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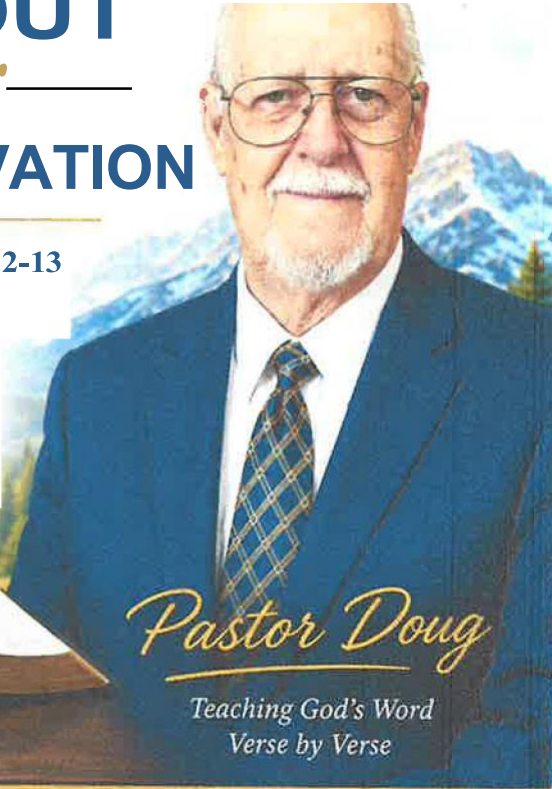


WORKOUT *Your* OWN SALVATION

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13

*"Therefore, my beloved, as you have
always obeyed, so now, not only as in
my presence but much more in my
absence, work out your own salvation
with fear and trembling. For it is God
who works in you, both to will and to
work for his good pleasure."*

-Philippians 2:12-13 (ESV)



Pastor Doug

Teaching God's Word
Verse by Verse



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Work Out Your Own Salvation
An Understanding of Philippians 2:12-13
Philippians 2:12-13 (ESV)
Dr. H. Douglas Peirce

"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."

Few statements in the New Testament are more easily misunderstood than Paul's command to "work out your own salvation." Taken by itself, the phrase might appear to suggest that salvation is something human beings achieve through effort, obedience, religious works, or personal merit.

That interpretation, however, would contradict both the immediate context of Philippians and the broader teaching of the New Testament. Paul does not tell the Philippians to **work for** their salvation. He tells people who are already believers to **work out** the salvation God has already given them.

From a Christian understanding of Scripture, Philippians 2:12-13 provides a beautiful picture of the relationship between **salvation by grace, Christian obedience, sanctification, and the continuing work of God in the believer.**

1. Salvation Is the Work of God, Not the Achievement of Man

Any interpretation of Philippians 2:12 must begin with the biblical doctrine of salvation by grace.

Paul writes in Ephesians 2:8-9:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

Human works cannot purchase salvation. Good behavior cannot earn forgiveness. Baptism does not regenerate the sinner. Church membership does not save. Religious ceremonies cannot produce eternal life.

Salvation rests entirely upon the person and finished work of Jesus Christ.

Christ lived the righteous life we could not live, died as the substitutionary sacrifice for sinners, and rose bodily from the grave. The sinner receives salvation through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul therefore cannot mean in Philippians 2 that Christians must perform enough good works to obtain salvation. Such an interpretation would contradict Paul's own gospel.

There is an enormous difference between:

working FOR salvation

and

working OUT salvation.

We do not work **for** salvation because Christ has accomplished the work necessary for our salvation.

We work **out** our salvation because God has already begun His saving work within us.

2. Paul Is Speaking to People Who Are Already Saved

Notice how Paul addresses his readers:

"Therefore, my beloved..."

These are not unbelievers attempting to become Christians. They are brothers and sisters in Christ.

Earlier Paul calls them "saints in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:1). He speaks of their "partnership in the gospel" (1:5) and expresses confidence that:

"he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."

- Philippians 1:6

God had already **begun** the work.

Now believers are commanded to live out the implications of that work.

Therefore, Philippians 2:12 is fundamentally a passage about **Christlike living and sanctification**, not about earning justification.

3. "Work Out" Means to Bring Something to Its Proper Result

Paul does not say, "Work **for** your salvation."

He says:

"Work out your own salvation..."

The Greek verb translated "work out" is *katergazomai*. It carries the idea of accomplishing, producing, carrying something through, or bringing something to its intended result.

The salvation God places within the believer is to become increasingly visible in the believer's life.

Salvation has consequences.

If Christ has changed the heart, that transformation should increasingly affect our:

- attitudes,
- speech,
- relationships,
- priorities,
- choices, conduct,
- service,
- obedience,
- and character.

We might put Paul's command this way:

Allow the salvation God has placed within you to increasingly show itself through you.

The Christian life is not merely possessing eternal life. It is living as someone who possesses eternal life.

4. Salvation Has a Past, Present, and Future Dimension

Understanding the New Testament's use of the word "salvation" is helpful here.

The Bible sometimes describes salvation as something that **has happened**.

We have been justified.

Romans 5:1 says:

"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

This is our **justification**.

The Bible also describes salvation as something presently being worked out in our lives.

We are being transformed into greater conformity to Christ.

This is **sanctification**.

Finally, salvation has a future dimension. One day the believer will be completely delivered from the presence of sin and made like Christ.

This is **glorification**.

Therefore, we may summarize salvation this way:

Justification - saved from sin's penalty.

Sanctification - being saved from sin's power.

Glorification - someday saved from sin's presence.

Philippians 2:12 particularly emphasizes the present outworking of God's salvation in the Christian life.

5. "Your Own Salvation" Does Not Mean We Save Ourselves

The word "your" is important, but it should not be misunderstood.

Paul is emphasizing personal responsibility.

No Christian can live another Christian's life.

A pastor cannot obey God for his congregation.

Parents cannot believe for their children.

A husband cannot grow spiritually for his wife.

A wife cannot grow spiritually for her husband.

Each believer has a personal responsibility before God.

Christians have historically emphasized what is sometimes called **soul competency** or individual responsibility before God. Every person must personally respond to God, and every believer is personally accountable to God.

Therefore, "your own salvation" does not mean **save yourself**.

It means:

Take seriously your personal responsibility to live consistently with the salvation God has given you.

6. "With Fear and Trembling" Does Not Mean Fear That God Will Take Salvation Away

Paul continues:

"with fear and trembling."

Does this mean Christians should constantly fear losing their salvation?

From a Christian understanding of the perseverance or security of the believer, the answer is no.

Jesus said concerning His sheep:

"I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand."

-John 10:28

The "fear and trembling" of Philippians 2 therefore should not be understood as terror that a Christian might suddenly lose eternal life.

Rather, it describes **reverence, humility, seriousness, and awe before God.**

The Christian life is not casual business.

We stand before a holy God.

We have been purchased by the blood of Christ.

We belong to Him.

We therefore approach Christian obedience seriously-not because we *pre*afraid Christ will abandon us, but because we understand the majesty of the One whom we serve.

7. Verse 13 Explains Verse 12

The key to understanding verse 12 is verse 13.

Paul writes:

"for it is God who works in you..."

The word **"for"** connects the two statements.

You work out because God works in.

That is the heart of the passage.

Christian sanctification involves genuine human responsibility, but it is never independent human effort.

God Himself is at work within the believer.

The Christian does not say:

"God does everything, so I do nothing."

Neither does the Christian say:

"Everything depends upon me."

Instead, Scripture teaches a remarkable partnership:

God works within us, and therefore we actively obey Him.

Our obedience is real.

Our effort is real.

Our choices matter.

Our discipline matters.

Yet beneath all of it is the gracious activity of God.

8. God Works in Both Our Desires and Our Actions

Paul becomes even more specific:

"for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."

Notice the two areas of God's activity.

God works in us "to will."

God changes our desires.

Before conversion, the natural person does not seek God's glory. But through regeneration and the indwelling Holy Spirit, God begins changing what we love, desire, and pursue.

The growing Christian begins wanting what God wants.

We begin desiring holiness.

We begin grieving over sin.

We begin loving Scripture.

We begin wanting to serve others.

We begin wanting-Christ to be honored through our lives.

Even the desire to obey God is evidence of God's gracious activity within us.

God works in us "to work."

God not only produces the desire; He provides the power necessary for obedience.

Christianity is therefore not simply:

"Try harder;"

It is:

Depend upon God and obey Him through the strength He supplies.

The Christian life requires effort, but it is **grace-enabled effort**.

9. Sanctification Requires Active Obedience

Christians rightly emphasize salvation by grace alone through faith alone. But salvation by grace does not produce spiritual laziness.

Grace does not eliminate obedience.

Grace produces obedience.

Paul tells Timothy:

"Train yourself for godliness."¹¹

-1 Timothy 4:7

Peter tells believers to "make every effort" to grow in Christian character (2 Peter 1:5).

The writer of Hebrews urges Christians to pursue holiness (Hebrews 12:14).

The believer therefore participates actively in sanctification through such things as:

prayer, Scripture, worship, fellowship, confession, repentance, service, generosity, resisting temptation, and obedience.

None of these activities earn salvation.

They are the response of someone who **has been saved**.

Good works are not the **root** of salvation.

They are the **fruit** of salvation.

10. The Context Is the Mind of Christ

The word "therefore" at the beginning of Philippians 2:12 is extremely important.

It points backward.

Immediately before this passage Paul has presented the supreme example of Jesus Christ:

"he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

- Philippians 2:8

Christ demonstrated humility and obedience.

Therefore, Paul tells Christians to obey.

This means "working out your salvation" is not merely about private spiritual improvement. It means increasingly displaying the character of Christ.

The question is not simply:

"Am I becoming a better person?"

The better question is:

"Is Jesus Christ becoming increasingly visible in the way I live?"

11. The Context Is Also Corporate

There is another important aspect of the passage that can easily be missed. -

Paul is writing to the **church at Philippi**, not merely to isolated individuals.

The command translated "work out your own salvation" is addressed to the congregation collectively.

The preceding verses concern humility, unity, selfish ambition, and concern for others.

The following verses say:

"Do all things without grumbling or disputing..."

Therefore, Paul's concern includes the spiritual health and testimony of the entire church.

A church should collectively demonstrate the transforming power of the gospel.

That means Christians must learn to:

forgive one another,

serve one another,

bear with one another,

put others ahead of themselves,

refuse selfish ambition,

avoid unnecessary disputes,

and maintain unity around Christ and His Word.

A congregation that proclaims salvation by grace but continually lives in bitterness, selfishness, and division contradicts its own message.

12. Working Out Salvation Produces a Visible Witness

Paul's thought continues into verses 14-15:

"Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world."

Here we discover one of the purposes of working out our salvation.

The world should be able to **see something different in God's people.**

Christians live in the same difficult world as everyone else.

We experience disappointment.

We suffer.

We face illness.

We experience financial pressures.

We encounter difficult people.

We endure loss.

But because God is working within us, we should respond differently.

Our lives become lights in a dark world.

That is why Paul's command to "work out your own salvation" flows naturally into his declaration that Christians should **"shine as lights in the world."**

13. The Great Balance of the Christian Life

Philippians 2:12-13 gives us one of Scripture's clearest statements concerning the relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

Verse 12 says:

You work.

Verse 13 says:

God works.

Both are true.

We obey because God is working.

We persevere because God is working.

We grow because God is working.

We serve because God is working.

We resist sin because God is working.

We become more like Christ because God is working.

The Christian can therefore take neither pride nor excuse.

We cannot boast, because the power comes from God.

But we cannot become passive, because God commands us to obey.

Conclusion

Paul's words, "work out your own salvation," are not a denial of salvation by grace. They are actually a description of what salvation by grace produces.

We are not working **to become saved.**

We are working because **we have been saved.**

We do not work **for God's acceptance.**

We work because **in Christ we have been accepted.**

We do not obey so that God will make us His children.

We obey because through faith in Christ **we already are His children.**

And we do not attempt to live the Christian life through our own strength.

"For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."

Perhaps the entire passage can be summarized in one sentence:

Work out what God has worked in.

God has placed His life within us through Jesus Christ. Now that salvation is to work its way outward-into our attitudes, relationships, words, decisions, service, obedience, and witness-until the world increasingly sees Christ in us.

And when that happens, Paul's next description becomes reality:

We shine like stars in a dark world.

That is the connection between **"work out your own salvation_"** and the larger message of Philippians 2:12-18.

I Love...

God's Word

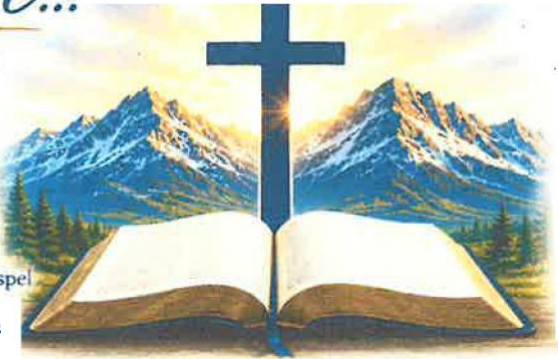
His Church

My Family

This Country

● **Sharing the Gospel**

Helping Others



*"Let your light
shine before others,
that they may see
your good works
and give glory
to your Father
who is in heaven."*

- Matthew 5:16

LOVE GOD

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LOVE PEOPLE

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MAKE DISCIPLES

YOU ARE ALWAYS WELCOME HERE!

Whether you are new to church, new to the area,
or simply looking for a place to belong,
we invite you to come as you are and
experience the love of Christ and His people.



GRACE COMMUNITY

BIBLE CHURCH

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SUNDAY SCHOOL
10:00AM

e WORSHIP SERVICE
11:00 AM

☐ BIBLE STUDY
☐ 4:00PM

CONNECT WITH US!

*There's a place for you at
Grace Community Bible Church.
We look forward to
meeting you!*