

# Work Out Your Salvation

Philippians 2:12-13

## Part 2

Sanctification is the duty and privilege of every Christian. By it God is making us like Christ for His glory and our own Joy.

LTS: Titus 2:11-14

Today I want to pick up where we left off last week in our discussion of how Christians grow into the likeness of Christ. Theologians refer to this as the doctrine of Progressive Sanctification, but its ok to think of it simply as the Bible's teaching on Christian growth and spiritual maturity.

This is not, however, a topical sermon. We are actually working our way verse-by-verse through Paul's letter to the Philippians and we find ourselves in chapter two verses 12-13. So stand with me now and follow along as I read several verses of this chapter.

Read Phil. 2:13-14

The question I asked last week is still relevant: "How is your spiritual growth? Have you made progress in your walk with the Lord over the a]past year? Is there evidence of change? Are you more loving, patient, self-disciplined, and kind? Do you hate sin more? Are you growing in your ability to defeat temptation? Paul is encouraging the church in Philippi toward this kind of change.

And that brings us to the four attitudes that should characterize our pursuit of spiritual maturity.

How should we strive for spiritual growth? We should strive...

- I. Obediently
- II. Rigorously
- III. Reverantly
- IV. Optomistically

We discussed the first of theses attitudes last time; namely, that we should

## **I. Strive for Spiritual Growth Obediently**

1. Paul writes in v. 12, “So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence but much more in my absence...”
2. Just as Jesus Obeyed the father by becoming obedient to the point of death on a cross (2:8), so we should humbly obey the word of the Father as we find it in the Bible.
3. Not only that, but we should be obedient even when no one is watching or looking over our shoulder. Paul couldn’t be with them all the time. He was no longer there to motivate them. But that’s OK, because they had the Spirit of God indwelling them.
4. Therefore, we said last week, the person who should motivate your sanctification is not so much the one who is with you, but the One who is in you.
5. So, we should strive for spiritual growth Obediently. Secondly (and here is where we pick up from last time),

## **II. We Should Strive for Spiritual Growth Rigorously!**

1. Again, in v. 12,  
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...
2. Now I think it is imperative this morning that we observe the fact that Paul does NOT say to work For your salvation, or work ON your salvation, or even work up your salvation. Rather he says, “Work Out” your salvation.
  - A. The term “work out” is only one word in the GK and it means “to effect, to produce, or cause.”<sup>1</sup> O beloved, we are on dangerous ground here. One false move and we slip into heresy. This is why we have to distinguish between the different categories of salvation. We don’t cause our Justification. We don’t cause our glorification. But we do “cause” (at least in a dependent, participatory manner) our sanctification.
  - B. We might say, Paul is calling us to see to it that our salvation is fruitful by

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<sup>1</sup> Zodhiates, S. (2000). [\*The complete word study dictionary: New Testament\*](#) (electronic ed.). Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

diligently cooperating with the HS who produces such fruit (Gal. 5:22).

- C. How do we do that? We do it as we fulfill our spiritual duties to Christ from the heart; or (to say it another way) as our love for Christ finds expression in our obedience to him.
- D. Sanctification requires work. Paul's point is that we cannot be passive about our growth in Christ and expect to make progress. It requires energy. It requires initiative. It requires resolve. Listen, God is not going to obey for you.
- E. I want you to notice some important fact about the verb "Work out."
- Its in the Present Tense. That means we do it all the time. We never get to take a vacation from Sanctification. We never go on sabbatical from our pursuit of holiness.
  - Middle Voice: It is reflexive. In other words its something that I must do for myself. I must choose to do it.
  - Imperative Mood: It's a command. Its not a suggestion. Its not optional counsel. God is commanding us to Work Out our salvation.
- F. Commentator, William Hendriksen says, "Paul has in mind continuous, sustained, strenuous effort."<sup>2</sup>
- G. This is a command to maintain a continuous sustained effort toward Christ-likeness. It is a call to dilligently apply all the means of grace supplied by the Spirit of God. It's a command to take seriously the need to
- Read and meditate upon the word of God
  - To pray
  - To worship God in the community of his church
  - To tell unbelievers of the salvation Christ has purchased for them
  - To love our wives and train our children
  - To serve and and help and forgive and seek forgiveness preserving the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
  - To guard our purity and maintain our integrity.
  - And to battle against the sin that so easily besets us.

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<sup>2</sup> William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1996) 120.

4. You see, beloved, God has provided in salvation all that we need to successfully battle sin. John Piper, speaking about his own study on this passage in the light of his own warfare against temptation, wrote:

- “I saw afresh that the salvation that I was to work out was not only the large reality of total deliverance someday but the concrete reality of salvation from anger, salvation from self-pity, salvation from blaming, salvation from suliness. This verse takes on a different ring when you say, “Work out your salvation from (insert your common most common sin), etc...”<sup>3</sup>
- For the Philippians it was salvation from selfishness, conceit and pride. Perhaps for you it’s salvation from lust, or a sinful kind of people-pleasing, or materialism, or dishonesty, or laziness.
- Whatever the temptation and sin, this text exhorts us to “Work out your salvation in a way that kills your specific temptation and sin”

5. For you who struggle with lust this may mean following the A.N.T.H.E.M plan for battling that sin.

A: Avoid the sights and situations that bring temptation.

N: Say NO to every lustful thought within five seconds.

T: Turn your mind forcefully toward Christ as a superior satisfaction.

H: Hold the promise of God in your mind until it pushes the others images out

E: Enjoy the superior satisfaction of Christ and cultivate holy affections for God.

M: Move into useful activity away from idleness.

6. You may have to battle lust like this for 20-30 minutes before you’re free, but it’s worth it. And God won’t do it for you. You must take the initiative by faith in the power of Christ.

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<sup>3</sup> John Piper, *Act the Miracle*, Philippians 2:12-13  
<https://www.desiringgod.org/scripture/philippians/2/messages>  
February 24, 2011. Last visited April 13, 2018

(BTW: if you want the full version of the ANTHEM plan for battling Lust, just google John Piper Anthem, and you'll have it.

6. If your greatest struggle is entertainment, materialism, anger, or something else, you'll need to come up with a different plan. Just find a way to bring God's word to bear on your temptation and sin and don't hesitate to ask someone for help.
7. So we must Strive for Spiritual Growth Obediently and Rigorously?

### **III. We Must Strive for Spiritual Growth Reverently.**

1. Paul says, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling."
2. Why fear and trembling? Because God is blood- earnest about the way we live. He created us in His image specifically to show the world what God is like and what His gospel is like. The American evangelical community knows little about the fear of the Lord and reverence for his deity. We like happy-slappy worship services with man-exalting sermons designed to make us feel good about ourselves. But one day we will see Him face to face. And I believe on that day we will look back with disappointment as we discover how foolish we were. How self-focused. How shallow our love for Christ and how weak our devotion to Him, how tepid our concern for the lost.
3. God is not impressed with out weak and shallow commitment to Christ. Through the prophet Isaiah he tells us what does impress Him. He says (Isa. 66:2) "But this is the one to whom I will look: He who is humble and contrite in heart and trembles at my word."
4. What we need in the American church is a lot less laughter and a hundred megadoses of the fear of the Lord. Not a servile fear? Not a fear of being cast into hell. But a reverent, sobering fear that reflects an apprehension of His awesome holiness.
5. That would be sufficient motivation to take sin seriously, and pursue the graces of Christ with unflinching ambition and undaunted zeal.
6. And this brings us to the last point. We must strive for spiritual growth Obediently, Rigorously, Reverently, and...

#### **IV. We Must Strive for Spiritual Growth Expectantly:**

1. Look at verse 13, “For it is God who works in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”
2. You see the basis of our “fear and trembling” is NOT the threat of punishment but the gift of God. We tremble because it is such an awesome thing to realize that the Almighty God of the universe, the Creator of heaven and earth, the sustainer of all things and our eternal hope of glory has taken up residence within us.
3. Here is the great mystery of Salvation: “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” And why does he indwell us? He indwells us to give us the very things we so desperately need and won't have without Him. He gives us the will and empowers the work that he requires.
4. If you are a child of God today, you're not offended by this passage. It overwhelms you with joy! The commands of God are not burdensome to us because Christ is in us! Paul says, “For it is God who works in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”
5. This is the fulfillment of Jesus' promise. In John 14 He declared to His disciples, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever,<sup>17</sup> even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. (John 14:16-17)
6. Yes, we participate in our own sanctification. But we couldn't accomplish anything that produces growth in Christ if it weren't for the power of Christ igniting the will of Christ in our hearts.
7. Augustine prayed, “Lord, command what you will, but give what you command!” Why did he pray that? Because God has promised it. “He who did not spare His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how will he not also with Him freely give us all things?” (Rom. 8:32).

6. Oh beloved. Do you see what a privilege it is to belong to such a Savior and to own such a Salvation. So work it out! Work it out! With fear and trembling – to the glory of God and your own eternal joy!