

Philippians XVIII – Sacrificial Lives (Phil 2:16b-18)

Introduction – The idea that the Old Testament sacrifices have nothing to do with the worship of God's people today is false. The sacrifices have not been abrogated, but fulfilled in Jesus Christ (Matt 5:17), our perfect and one-time sacrifice. This fulfillment not only has taken place in Christ for us, but also through the work of Christ in us (1 Pet 2:5). The language of sacrifice has not gone away at all in the New Testament; it describes for us the Christian life (Rom 12:1). We are priests in Christ (Rev 1:6, 5:9-10) and we sacrifice in Christ (Heb 13:5). The following verses in Philippians require us to understand something of the Old Testament shadows of sacrifice so that, in Christ, we might understand how we live in their fulfillment.

The Text – “....so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain. Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me.”

Looking Forward to a Holy Boasting (v16) – Paul's personal goal is made clear in this passage. He hopes to rejoice over his running and laboring in the day of Christ because of the presentation of the church at Philippi in that day. The word is 'boasting', same as is used in Gal 6:14. This holy boasting is in the work of God's grace through Paul to the work that he was called to do (Rom 15:18, 1 Cor 15:10). This boasting is good and proper and right, for it is recognizing God's exhaustive sovereignty and work of grace.

Running and Laboring – Paul is not interested in short-term successes, and so he employs these terms. He sees his ministry as one who is running a marathon, and we are exhorted to see it as well (Heb 12:1-2). The word translated 'labored' really means 'to labor to exhaustion'. Peter uses this term, having thrown his fishing nets all night in vain (Luke 5:5). The running or the laboring is in vain if, at the end of the race or the work, the prize is not won or the work is not completed. Paul uses this imagery in 1 Thess 3:5 describing the possibility of losing those who had fallen away.

Drink Offering (v17) – Paul assumes that the Philippians (Gentiles) would understand and be able to apply the ideas of the Jewish sacrificial system (Num 15:1-10). He is not concerned if his life is to end, as long as it is a drink offering poured out as the capstone upon the sacrifice of the Philippians, demonstrated in their faithfulness, their “*holding fast the word of life*.” If the sacrifice offered is pleasing to God, then the drink offering will be a pleasing as well.

Sacrifice and Service of Your Faith – In this metaphor, the primary sacrifice is that of the Philippians, and in essence they are Paul's sacrifice before God (he uses the same metaphor in Rom 15:16 where the gospel, the Word of God, is the instrument of the minister to prepare the offering). The gospel brings forth faith by the work of the Holy Spirit. That Christ-like faith produces Christ-like living, following the example of Jesus (2:5-11) in death and in resurrection, in humiliation and exaltation. They are not only the sacrifice of Paul to God. They are his crown and joy and boasting (Phil 4:1, 1 Thess 2:19f).

Rejoice With You; Rejoice With Me (vv17-18) – *Sugchairo* is a verb that cannot be done by an individual, any more than you can congratulate all by yourself. This rejoicing is not unlike what a father and daughter would do on the day he walks her down the aisle and gives her away, fulfilling his faithful jealousy until that day (2 Cor 11:1-2). Faithful perseverance to the end is what the apostle longs for and preaches – “*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth*” – 3 John 4. The greatest of all possible joys is to know that your labors have been used to bring people to real salvation all the way to the end.

The Joy of Salvation in Community – No one would be satisfied to go to heaven alone. God has created us in such a way that joy is not fulfilled unless it is shared. This is Trinitarian. This is life in Christ and in His body. In his great desire to share this joy, Paul would gladly toss aside his own salvation if he could somehow bring it to his Jewish brothers (Rom 9:3, 10:1). To the Philippians, his sacrificial service to them is worth everything if in the day of Christ they rejoice together.

The Toil of the Gospel – Gospel-labor by the minister of the gospel and by the congregation at large is toilsome work. We must learn what it means to press on as in a battle or a race. We must expect strenuous and exhausting work. We must recognize those who labor-to-exhaustion and esteem them highly (1 Thess 5:12-13, 1 Tim 5:17). When done faithfully, the calling of the minister is not an easy *two-hour a week job with no heavy lifting* (2 Cor 11:28-29). But this spills over into all of our ministering –

The Goal of Our Labors – Not everyone is called to be a pastor/elder. But as friends, we are called to encourage one another day by day, pressing one another to enduring faithfulness. What is the goal of your friendships with brothers and sisters in Christ? As parents, we remember that Paul labors over his congregation as a father or as a nursing mother, and so he presupposes an understanding of parents' roles over their children. The goal is not polite, well-mannered, rich or famous children (Prov 19:13, 17:25, 21). The goal is faithfulness to Christ. The goal is that we would *sugchairo* in that final day.