

The Christians Workout

Philippians 2:12-16

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I want to read Philippians 2:12-16. Follow with me in your Bible. Paul says, "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation," there it is, "with fear and trembling. 13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. 14 Do all things without murmurings and disputings: 15 That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world. 16 Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain."

The humorist, Mark Twain, years ago said, "Few things are harder to put up with than the annoyance of a good example." Have you ever had somebody that looked so perfect you just kinda wished they would do something wrong so it made you feel more comfortable? One thing about a good example is it gives you inspiration but it doesn't bring transformation. You might be able to admire a person's life or look at their example, but it doesn't enable you to live the same way.

I used to watch a lot of NBA, and I see these guys dunking at a ten-foot rim. Now, I admire that, but I can't do that. I can only jump about a half an inch off the ground and then they hospitalize me for a month. I can admire the example, but it doesn't really enable me. The thing about Jesus, our example, which we saw in verses 5-11, is that Jesus is also our enabler. Amen? Not only does Jesus give us an example of humility and sacrifice and service, but He also enters into us, transforms us, and enables us to live the Christian life. The Christian life is not just your strength or your ability, it is "...Christ in you, the hope of glory." Amen?

What Paul has done in Philippians 2 is given us a plea for unity, verses 1-4; and in verses 5-11, we spent two weeks there, he gave us the pattern for unity in Christ who left Heaven, came to earth, "...and took upon him the form of a servant...and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth...And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." There's the pattern.

Tonight, we move from verses 5-11 to verses 12-16, so we have the power. The first 16 verses of Philippians 2 are first the plea for unity, verses 1-4; secondly, the pattern for unity, verses 5-11; and tonight we look at the power for unity, verses 12-16. The theme is there in verse 13. Paul says, "For it is God which," here's our word, "worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." He says, "We're to work out our salvation but not forget that it's God who "worketh," that's energizes or powers us, "...both to will and to do of his good pleasure." We must yield ourselves as vessels to God, and we have our part. Salvation is God's work from beginning to end, but we also must cooperate with Him, allow Him to work in us that He might

work through us. In verse 12, he says, "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed," note that word "obeyed." I've highlighted that in my Bible. He says, "You've always obeyed when I was there with you, but now that I'm absent from you I want you to work out your salvation with fear and trembling." It's kind of an idea where, "I'm not there with you, you've always been obedient to God, I want you to continue to work out now what God has worked into your heart and into your life."

In this section that we're going to look at tonight, verses 12-16, there are four things that we need to do to work out our own salvation. I want you to write them down. The first is that we're to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. Look at verse 12. He says, "Wherefore," so he's going back to what he just spoke about in verses 5-11, Jesus, our example, because Christ is our example; and then he uses this endearing term for the believers in Philippi, "my beloved." Paul loved the believers in Philippi, and that phrase reminds them that Paul loved them and that God loved them. I think that's kind of a neat term that we could use in the body of Christ. I know it might seem kind of mushy or a little too emotional in our western culture or society for us to use but we're brothers and sisters in Christ, and Paul and the believers in the New Testament called each other "beloved." I think that's kind of cool because it reminds us that God loves us and I love you. He says, "...as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence," I want you to obey in my absence, so this is what you're to do, "work out your own salvation," and tells us how to work it out, "with fear and trembling."

What does Paul mean when he says, "...work out your own salvation"? Unfortunately, there are people that misunderstand this statement and somehow think it reads, "Work for your salvation." It doesn't say that. It doesn't say that we work for our salvation, it says we work out our salvation. You can't work out what God hasn't first worked in. We know that the Bible teaches that we're saved by grace, through faith, "and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." No one can work to be saved, no one can be good enough to be saved, no one by the works of the law can be justified before God. What he's not telling us is that we should work in order to be saved, that we should try to keep ourselves saved, or that we should earn, merit, or deserve our salvation. Paul said, "...work out your own," and I love that word "own" there, God saves you individually and personally, "salvation with fear and trembling."

The phrase "work out" in the Greek is an imperative, that means it's a command. This statement here in verse 12 is not optional. You can't say, "Well, God saved me, but I don't want to cooperate. I don't want to grow in grace. I don't want to grow in my walk with the Lord." No. He's commanding us to live out what God has worked into our hearts. That phrase, "work out," has the idea of to work to full completion.

Now, don't let your kids hear this message tonight, but when I was in school I hated math. I still hate math. I think anybody that loves math needs prayer. When I was in middle school I had a math teacher that would do these equations on the board with chalk flying everywhere, and he would get all excited. It was almost like he was in ecstasy or something. I thought, He's a sad,

sad little man. That's what this phrase actually means. It's the saying used for working to complete a mathematical equation—you start here, and the conclusion is here. It means to work out. It was also used for mining when they would coal mine or ore mine. They would go into the earth and would dig the treasures from the earth. It means to work out the gold, the silver, the ore from a mine, to work it out or to bring it out to completion. We don't live the Christian life in order to be Christians, we live the Christian life because we are Christians, so Paul is here talking about sanctification not justification.

You've heard me say it a million times, but we find the word "salvation" in verse 12. The word "salvation" is a general term for all that God does to save us, but we need to understand that salvation has three tenses. We can say as a believer that, "I've been saved," this means that we've been declared righteous, or justified is the technical word we use; and then we say, "I'm being saved," present tense, which means sanctification, He's making me more holy little by little as I grow in grace; and then, "I will be saved," when I die and go to Heaven, I will be glorified. These three words are super important for you to understand: justification, that's the initial God imputing righteousness to us by faith. It's the act of God whereby He declares the believing sinner to be righteous based on the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

When we take communion tonight because of what Jesus did on the cross, we are justified. We are declared righteous before God. Some say, "Just as if I'd never sinned." We're also being saved, that's sanctification. Sanctification starts the moment you are justified and does not end until the moment you are glorified, which is the third phase; so when we die and go to Heaven, or the Lord comes and takes us home in the rapture, and we see Jesus face to face, and we're change to be like Him, and we get new bodies, won't that be a great day? Amen? We will be totally, completely saved. We will be glorified. We're not glorified now, go home and look in the mirror tonight, you'll know what I'm talking about.

When Paul says, "...work out your own salvation," he says, "That which God has done in saving you, justification, He wants you now to grow in sanctification." This is the process of sanctification, which is lifelong, never does it come to a conclusion until we go to Heaven because the goal of sanctification is likeness to Jesus, that's the process. The process is lifelong, and the goal is being like Jesus. It won't happen perfectly until we are in Heaven. Paul is talking about our sanctification, that we work out what God has first worked in our lives.

Paul mentions running in verse 16, we'll get there in a moment, and laboring; so we have a work to do—we run, we labor, we serve the Lord. Each believer has a responsibility of their own for their spiritual growth. If you're not growing spiritually, you have no one to blame but yourself. You need to work out your own salvation.

Notice, as I pointed out in verse 12, you do that "...with fear and trembling." I believe fear is a reverence and respect for God, and trembling is the dependence and reliance upon God; so a healthy fear of not offending God, reverential awe, and a righteous awe and respect for Him. If you're going to grow in your sanctification, if you're going to "work out" what God has worked in, you're going to have to do that with the fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom—a

reverential fear for God, respect for God, and a reliance and dependence upon God. Reverence for God and dependence upon God are two very, very important elements in your spiritual development. Live in a constant state of respecting God and depending upon God, so we are to, "...work out."

Here's the second thing we're supposed to do. We move from our part, verse 12, to God's part, verse 13; we are to work in or let God work in us. "For it is God," here's the phrase, "which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." In verse 12 we have man's part; in verse 13 we have God's part. God works in you that He might then work through you, verse 13; so we are to work out, we are to work in, letting God, yielded heart, work in our hearts. The word "worketh" is where we get our word energy or power from. It's God who energizes or empowers you.

Let me give you four quick ways that God works in us. This is limited. These are the ways God works in us to sanctify us. First, by and through His Word, by the Word of God. The number one tool by which God works in your life is the Word of God. If you want to grow, if you want to be sanctified, if you want to be like Jesus, you cannot arrive at that without the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. It's the Spirit of God, using the Word of God, to transform the child of God, into the image of Jesus, the Son of God. If you're neglecting your Bible, if you're not studying the Word of God, if you're not growing in your knowledge of the Word of God, you are not growing in sanctification. Jesus prayed in John 17 saying, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." If you want to have a renewing of your mind, you need to yield to the Spirit of God and, through the Word of God, be transformed into the image of Jesus.

Write down 1 Thessalonians 2:13 where Paul says, "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which," listen to him, "effectually worketh also in you that believe." Paul says to the believers in Thessalonica that when you heard the Word, you received it not as man's word but as God's Word, and it worketh, same word, energizes or empowers you as the Word of God works in those who believe. Now, we need to appropriate God's Word to be sanctified, we need to appreciate God's Word, and we need to apply God's Word. We need to appreciate it, appropriate it, and apply it or believe it in our hearts and in our lives. Read the Word, study the Word, grow in your knowledge of the Word. From the moment of your salvation, sometimes even before you were saved, you start reading the Bible, and the Spirit of God uses it to bring salvation and produce sanctification.

You never outgrow the Bible. You never go, "Oh, I've read it. Yeah, I've read it. Give me something new." When you read a book, you read a book and might read it again once in a while, but you don't really have to go back and re-read that book, you've read it already. But the Word of God is alive, right? and it's powerful! It's "...sharper than any two-edged sword." You can never outgrow or plumb the depths of God's Word, and it's transforming in our lives.

The second way God works in us is time spent with God in prayer, so the Word of God and spending time praying in communion with God. Jesus got up early every morning and spent

time talking to His Father. Over and over in the gospels we find Him finding a quiet place apart to spend time in prayer. Prayer is an avenue by which God uses to sanctify us.

Thirdly, this is one of my favorites, He uses trials and sufferings. You say, “Did you have to add that into the list?” Tribulation worketh patience which means steadfast endurance. Trials develop your faith and your likeness to Jesus. Without trials and suffering we cannot grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Fourthly, He uses the family of God. Tonight you’re in church, that’s wonderful, but you need to be connected with other believers provoking one another to love and good works. Sometimes we just provoke one another. We’re to provoke each other to love and good works. You need the body of Christ. You need the Word of God. You need prayer, spending time with God. You need the trials and sufferings where God is using them to wean you from the world and make you more like Christ and bring you into a deeper dependence upon Him and the family of God. It’s so very important.

Note verse 13, “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” I love that. The idea of “will and do” means that we have the desire, the will, and the ability to do what God has called us to do. It’s impossible on your own strength, and in your own power, with your own ability, to live the Christian life. The sooner you discover that, the better off you’ll be. The sooner you look to God to give you the will and the desire and the ability, the sooner you’ll see God working in your life—working out what God works in.

Notice the third thing we do, verses 14-15, we shine out. First, we work out; second, we let God work in us; and thirdly, we shine out, verses 14-15. He says, “Do all things without murmurings and disputings,” this is one of those verses that I wish were not in the Bible. I have the gift of murmur. I’m really good at it. Murmur is one of those words that sounds like what it is, “Murmurmurmur,” oh that’s murmur. “Murmurmurmurmur,” we made the word “murmur” because it sounds like that. Don’t murmur and don’t argue. I think that’s probably in context talking about debating and arguing with God who wants to work in and through us. Why? Verse 15, “That ye may be blameless,” not perfect but without blame before Him in love, “and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom,” here’s my point, “ye shine as lights in the world.” We are to shine out in a very dark world. We are to shine as lights in the world. We are to shine in the world.

So many times Christians over the years have thought the thing is to run out of the world and get away from the world, maybe to live in a monastery or Christian community, “I go to Christian restaurants. I only go to restaurants where there are sanctified waitresses or sanctified sections for the saints.” We’re in the world, but we’re not of the world, right? We’re in the world, it’s dark, it’s corrupt, and we’re to shine as lights. That’s so very, very important. Like Jesus, who was in the world but was not of the world.

Why should we shine, verse 15? Because the world is “...crooked and perverse,” or twisted and perverted. Have you ever seen a day and age in which the world is more perverted and

twisted? I certainly haven't. Not in my lifetime have I ever seen the world so twisted, so perverted, and so dark. You think, Wow, let's run for our lives! No. Let's shine out. Amen? The light shines brightest in the darkest places. When you want to see the stars at night, you get away from the light, right? You find a dark place. You don't want a full-moon night, you want a night where there's no moon so you can see the stars. The darker the world gets around us, the brighter we are to shine. This is part of working out our salvation, living out our salvation in the world we live in.

How are we to shine? Without murmuring, complaining, or arguing. Notice that in verses 14-15. Then, verse 15, we're to "...be blameless and harmless," so don't murmur and don't argue, perhaps he's referring to arguing with God, "I don't want to do that. I don't want to go there. I don't want to be that." You are resisting God's work in your life. Yield and surrender to God.

Do you know that the children of Israel are a great example, too, of murmuring? God brought them out of Egypt by a strong and mighty arm, did marvelous miracles. What did they do? Complain. God gave them bread, manna, and they said, "Manna again?" Manna in the morning, manna in the evening, manna all day long. Manna meatballs, manna-cotti, manna, manna, manna. "We want quail! We want meat!" They griped and complained, so God's people are very, very good at complaining. Don't complain. Accept what God's doing in your life. Use it to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ by being "...blameless and harmless."

The phrase "blameless" means free from censure, and "harmless" means to be unadulterated or unmixed. This phrase "blameless" is used of the qualifications for spiritual leaders in the church. It doesn't mean that they're perfect or sinless, but it means that if someone were to bring an accusation against them, the phrase actually carries the idea of it doesn't stick to them. They may be accused of something but their lives are lived blamelessly, so the accusations do not hold water because of the way they live their lives blamelessly. "Harmless" means that we are unadulterated, we're unmixed with the things of the world.

Here's the fourth, and last, thing we're supposed to do: hold out. First, we work out; second, we let God work in us; thirdly, we shine out, hold out the Word of life we're going to see; and the last thing we do is we also hold out the Word of life, verse 16. We shine, let our light shine by the way we live and, verse 16, I love this, "Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain." Remember in verse 12 Paul started this section by saying, "...as ye 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," so when he comes to verse 16, he wants them "Holding forth the word of life," because he doesn't want to have them, "...run in vain, neither laboured in vain." He wants their lives to bear fruit for the glory of God.

Notice the phrase Paul uses for the Scriptures, "...the word of life," I love that! When I was the pastor of Calvary Chapel San Bernardino, the radio ministry, the radio outreach, the ministry of the teaching there was known as the Word of Life. I love that concept of the Bible being "...the

word of life,” because the Bible is alive and powerful and it brings life. We’re saved by the Bible bringing regeneration in the life, the seed?. We’re sanctified by the Bible, and we’re equipped for service through the Bible, “...the word of life,” and it is alive and brings life to the believer.

The gospel as well is referred to as “the word of life.” John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” The Scriptures bring life, they’re the “word of life.” We live in a crooked and perverse nation, we’re to shine out! We live in a dark, crooked and perverse world, we’re to hold forth, bring forth, preach the Word, share the Word, live out the Word, “Holding forth the word of life,” so that people can come to salvation and find Jesus.

Paul says, “I don’t want to find that I’ve ended my life,” and notice the phrase, “...the day of Christ,” when the Lord comes again, when Jesus Christ returns and comes back to judge us as believers, Paul says, “I don’t want to find out that my ministering among you has been in vain or empty. I love 1 Corinthians 15:58 where, at the end of that chapter on the resurrection of the believer, he talks about the rapture of the church. He says, “Therefore...be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.” Amen? How wonderful to think that I can have eternal rewards, that I can find that when I get to Heaven, I’ll hear the words, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant...enter thou into the joy of thy lord.” Paul says, “I don’t want to find out that I’ve labored in vain. I don’t want to find that I’ve run in vain. I want your lives to grow, to bear fruit, and to have an impact on the world that is around us.”

What we have in this passage is actually the Christian life. God saves us by His grace, then we live out what He has done in saving us by Him working in us and through us. We shine out by holy living, by our examples in a dark world, and then we hold out the “word of life.” It’s not enough just to live the Christian life, we must preach the good news of Jesus Christ so that when people see us shining, they’ll know it’s Jesus. They’ll know who we are and what we’re about—we’re “holding forth the word of life...that I have not run in vain.” Amen? Let’s pray.