

“KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK” – The believer’s sanctification (Phil. 2:12-13)

In this section (2:12-18), P now begins to apply the e.g. of Christ’s unselfish humility & obedience to the P’s situation. His basic meaning is clear: he wants the P’s to obey as Christ obeyed, and so live in a manner worthy of the gospel & in a manner that advances the gospel. Particular to their situation is the need for unity by avoiding the kind of selfish ambition that leads to dissention (cf. 2:1-4, 14).

1. What does “work out our salvation” mean?

A) Paul is not telling them to work *for* their salvation

i) He is exhorting his “beloved” → only believers (cf. Rom. 1:7; 2 Th. 2:13)
→ Cf. 2:1 (“since” they have these assurances from Christ = believers)

ii) They had previously “always obeyed” the message of the gospel

iii) Also nullifies Eph. 2:8-9; Tit. 3:5; all of Romans & Galatians (*sola fide*)

iv) *Salvation* is not synonymous w/ *justification*, despite 21st century usage.
⇒ *swthr i, a* – ‘umbrella’ that can refer to past (J), present (S), & future (G)

– Rom. 8:29-30 (the ‘golden chain’ of *salvation*)

– Phil. 1:6 – ‘sanctification’ the *how* God completes the good w

B) Paul often connects salvation w/ the “Day of the Lord” (i.e. future event)

⇒ 1 Cor. 5:5 (his spirit saved on D of L); Rom. 13:11; 1 Thes. 5:9 (destined)

⇒ Those who have been justified can be assured that they will be saved, but their salvation awaits that final day (Rom. 5:9)

⇒ Should deter us from preaching easy-believism salvation (Matt. 7:21-23)

C) “Cultivate” perhaps the best imagery (or, ‘carry through’)

⇒ *kat erga, zomai* in Rom. 4:15; 5:3; 7:8, 13; 15:18; 2 Cor. 4:17; 7:10-11 = “brings about”, “produces”, “accomplishes”

⇒ Something working inside will eventually show itself outside (1 Jn 3:3)

⇒ Thus, P is here exhorting his “beloved” to make their eternal salvation fruitful in the here & now. “Working out our own salvation means that we do everything we can to feed this new life, to stimulate it, to enable it to extend & develop & grow” (Lloyd-Jones).

⇒ “Cultivate” what God has “begun in you” (i.e. outwork the gospel).

⇒ Same idea found in 2 Pet. 1:3-11 (“Make your calling & election sure”)

⇒ Paul has intimated at this eschatological exhortation in his prayer (1:9-11)

⇒ Also related to 2:5-11 → God’s vindication of Christ’s obedience (w[*ste*])

⇒ Paul commends their previous obedience that he may encourage them to continue their perseverance to advance the gospel.

⇒ “Bring about your salvation fully to its intended goal [Christlikeness]”.

Application:

i) In light of (w[*ste*) Christ’s obedience & subsequent vindication, P is exhorting us to continue (*kat erga, zesqe*) to cultivate the good work God (the same One who raised Christ from the dead & bestowed the Name on Him) has begun in us. This is no different than his exhortations in 1:27 & 2:5.

ii) We should not also remember the warning of 2:9-11. False professors take note!

iii) Sanctification takes a lot of our own work (labor, work, engage in an activity involving considerable expenditure [effort] to bring something to its conclusion or end [to complete]). I.e. no obedience, no sanctification! The essence of living the Christian life is being obedient like Him: “The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked” (1 John. 2:6).

2. How should we work out our own salvation? (Awe & Reverence)

⇒ In classical Greek *phobos* meant panic or flight & conveyed the idea of running away, of fleeing panic-stricken from battle [Homer]. (2) More generally *phobos* means fear in the widest sense means 'awe' or 'reverence' for some exalted ruler & especially for some divinity or some god. It is the feeling that a man experiences in the presence of someone who is infinitely his superior. ‘This is not the slavish fear of the unbeliever’ (O’B, 283).

⇒ Nor is it the fear of one losing their salvation. These words never carry this implication in the NT. As LJ says, “this means humility & a holy reverence, or, if you like, a holy vigilance & circumspection. It means that as I work out my salvation, I should realize the tremendous seriousness I am doing.”

⇒ It is taking heed lest we fall; it is a constant apprehension of the deceitfulness of the heart, and of the insidiousness and power of inward corruption. It is the caution and circumspection which timidly shrinks from whatever would offend and dishonor God and the Savior.

⇒ Sanctification must be taken very seriously, b/c God takes it very seriously.

⇒ Something that is very rarely mentioned in contemporary Christianity is that believers must have a holy respect for their holy God, w/ a holy hatred for the sins that we commit. It is a rare thing to define Christians today as God-fearing people. This is b/c we have lost sight that a holy God has elected & called us unto holiness (cf. Isa. 66:2, 5; 2 Cor. 7:1).

⇒ We as Christians must be serious & sober people & must realize the glory of our salvation. Christianity is more than getting our ticket of Hell.

⇒ In light of 2:6-8, are we cultivating the mind we have in Christ w/ reverential awe for God’s holy love for us? The cross shows us how serious God takes our sins against Him!

⇒ How we think about God will always influence how we act before Him.

⇒ Wherefore, my beloved ones, as you always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, carry to its ultimate conclusion [likeness to the Lord Jesus] your own salvation with a wholesome, serious caution and trembling.

⇒ Believers are to work out their salvation w/ fear & trembling b/c such seriousness is appropriate to the task of living out their commitment to the gospel that demonstrates that they are genuine believers (2 Pet. 1:10-11).

3. Why (*gar*) should we do so? (God’s Working in us)

"There are two significant things about *energeo*; it is always used **of the action of God**, and it is always used **of effective action**. God's action cannot be frustrated, nor can it remain half-finished; it *must* be fully effective. God gives us His pattern to follow without, while at the same time providing the needed power within (Swindoll). "No one can work out his salvation until God has worked it in" (Boice).

i) He works in us so that we desire what pleases Him

"It is the grace of God working in the soul that makes the believer delight in holiness, in righteousness, in obedience to the will of God, for real joy is found in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ. I remember a man who lived a life of gross sin. After his conversion, one of his old friends said to him, "Bill, I pity you—a man that has been such a high-flier as you. And now you have settled down; you go to church, or stay at home and read the Bible and pray; you never have good times any more." "But, Bob," said the man, "you don't understand. I get drunk every time **I want** to. I go to the theater every time **I want** to. I go to the dance when **I want** to. I play cards and gamble whenever **I want** to." "I say, Bill," said his friend, "I didn't understand it that way. I thought you had to give up these things to be a Christian." "No, Bob," said Bill, "the Lord took the '**want to**' out when He saved my soul, and he made me a new creature in Christ Jesus." When we are born of God we receive a new life and that life has its own new nature, a nature that hates sin and impurity and delights in holiness and goodness."

ii) He works in us so that we do what pleases Him

"As He pours His power into us, we do the things that bring Him pleasure. Take special note that His pleasures (not ours), His will (not ours), His glory (not ours) are what make life meaningful."

iii) God's sovereign working in us an encouragement to action not inaction!

- ⇒ God's sovereignty in sanctification does not remove our obligation. It enables it...God's sovereign work in us is our only hope that we will press on to maturity. We really do work, but all our working is the fruit of enabling grace (Piper).
- ⇒ Ezra 1 & 3. God initially moves their heart to give 'freewill' offerings
- ⇒ 1 Cor. 15:10; Col. 1:29; John 15:4 (Indic. – Impv.; cf. Rom. 6; 1 Cor. 5).

Conclusion:

The Christian life is not a series of ups and downs. It is rather a process of "ins and outs." God works in, and we work out. We cultivate the submissive mind by responding to the divine provisions God makes available to us (Wiersbe).

The believer's supreme purpose is to obey, worship, & glorify God, and their fulfilling that purpose brings pleasure to Him. But before this happens, we must come to the end of ourselves, realizing we cannot live the life Christ lived unless He lives it through us, (Gal 2:20) in His power.

Closing prayer: **O God work in me, not only to will, but to do of Thy good pleasure; and may I work out in daily life what Thou dost work in. AMEN.**

"As you have the example of Christ's humiliation to guide you & His exaltation to encourage you, so continue" (Lightfoot). Benediction: Heb. 13:20-21