

[manifest destiny]

:: philippians 2.12-13 ::

Men, you and I are destined for great things.

So far in Philippians, we've seen some incredible verses which detail for us the Christian life, the Christian hope and the Christian future. A summary verse of the book is:

Philippians 1.6b - He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

Today we're in chapter 2, verses 12 and 13. And here we find something Biblically mysterious, something that seems contradictory at first, but is, in fact, a revelation to us of how God works in our lives.

Verse 12:

Philippians 2.12-13 - Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now 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 do for His good pleasure.

Couple of serious questions come to mind.

First, is this text implying that a Christian can lose their salvation?

And, second, is there a contradiction since Paul says in verse 12 that *WE* work but then in verse 13 that *GOD* does the work?

The thing to keep in mind is that God's desire is to **reveal** Himself to us and answer these questions that we have. As we seek Him, we'll discover not only understanding, but also a way of life that leads to fullness and completion in His will.

So, first: **Does this text imply that a Christian can lose their salvation?**

There are many Christians who do believe that our salvation can be forfeited through sin or lack of faith. Belief in that doctrine does not disqualify a person from being saved.

We, however, do *NOT* hold to that teaching. We believe, from the Biblical text, that a person is secure in their salvation, that nothing can snatch us out of the hands of Jesus who holds us and grants us eternal life.



Remember who Paul is addressing. He's been talking about unity in the Church, relationship in the Church, co-service in the Church. He's extended to his readers grace and peace, called them 'saints,' expressed his confidence that God was going to complete them in the day of Christ Jesus.

It's clear that Paul wasn't worried that this group of readers was going to lose their salvation.

H.A. Ironside recounts the story of how a small child heard this verse used to teach that a person *could* in fact lose their salvation who then said, "How can you work it **out** if you haven't got it **in**?"

Instead, this particular text is speaking about obedience and effort. It's about manifesting our salvation *in* our lives. That phrase 'work out' can be translated as manifest or accomplish. We're to manifest the power of God in our lives. All those things that God provides to us, all those characteristics we read about in the Sermon on the Mount and Romans 6, 7 and 8, 1 Timothy and Titus, all over God's word, we're to *manifest* those things in our lives. Because salvation is not just a **destination**, but it's also an **implementation**. Putting into reality, putting into action the life of Jesus, the gifts of the Spirit, the will of the Father as we are transformed by His power.

And so Paul calls upon us to work out our salvation, to *manifest* it, to *move forward* in God's will and not be stationary. When problems arise in the Church, we're to manifest unity, which will save us from broken relationships and a loss of our witness.

This verse is not about losing our eternal security, but it's about missing out on the life that Jesus offers. And *that* is something that we are in danger of while we're here on the earth.

But, second: **Does this text contain a contradiction?** Are we the ones that do the work, or is God the one who does it?

Philippians 2.12-13 - Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now 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 do for His good pleasure.

Boil this down and it's like Paul is saying, "YOU do the work, but, by the way, GOD does the work."

And here we remember that God's ways are above our ways. His activity is not limited to our finite understanding. This situation is consistent with what we see throughout the Bible.

He's the Potter, we're the clay. He forms us, but we have control over our usefulness and pliability in His masterful hands.

We're called upon to bear fruit as Christians, yet God says that He is the one that bears it.

He is sovereign, yet we have free will.

God has transformed us, but we have the ability to resist His presence and His will in our lives. We have the ability to yoke up with Him or to remain distant from His presence and His work.

This is what Paul is talking about. And, really, it's not that hard to understand.



This is a poor analogy, but it's the best I could think of.

Some of you guys lift weights. When you do, all sorts of crazy things happen within your muscles which cause them to grow and strengthen.

So, when you exercise with weights, is it *you* who is strengthen yourself, or is it your muscles and the processes within? There must be a cooperation between that which is within and a willingness to *DO* the exercise.

Our relationship with God is about us participating in the things He wants to accomplish in us. We cannot purify ourselves, but we can allow Him to purify us. We cannot bear fruit of ourselves, but we can allow Him to bear it in us. And, perhaps more significantly, we can hinder God from that which He desires to do as we fail to obey Him and love Him.

The Lord *intends* to will and to do in our hearts for His good pleasure. He *intends* to not only transform us, but then actually use us in significant ways. But, if we want what He wants, then we can't remain stationary, we can't remain carnal, we can't remain unengaged in this life we're living.

Paul instructs us on this here in our text. And he says a couple of things.

First, we're to **obey**. That's the key. That's how we allow God into our lives to will and to do. By obeying what He's said and what He says. Thankfully, we're given a 1,000 page head start. We're given a revelation of what it means to be Christian and what it means to be Godly and what it means to be mature and bear fruit.

Beyond that, the Spirit of God is faithful to speak and to direct us continually. God didn't stop communicating when the Bible was finished. But He continues to actively speak through His word and by His Spirit to each of us personally an daily.

Obedience, first of all, simply means to **listen**. To hear. The same word is used in the book of Acts when Peter is miraculously released from prison, goes to where the disciples are and then knocks on the door of the house.

Acts 12.13 - And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer.

God is depicted as knocking on the doors of our hearts, desiring to come in and dwell with us. Obedience means hearing God and answering Him. Have we communicated with the Lord this week? Has He spoken anything to us? If not, it's not because He is silent, but because we need to listen.

Obedience also means **submitting**. Choosing a course of action that places the Lord in charge of our lives. It's the same word used when Christ rebuked the storm and the wind and waves obeyed His voice. It means not being like the rich young ruler, who came to Jesus and said, "I'll follow you to this point, but beyond that I'm not willing to sacrifice. I'm not willing to pursue." Instead, we're to live in unconditional surrender to God. Being submitted to every decision and direction that God places on our lives.



Paul says, "I know you guys were locked in when I was there, but don't let up. Don't cool down." The same encouragement applies to us. When we were new believers, we had a beautiful abandon to the Lord. Yet, we find so often that our first love has changed into something less passionate, something less sacrificial, something less personal, something less than what we want.

We need to **listen** and **submit** to God and take on the life and the calling and the yoke that He has for us.

But then Paul says to manifest our salvation in 'fear and trembling.'

We talked a little about Godly fear last week. Not being afraid of God's anger, but being afraid of displeasing Him. But also, as we've seen in this Epistle how important our witness is, we also should have a fear of stumbling those who Jesus loves.

Mark 9.42 - But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea.

That is serious and we should take it seriously. We need to have a healthy fear of damaging someone's spirituality or eternity if we manifest sin rather than salvation in our lives.

A Church also needs to have a healthy fear for her witness and testimony.

Revelation 2.5 - Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.

When we leave our first love, we're in danger of this discipline. As individuals and as congregations, we need to manifest God's love and His power so that we stay in the proper relationship with our Bridegroom.

But there's also that world *trembling*.

I thought about what causes a person to tremble.

2 quick ideas.

First, **hunger** can cause a person to tremble. We should have a hunger for the things of God. For His word. If we don't, that means that we're depending on some other source for our satisfaction, but only Christ can satisfy, only Christ can fill, only Christ can offer lasting supply.

Second, **weakness** can cause a person to tremble. We should remember our weakness and our dependence on the Spirit of God. Not by might, not by power, but by God's Spirit we live and move and have our being. Nothing else. No other strength. No other ability. When we remember and embrace our weakness before the Lord is when He can fill us with His confounding power.

God desires to bring forth salvation in our lives. Not just the destination, but the implementation of His will. He desires to glorify Himself in us. He desires to transform and complete us. But He leaves a lot of that up to our participation.



We want to be fruitful, not barren. We want to be full, not spiritually emaciated. Listen to God. Submit to God. Love God and *keep* loving God. That's how we receive the fullness, the completion, the mysterious wonder of Christ in our lives.

