Fear and Trembling

Dear Culture Contrarians:

Most Bible readers assume that Paul’s imperative “work out your own salvation” (Phil 2:12) refers to our relationship to God. The term “work out” can also simply refer to “working, doing, or practicing” certain behaviors. The context, however, takes this imperative to our government not to our God.

Paul is concerned that his current Roman imprisonment could result in his death (which is perfectly fine with him) for to be with Christ is far better. But with their prayers and the provision of the Spirit, it is likely that he will be released. Older translations translated Philippians 1:19 with “salvation”; most modern translations use the term “deliverance.” In Greek salvation/deliverance are the same; spiritual salvation is a specific kind of deliverance. (Phil. 1:19-26)

Suffering for Christ is actually suffering with Christ. He set the standard for obedience and humility and such amazing behavior will make Him the exalted King of kings and Lord of lords. (Phil. 1:27-2:10)

We should obey the governing authorities, because God is at work in the whole process of government operations. He works it all according to His good pleasure. That includes Paul’s imprisonment and our current president. As Paul is working out his own deliverance from governmental trouble, so we should be working out our own deliverance. And “fear and trembling” go a long way to resolving problems with our governing authorities. (Phil. 2:12-13)

Stop complaining! Stand blameless and harmless as God’s children in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. Yes, that describes our world. But we are lights in the darkness as we wait for the return of our true King. (Phil. 2:14-16)

As referenced earlier in the passage, Paul repeats his view of death. If he dies, it is not a problem. He is ready to go. (Phil. 2:17-18)

Fear and tremble before our God? No, we run boldly into the Holy of Holies and shout “Daddy!”. Before the government, however, fear and trembling may be appropriate.

My love to you all,