despised death of all, a condemned criminal on the accursed cross.

According to Paul: the humility and obedience demonstrated by Jesus is our supreme example/motivation to also live our lives with humility and obedience...

**Theme of Philippians:** Sometimes following Christ is a pleasure, other times following Christ is painful. But when we follow Christ, it's always worth it!

**Big Idea.** What's the Greatest Testimony a Christian Can Have? The greatest testimony a Christian can have is that he or she obeyed God with their life!

- Fundamentally, Christianity is a matter of obedience.
- Discipleship according to Jesus, "Follow me..."
- There's a reason Christ's name is: Master...King...Lord...Messiah...God

Notice how Paul begins speaking to his audience in Phil 2:12, “Therefore my –”

- Dear friends (CSB) (NIV)
- Beloved (KJV) (NKJV)

In other words – this issue of “personal humility/behavior, expected obedience” – this is a church conversation. A family conversation. This is insider language. This is a Christian leader speaking to His Christian Church Family.

FACT: problem in the church today – we expect too much from the world, and we expect too little from ourselves (the church).

1 Cor 2:14, *But the person without the Spirit does not receive what comes from God’s Spirit, because it is foolishness to him; he’s not able to understand it since it is evaluated spiritually.*

- Lost people are supposed to act lost!
- The issue for Paul – is when saved people act lost (people who claim to be saved).

**Q:** Well Pastor Jeremy, how can you know the difference?

**A:** It boils down to the issue of obedience to God. (We should know it when we see it!)

**First, to have the testimony of obedience, the Christian must do his/her part (2:12).** The subject Paul is addressing here is the personal behavior of the Philippian Christians.

“*Just as you have always obeyed...*” the word obey means =

- To hear under authority
- To listen attentively
- To heed, to conform
- To hearken unto obedience

Note: Listening, by virtue of definition is tied to obedience! Listening saints are obedient saints.

Deut 6:4-6, *Listen, Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. These words I am giving you are to be in your heart...*

(ILLUS: Ask any parent/teacher/coach → surest evidence someone is listening? They obey!)

Note, they obeyed when Paul was present.

Note, now they are obeying while Paul has been absent.

- Do it even more!
- This is Spirit-filled Christianity! Want to > Have to.
- They’d moved from needing Paul’s direct inspiration to drawing their inspiration from Christ!

“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling...”

Work out = to work full...to accomplish...to toil...labor...minister.

Note, it doesn't say work for your salvation!

- Salvation is a gift of grace, not of works (Eph 2:8)

Note, in light of being a recipient of salvation, I need to ask myself these questions:

- Am I saved? (2 Cor 13:5)
- Am I currently living like a saved person?
- What would a devout Christian be doing right now in this situation or in this season?

Note, I'm to work out my salvation with *fear* and *trembling*!

- Fear: alarm, fright, exceeding fear
- Trembling: to quake with fear

Perhaps it means this → in light of God's great gift of salvation...an eternal gift that I'd never deserve on my own...how am I handling this gift? How am I presently living in light of this gift? (ILLUS: *God has given you His most costly treasure – do we treat it with honor/respect/sobriety?*)

Very personal – I think at times “fear and trembling” means we consider very seriously → our personal doubts vs the assurance of Christ.

Doubts do NOT mean I'm unsaved.

Doubts may be evidence that we want to take our salvation seriously/carefully.

(Prov 1:7... Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom).

I am suspicious of people that say, “I'm saved...been saved...never doubted...”

- Really...never doubted? Come on!

Why do we doubt at times?

- Our nature is that we are prone to forgetfulness. We forget God's grace often!
- If you were saved at a young age...long ago...it can be hard to remember the precise moment.
- We doubt if we inappropriately compare our story to others.
- I think we doubt because of spiritual warfare.
  - Satan cannot steal my salvation.
  - But Satan will try to steal my joy/peace...Satan wants me worried.

This is precisely why the Bible calls on us to “remember” so often.

- Remember the Lord...Remember His Word...Remember His mighty Hand in the past.
- All through the OT we see the theme of remembering:
  - Abraham...

- Moses...out of Egypt...
- Red Sea...manna...water...
- Jericho...Canaan...God crushed our enemies for us.

Note, fear and trembling:

- Am I saved (yes) Who saved me? (God) For what purpose? (His glory)
- Right now, what would “maximum glory” look like for God? Am I doing that?
- Fear and trembling = humility. I hope I’m living right, trusting in Christ, walking by faith and not by sight.

**Second, to have the testimony of obedience, we can trust God to do His part (2:13).**

Although the believer is personally responsible to work/obey (2:12), it is actually God Himself in the believer that produces the good works and spiritual fruit in the believer’s life.

God is working in you!

- To will: God’s choice, God’s prerogative.
- To work: God’s supply, God’s energy.

In other words, we can count on God...IF we follow Him and obey Him...

- 1) He will plant our lives in the right location (His will).
- 2) He will provide water/light/resources (His work).

FACT: if we obey God’s Will...we will never lack God’s Supply.

I am NOT saying that the Christian life is without struggle – but here’s a serious question – how much of our struggle might be attributed to the fact we are NOT in God’s will?

ILLUS: My Dad taught me this, “*When God is in something, it flows...*”

- Doesn’t have to be forced, coerced, manipulated, pushed...no! God just lets it flow.

John 15:4-5 and my 2019 word → abide/remain.

John 15:4-5, “*Remain in me, and I in you. Just as the branch cannot produce fruit unless it remains on the vine, neither can you produce fruit unless you remain in me...*”

Both of these are equally true:

FACT: we must work hard to live a responsible Christian life.

FACT: we can do nothing significant without God’s grace/presence in our life.

Lesson. If we let Him, God will give us the desire and the power to do what pleases Him.

Lesson. The secret to an obedient life is to submit to God’s control and let Him work.

**Third, an obedient testimony is characterized by Christlikeness (a godly attitude) (2:14-16).**

Paul will now elaborate on what “working out” this salvation might look like. As you seek God’s will, and as you trust God’s freedom to perform His will in your life.

Notice the flow of 2:14-16.

“Don’t do this...do this...you’ll look like this...and here’s how you do it...”

“No...Yes...Why...How!”

Don’t do this: Do not grumble...Do not be argumentative...

Do this: You’ll be blameless and pure...

It will look like this: You’ll shine like stars in a crooked, perverted world.

Here’s how: You achieve this by holding firmly to the word of life!

### **Do NOT**

Grumble = murmuring, grudging (passive aggressive) – “I might do it, but I’ll do it with a poor attitude.”

Arguing = debating, combative (overly aggressive) – “I probably won’t do it, because I think I’m smarter than you; my way is superior.” (ILLUS: *Video of Lion attacking antelope*)

### **Instead, do this:**

Now notice 2:15 – if you don’t grumble, argue, complain, question – you will stand out as true children of God in this wicked and perverse generation!

Be blameless: faultless, beyond reproach.

Be pure: state of innocence; unmixed; harmless because it’s untainted by sin.

### **It will look like this:**

You will be children of God.

You will shine like stars in the world.

- Numbers: Some think this is reminiscent of the Israelites following the cloud by day and the fire by night!
- Dan 12:3, *Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.*

FACT: this present generation is crooked and perverse!

Isaiah 5:20, *Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!*

BUT..... 2 Cor 6:17 is still in the Bible! ..... and Israel was instructed to NOT be like the other nations!

Matt 5:16, *You are the light of the world...shine before others...so that they’ll see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*

### **Here’s how we live like this:**

Hold firmly to the word of life.

- This means to believe God’s Word and to follow it.

- Hold firmly = Hold on to...hold out...  
(Idea that when others let go, you still hang on)

We must believe God's word...obey God's word...hang on to God's word...and offer it as the truth of salvation to others searching for something to grab hold of.

**Fourth, an obedient testimony is always enhanced when we live with eternity in mind (2:16-18).** Notice how Paul concludes this section of Scripture.

When the Philippians obey God and serve Him, Paul concludes this:

- Jesus is one day coming back (v 16).
- When Christ returns, it will all be worth it (v 16).

2:17, Paul compares his life being poured out (serving, sacrificing, possible martyrdom) as a picture of OT sacrificial offering.

- They'd pour out the blood of an animal.
- They'd pour out wine or grain or food.

Paul says, "*My life is being poured out (offered up) for you!*" → and I am glad!

You can only live and minister with this type of selfless attitude if you believe:

- 1) Jesus Christ is worth everything!
- 2) Jesus Christ is coming again to settle the score.
- 3) What we do for Christ UNTIL He comes again matters!

Some days are a pleasure...some days are painful...but in Christ, every act of obedience is worth it!

**Big Idea.** The greatest testimony a Christian can have is obedience!

- Your testimony might be saving grace... (What did God save you from?)
- Your testimony might be keeping grace...(What did God keep you from?)

It does not matter where you are from!

What matter is this → how are you living right now? Where are you going?

**Question: Do I obey God with my life?**

- Majority of the time? Fraction of the time? Anytime?
- What is my pattern?
- Do I have the confidence of those around me: "*Jeremy will obey God...*"?

ILLUS: Last Sunday I was so moved at the Jasper Campus (God, Eddie, Jeremy, the people, etc.) As Jeremy Law led us in singing, "Follow You Anywhere..." → I wept! How did I get here? Is it true of me, God?

*You are the refuge I run to  
 You are the fire that leads me through the night  
 I'll follow You anywhere  
 There's a million reasons to trust You  
 Nothing to fear for You are by my side  
 I'll follow You anywhere  
 All I want is You, Jesus, All I want is You*

**Question: Do I realize salvation means → I'm called to obey God? When I get saved, I give up my rights. I give up my preferences.**

- Fear and trembling = God owns me!
- God is the Potter...I am the clay!

Just feel, hear, and imagine those fishermen from Galilee. Jesus says, "Follow me..."

Follow Me = 1) Jesus is going somewhere. 2) Jesus is taking me somewhere with Him!

Oh wherever you lead me  
 Whatever it costs me  
 All I want is You  
 Jesus all I want is You  
 There's a million reasons to trust You!

Or how about this one, from long ago?

Take up my cross and follow Me  
 I heard my Master say;  
 I gave My life to ransom thee,  
 Surrender your all today.  
 Wherever He leads, I'll go.  
 Wherever He leads, I'll go.  
 I'll follow my Christ who loves me so  
 Wherever He leads, I'll go.

**CONCL:** Paul is basically asking the Philippians:

"Do you believe Christ is worth it?"

"Will you continue to serve Him, even if the results are not immediate and preferable?"

"Will you serve God even if you have to serve Him alone?"

"Will you keep holding fast and fighting until your Father returns?"

End with the video clip.

