

PHILIPPIANS

2:12-30

Introduction

A farmer purchased an old, run-down, abandoned farm with plans to refurbish it and make it productive again. The fields were overgrown with weeds, the farmhouse was falling down, and the fences were collapsing all around.

During his first day of work, the town pastor stopped by to bless the man's work, saying, "May you and God work together to make this the farm of your dreams!"

A few months later the pastor stopped by again to see how the farmer was progressing. Lo and behold, the farm was like a completely different place - the house was rebuilt and in excellent condition, the fences were up and painted, and the fields were full with seedlings planted in neat rows.

"Amazing!" the pastor exclaimed. "Look what you and God have accomplished together. You should give glory to God."

"I suppose you're right, pastor," replied the farmer, *"but I can't help but remember what the farm was like when God was working it alone!"*

Our concept of working together with God can be like that of the farmer, with an overemphasis on what we should be doing for God. We are exhorted to quit being pew-potatoes, reminded that 10% of the people do 90% of the work, and generally motivated by a sense of guilt that if we don't get busy soon, God's program will fail.

There is another extreme, just the opposite. We're told to "Let go and let God," never exhorted to get busy for God, and generally left alone and to ourselves.

Neither of these is correct, because neither of these is biblical. The biblical concept of working together with God is given to you in verses 12 and 13 where you read,

Philippians 2:12 ...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;

Philippians 2:13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

"Work out your own salvation." You do not have to work to obtain your salvation, nor do you have to work to maintain your salvation. Paul is writing to believers, folks who are already saved, of whom he is confident that "He who [had] begun a good work [in them] [would] complete it until the Day of Christ Jesus."¹

¹Philippians 1:6

If you don't work to obtain or to maintain your salvation, then what does "work out your salvation" mean?

The word for "work" means *to work to full completion*, such as working out a problem in mathematics. It is used in Greek literature and language to describe a farmer working a field or a miner working a mine. The farmer works to get the greatest harvest possible; the miner works to get out of the mine all the valuable ore possible. Apply that to your life as a believer! Like a field or a mine, your life has great potential. The potential God wants you to achieve is Christlikeness, "to be conformed into the image of His Son."² Your life has tremendous potential, like a field or a mine, and you should work to realize that potential.

And you're not working alone! When verse 13 says that God "works in you," a different Greek word for work is used. It is the word *energeo*, from which we get our English word *energy*. God *energizes* you, working effectively in you, to insure you of success in your working to becoming more like Jesus. God works *in* you, and you work *out* by responding with obedience and faith to the divine provisions which your experience of salvation affords you.

How does this all work out in your practical, everyday living? Your life is unique, but some examples might help. Paul gives you three examples of believers who worked out their salvation by responding in obedience and faith in the situations they found themselves in: himself, Timothy, and Epaphroditus. Each of them teaches you something about working out your salvation:

#1 You Work Out Your Salvation
By Being Poured-Out As A Sacrifice
(v12-18)

#2 You Work Out Your Salvation
By Being Proven As A Servant
(v19-24)

#3 You Work Out Your Salvation

²Romans 8:29

By Being Precious In Your Sickness

(v25-30)

#1 You Work Out Your Salvation By Being Poured-Out As A Sacrifice

(v12-18)

As you may recall from our previous studies, there were problems in the church at Philippi. The believers were not getting along with one another. As bad as that was for the fellowship, it was worse because unbelievers were being negatively affected. Before giving the Philippians good examples to follow, he reminded them of their own bad example in verses 14 through 16:

Philippians 2:14 Do all things without complaining and disputing,
Philippians 2:15 that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,
Philippians 2:16 holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.

You don't have to "work out your salvation"; it's your choice. You can be satisfied with your salvation as fire insurance! But those who are not working usually stagnate; those not making progress tend to regress. Fields that are not worked yield weeds; mines that are not worked cave-in on themselves. And the effect is seen not only in the church, but outside the church, by unbelievers.

It is your great joy to "hold fast the word of life" to a lost world. The phrase "hold fast" would be used of offering wine to a guest at dinner - a sign of joyful feasting and fellowship. But no one wants to come over and watch you argue! The "complaining" and "disputing" that were going on in the church was hindering their testimony. Paul was encouraging the believers to stand out from the unsaved - to "shine as lights in the world," drawing men and women from their darkness.

Paul was constantly mindful of the "Day of Christ," which is a reference to the Rapture and the Reward Seat of Jesus immediately following the Rapture. Paul anticipated great "rejoicing" in that Day at the ministry of the Philippians in reaching their world for Jesus. When he speaks of running in vain or laboring in vain it's a reminder that our lives will be evaluated for their effectiveness. You don't have to "work out your salvation"; it's your choice. But you ought to do so, with "fear and trembling" in anticipation of the gaze of your Lord upon you.

Having examined their bad example, he gives them three good examples - beginning in verses 17 and 18 with himself.

Philippians 2:17 Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.

Philippians 2:18 For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me.

In the Old Testament, the priests, when they offered sacrifices to God on behalf of the people, would sometimes pour wine on the sacrifice. Wine is symbolic of joy and exhilaration. The pouring of wine taught that sacrifice was the key to joy!

Paul saw the Philippians as his offering to God and his own poured out life as an added drink offering. Perhaps he was referring to the possibility of his martyrdom at the hands of Nero - of the pouring out, literally, of his blood for the sake of the gospel.

Whatever his specific reference, this much is clear: A Christian who is working out his or her salvation understands that sacrificial living is the key to joy and offers themselves wholly to God in obedience and faith.

This pouring out of yourself doesn't require that you be a minister or a missionary. It can, and should, occur right where you are! In your marriage... In your employment... In your neighborhood... In your school...

Let's say you are having marriage problems. Paul would say to you, "*Work it out!*" Draw upon the power and provision that accompany your experience of salvation - like the Word of God and prayer. Then offer your marriage to God, and yourself a drink offering to God. Pour yourself out by loving your spouse in a way that is pleasing to God.

Can't do it? **Yes, you can** - because it is God who works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure! You discover His will through the word and prayer; you respond in obedience and faith to be pleasing to God. That's the idea; that's how you work out your own salvation.

Turning to the example of Timothy, you see that

#2 You Work Out Your Salvation By Being Proven As A Servant (v19-24)

Philippians 2:19 But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state.

Philippians 2:20 For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state.

Philippians 2:21 For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus.

Philippians 2:22 But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel.

Philippians 2:23 Therefore I hope to send him at once, as soon as I see how it goes with me.

Philippians 2:24 But I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly.

Paul probably met Timothy on his first missionary journey, at which time, perhaps, the young man was converted. Apparently Timothy's mother and grandmother had been converted first. He was the son of a Jewish mother and a Gentile father, but Paul always considered him his own "dearly beloved son" in the faith. While on his second missionary journey, Paul enlisted Timothy as one of his fellow travelers and fellowlaborers.

The emphasis in these verses is on Timothy's service. Paul says, in verse 22, "he served with me in the gospel. What's more, his service was "proven." The word "proven" means *tested*. Timothy was a tested, proven servant. He could be counted on.

Not everyone could be counted on. In fact, Paul says that none of the believers in Rome could be counted on to be sent to Philippi and help the believers there! They were "all seeking their own, and not the things of God."

Not everyone can be counted on today, either:
=Sometimes there are no volunteers...
=Sometimes the volunteers that there are can't be counted on...
=Sometimes the volunteers that can be counted on are seeking something for themselves, and not for the kingdom of God...

Your service will be tested. Will you volunteer? Will you be faithful when you do volunteer? Will you submit to leadership and seek the things of God?

God is working in you to answer "Yes!" to each of these questions! It's up to you to work out the details, depending upon His power to do so.

Turning to the example of Epaphroditus you see that

#3 You Work Out Your Salvation By Being Precious In Your Sickness (v25-30)

Philippians 2:25 Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need;
Philippians 2:26 since he was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick.
Philippians 2:27 For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.
Philippians 2:28 Therefore I sent him the more eagerly, that when you see him again you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful.
Philippians 2:29 Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem;
Philippians 2:30 because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me.

Epaphroditus had traveled to Rome from Philippi to deliver the church's financial gift to the imprisoned apostle. The indication is that his near fatal illness was not caused by his coming, but that it was greatly aggravated in its severity by the trip he took. He had recovered and now Paul was sending him back with this letter.

Notice two things about Epaphroditus in his sickness:
=First, in verse 26, you learn that he was concerned far more for the spiritual health of the believers at Philippi than he was for his own physical health.

=Second, in verse 30, you learn that his sickness was no obstacle to his serving the Lord. When it says he did not regard his life, it literally means that he "gambled with his life" for the sake of completing his task.

Because of these qualities, Paul tells the Philippians to "esteem" Epaphroditus. The word means *precious*. Epaphroditus was precious in his sickness - concerned more for others than himself, gambling with his life for the gospel.

You can be precious in sickness! First of all, sickness need not stop you from serving the Lord. True, your particular sickness may alter your abilities; but sickness is not, by itself, a reason to retire from Christian service.

And, secondly, you can think of others when you are sick. That is, you can think about how to minister to them. Let's face it: If your sickness is unto death, you will wake to the beauties and glories of heaven. Those you leave behind need to be ministered to. One way you can think of them is to not make them feel bad; don't put demands on them.

Sound difficult? It's *impossible* from a human point of view. But, with God, all things are possible! Remember - God works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. *Work it out!*

Conclusion

God works in you; the energy comes from the indwelling Holy Spirit.

The examples are given you. You must believe that God's power is going to work in you just the way it worked in Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus - and in countless other saints right up to the present day.

You have the energy and the examples. Now it's up to you to work out your own salvation - to respond in obedience and faith to the will of God in order to please God.

You don't have to. You can be a field full of weeds, or a collapsing mine.

You don't have to work out your own salvation... *You get to!*