

WORK OUT YOUR SALVATION

Philippians 2:12-13

INTRODUCTION

One of the things that John MacArthur shared during the Shepherd's Conference was acknowledging what is a sad dynamic in much of Christianity in the 20th century - that was the separation of theology from the pulpit.

When he was in his thirties, he was asked to go to the Chicago Statement on Inerrancy. Out of the 100 or so men who attended, he was one of only two pastors. He drew the contrast with the authors of the Westminster Confession, 121 men in all, and all were pastors.

So it is true, sadly, that there is a separation of theology from the pulpit and pastors do not think of themselves as theologians. And it is also an equal disheartening reality that there is a separation of theology from worship music and those who lead that music.

We just sang *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*, written by Martin Luther, who was a pastor, and expositor, and certainly a theologian.

2017 will mark the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther nailing his 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517. The European Biblical Training Center anniversary celebration is planned in Wittenberg next year.

There are many Fundamental Principles of the Reformation:
Sola Deo Gloria, *Sola Scriptura*, Church of Believers,
Priesthood of All Believers, Sanctity of All Callings

But the battle cry issue of the Reformation is *Sola Gratia* or
Sola Fide

Salvation by Faith Alone.

This is the Shibboleth, the dividing line, between biblical Christianity and every false belief system in the world.

Salvation by Faith Alone is at the **Heart of the Gospel**.

Now the big question for many is this:
Does this mean → Let go and let God?

READ Phil 2:12-13

Proposition:

- I. Man at Work**
- II. God at Work**

So That: We will walk in the footsteps of our Lord and Savior, the self-denying, self-submitting, and self-sacrificing footsteps of the Man Jesus Christ.

I. Man at Work **Phil 2:12**

Point – Human Responsibility

Answer to the big question → Let go and let God?

NO!! We are saved by faith alone but the faith that saves is not alone.

- Faith that works
- It is a working faith
- The faith that saves is a faith that works

Proof – “¹²**So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling;**”

“**So then**” – therefore; what took place before that word was the reason → what takes place after the word is the result

Paul started section, **1:27-2:18**, with the exhortation, “Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”

You will remember that in **2:5** he says “Have this mind in yourselves, which was also in Christ Jesus”

And then Paul illustrates this with the humiliation of the Son in the Incarnation (Denial of Self, Submission ..., Sacrifice ...)

“**my beloved**” – Paul loves the Philippian church – 4:1.
→ You whom Christ loves, I also love.

- This term is only used in Scripture of believers.
- So the exhortation that follows is only for believers.
- It is NOT given to one outside the forgiveness of Jesus Christ.

“**just as you have always obeyed**” – Connects to **Phil 2:8b** – “He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

The very notion of obedience grates on modern sensibilities. This idea does not react well with the pagan, unregenerate heart of mind today.

Illustration – At the Shepherd’s conference, the Q&A session included John MacArthur, Al Mohler and Ligon Duncan - all men who are shepherds, expositors and presidents of solid seminaries. These men were talking about the whole dynamic of the separation of theology from the pulpit and the twisting of the Truth in the church today.

→ MacArthur shared that he wrote a book he entitled *The Dad Who Leads*. When he presented that title to the Christian publisher, it was rejected based on two counts ... gender and authority. Al Mohler replied, “so they want *The Parent Who Suggests*”.

That is the reality. It is not just outside the church - it is in the church as well.

Back to the text:

- 1) Paul is not saying the Philippians have reached a point of perfectionism.
- 2) Paul is not merely violating the good wisdom, “Never say ‘never’ or ‘always’ and always remember this.” 😊

He is saying, obedience is characteristic of these mature believers.

“not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence” – connects with **1:27** – “Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; so that whether I come and see you or remain absent”

They must be good Gospel citizens independent of whether he is there or not.

Illustration – I remember walking into Zachary’s 5th grade classroom in DE when the teacher had left the room for some reason. Zach was sitting in his desk but there was total pandemonium in the class. Kids were running around, being loud, playing. As I left, the Headmaster Jeff Bergey was coming down the hallway to get the class under control.

→ when the cat is away the mouse will play

App – In the same way, you are to be living as gospel citizens all the time. What does your life look like in private compared to Sunday mornings? If there is disparity in what we look like when we are around people and when we are not, there is a problem. We are a work in process, of course. But there can not be a massive chasm between the two.

“work out your salvation” – κατεργάζομαι – κατα + ἐνεργέω

- This is not a suggestion from a parent
- This is a command from our Father

James 1:3 – “knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.”

Eph 6:13 – “Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.”

- both these underlined words are translated in the original language from the same word that is translated as “**work out**”

Illustration – There was a Greek geographer, philosopher, and historian named **Strabo** who lived at the time of Christ. He used this word to describe miners “working out” the mines Rome owned in Spain. The Romans were extracting all the richness and value in the mining of the silver from within.

If someone was to look at this phrase by itself, without an understanding from the rest of Scripture, it sounds like Paul is contradicting himself.

Both theology and grammar will help us understand this.

Theology: There are four epics of Salvation:

Election → Justification → Sanctification → Glorification

What is Paul talking about here?

Election - The Bible is clear - Eph 1:3-5 - that election occurred before time began. So, if you were there before time began, you might want to apply this. But in reality, we know Paul is not talking about election.

Look at the context from 1:27 to this point.

Is Paul telling us how somebody is converted? No.

Is he telling us how someone is justified? No.

Is he telling us how you are accepted with God? No.

He is telling us how to live as gospel citizens.

When God saves us

→ He accepts us, adopts us, and changes us.

He changes us positionally and practically.

Paul is not talking about how we are accepted by God.
He is not talking about how we are adopted by God.
He is not talking about how we are changed positionally by God at the point of our Justification
Paul is talking about how we are changed practically by God in the process of Sanctification.

→ He's talking about how Christians become more mature.

He's talking about how you show the fruits of God's saving work in yourself in the way you pursue godliness.

He's talking about how work out your sanctification by actively pursuing holiness and godliness in the your life.

Grammar: – Paul is using the language in the 'present imperative' → keep working out your salvation

Paul does not say, “Work for your salvation.” He does not say, “work towards your salvation,” “work at your salvation,” or “work up your salvation.” He says, “work out your salvation”

→ No one can work out his salvation unless God has already worked it in.

Eph 2:9-10 – “by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; ⁹not as a result of works, that no one should boast. ¹⁰For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

William Hendriksen – talking about working out salvation, he describes it this way:

“thoroughly digest it and apply it to day-by-day living.”

He continues, “It is one thing to shout, ‘Do all to the glory of God’ but it is quite a different thing to carry this out in practice.

“It is one thing to display a beautiful plague saying, “Christ is the Head of this home,” but it is something else again actually to recognize him as Head by submitting every important question to him in prayer and by obeying his every command.”

He continues, “It is one thing to assert very piously, ‘God’s sovereignty is the ultimate principle for faith and practice,” but it is far more difficult to submit trustfully to this sovereign will when a dear one is growing gradually weaker and finally dies.”

“**with fear and trembling**” – this phrase is so important, it precedes the command it modifies

→ literally translated – “with fear and trembling, your salvation work out”

God is not telling you he wants you to be depressed and neurotic and jittery.

“**fear**” – **Mic 6:9** – “The voice of the LORD will call to the city-- And it is sound wisdom to fear Your name:”

- He is a fearful God
- We know we are not to fear anything in this world - not man, not death, not loss of job.....we are to fear God only.

Purpose! → **Exod 20:20** – “And Moses said to the people, ‘Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin.”

For His glory and for your joy, peace and contentment, God wants you not to sin!

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, writes in The Life of Joy – “A man who knows his own heart is a man who cannot be light and carefree and flippant. He knows that in his flesh there dwells no good thing. The Christian is one who works out his own salvation with fear and trembling; fear lest he should fail or falter, lest he should not discern the subtlety of the world, the power of sin and his own weakness, and the holiness of God. So he walks with gravity lest he should be unworthy of this great salvation.”

This is Paul’s Philippian version of Put Off and Put On

Put off the vices of the old man

Put on the virtues of the new man

Put Off:

The work of God where the Holy Spirit applies the Word of God to the regenerate heart and mind to transform you from glory to glory.

Col 3:5 – “Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.”

Richard Baxter – “Kill sin or it will kill you; don’t spare it, for it won’t spare you; it is your murderer, and the murderer of the world: Kill it before it kills you.”

Application – To put something to death, sometimes you have to cut off its lifelines of supply. That might mean there are certain places you stop going, certain things you stop watching, certain things you stop listening to. Maybe certain people you stop hanging out with.

This is all-out war in which we are to be utterly merciless towards our sins. We are going to work out our salvation by putting them to death; we are going to kill them.

Holiness is a titanic struggle between myself and sin, an absolute fight to the death. The killing never ends.

Illustration – Sin is like those **trick birthday candles**. You blow them out, laugh, and think it’s over. You’ve made your wish, but the next moment the candle rekindles itself again.

Application – In the same way, sin is always rekindling itself and you are always blowing out its flames. There is no cease-fire; no truce; no surrender; no amnesty – ever!

Put On:

Already - **Col 3:10, 12** – “and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him ...

Point – Regeneration; born again. Your old filthy clothes are removed and you have beautiful new clothes.

- New heart, new inner man, new nature, new creation, new song

Not yet - **Col 3:12** - ¹²put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience;”

2 Cor 4:16 – “we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.”

II. God at Work

Phil 2:13

Point – **John Murray** – “*God works and we also work ... All working out of salvation on our part is the effect of God’s working in us ... The more persistently active we are in working, the more persuaded we may be that all the energizing grace and power is of God.*”

Proof – “¹³**for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.**”

“**for**” – remember! That is the result

→ Reason!! Because God is at work in you.

“**it is God who is at work in you**” – ἐνεργέω – that is the present tense

→ God is at work *in you now* to change you
→ keeps on working (sanctification)

1:6 – “*For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.*”

Paul uses the exact same term he uses elsewhere to describe His work of raising Jesus Christ from the dead.

Eph 1:18-20 – “*I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,¹⁹ and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. *These are* in accordance with the working of the strength of His might²⁰ which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly *places,*”*

This same power is at work in every ordinary Christian.

- God is keeping you.
- God is sanctifying you.
- And God is remaking you and renewing you day by day.

Our outward man is perishing as we grow older and slower and weaker, God is renewing our inward man day by day. He won't let go of you. He is transforming and remaking you.

So what work is God doing in us?

“**both to will and to work**”

- It is not behavior modification.
- God changes us from the inside out.
- God is demanding Truth and integrity.

Illustration - Remember what Christ said - if you look on a woman with lust, you have committed adultery. If you say to your brother, “You fool!”, you have committed murder because God is looking for truth from the inside out.

In the same way, in Augustine’s great prayer when he said “Lord command what Thou will and grant what Thou commands”

The Canons of Dort III and IV, articles 11 and 12 – *“He infuses new qualities into the will, making the dead will alive, the evil one good, the unwilling one willing, and the stubborn one compliant; He activates and strengthens the will so that, like a good tree, it may be enabled to produce the fruits of good deeds.”*

“for His good pleasure” – Eph 1:5, 9

I love it. Remember the very last phrase of the magnificent kenosis passage, the Incarnation and Exaltation?

2:11b – “to the glory of God the Father”

CONCLUSION

Illustration– The toaster cannot produce toast unless it is “connected,” so that its wire is heated by the electricity from the electric power house.

Illustration – The electric iron is useless unless the plug of the iron has been pushed into the wall outlet.

Illustration– There will be no light in the room at night unless electricity flows through the tungsten wire within the light-bulb, each end of this wire being in contact with wires coming from the source of electric energy.

Illustration – The garden-rose cannot gladden human hearts with its beauty and fragrance unless it derives its strength from the sun.

Illustration – Best of all, “As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in me” (John 15:4).

Application – The Sovereignty of God in our salvation and sanctification is NOT a divine permission slip to be lazy. The Sovereignty of God in our salvation and sanctification is our reason to hope!