

Work Out Your Own Salvation

- Phil. 2:12-13
- Paul has completed his powerful theological proclamation on the humiliation and the exaltation of Christ. Now he is going to answer the “so what does that mean for us” question. This is a very straightforward word today, even though I did get an email this week from one of you when I sent out the memory verse. He said something like, tongue in cheek, “Oh boy! Works-righteousness, here we come!” And you folks know your Bible better than that, as does he. We have already talked about Paul’s statement in 1:6, “that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” What a promise! And what a clear teaching on salvation. He began it. He will complete it. In the meantime, He is **bringing it to completion**. So, if God does all of it, the beginning, the middle, and the end, then I can live any way I want to. Right? It’s like when I got on that plane to go to Moldova. I didn’t start the plane. I didn’t fly the plane. I didn’t land the plane. The pilot and the plane did all the work, so I could do anything I wanted, right? No. I had to behave in a certain manner in order to assure that when the plane landed I didn’t get dragged off to a Moldovan jail. The person who says he has the grace of God and can live any way he wants to reveals that he has never understood the grace of God! The grace of God does not mean I don’t need to obey; the grace of God means that now I CAN obey. And I must. Paul has three points here that I want to focus on for a few minutes. We are called to obey, work, and trust.
- **Obey**
- Notice that Paul uses another ‘therefore.’ We always look at what precedes a therefore to see what it’s there for. And Paul has just explained the humiliation of Christ which hinged on his obedience to the Father. Jesus obeyed. He obeyed to the point of death. He obeyed to the point of death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and therefore, my beloved, we are to obey the Lord.
- Paul loves the church. He loves the people of Philippi, and he says as much when he calls them, my beloved. He loves them, and when you really love someone, you are willing to exhort them with strong words. My wife really loves me, and I know this because she is willing to tell me the truth. Even when it hurts. Even when she is afraid of my reaction, which has sometimes hurt her. I say that to my shame. Paul loves the church and so he says, as you have always obeyed, so now obey.
- Why should we obey? Because Jesus obeyed! How can we do anything less? How can we consider the cross, and still choose to obey only when we feel like it, or only when we agree with what’s being taught, or only when it’s convenient?
- When do we obey? Paul says, when I am present, but MUCH more when I am absent. It’s the whole question of what our character is really like, isn’t it? Do we only do what is expected of us when others are watching? Do we love Jesus with all our might...only on Sunday morning?
- How should we obey? Much more. You’re doing it. Keep on. Remember when you learned to ride a bike? Or if that’s too far back, as it is for me, remember when you taught one of your children to ride a bike? When they first got it, and they were able to keep their balance and pedal, you were doing what? Running alongside, yelling encouragement, “You’re doing it! You’ve got it! Keep going, keep pedaling! Watch out for the tree!” Learning to obey the Lord is like pedaling a bike, if we just start doing it and keep on doing it. When we stop, we fall over. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, “Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more.” (1 Thess. 4:1)
- **Work**
- Work out your own salvation. This phrase has caused many to stumble, and to make or build an argument for works-righteousness, and even to believe that what Jesus did was not enough. He needs my help. We know that’s nonsense, and the plain meaning of this text makes perfect sense, if you look at what Paul says, and what he doesn’t say. He says work OUT your salvation. He doesn’t say work in your salvation. Or work up your salvation. Or work for your salvation! No, we are to

work it out. In other words, what God has secured in you through His grace given on the basis of Jesus' sacrifice, work it out in every way and on every day. It's what we do in our marriages, right? Were you done when you said "I do"? No! Just getting started! And for the rest of your life, you are working out your marriage in fear! And with trembling! It's what we were teaching the men in Moldova, as we have taught here for many years. If you are working out your salvation as a father, it means you are learning to bring up your children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. You cannot learn that without starting to do it badly. You have to start. If you have started and stopped, you simply start again. Again, when my children were very young, they each had trouble learning to ride a bike. They fell. They scraped their knees. They cried. But they kept getting back on the bike until it became second nature to them. If you are working out your salvation as a student, it means you study. You work hard. If you are working out your salvation as a brother or sister in Christ in this family, it means that when you are offended, you don't hold onto that. You let it go quickly, and if you can't let it go, you go to the one who offended you and work it out.

- To that end, some have said that Paul is really speaking to the church here, corporately, that this is how the church is to conduct itself in a way that reflects obedience to Christ. And I think it is not either-or but both-and. The worship experience when we sing on Sunday morning is a corporate experience, but it is dependent on each of us coming with hearts ready to worship. The outreach we have as a church in the community, our winsomeness in making the Gospel attractive is a function of the body of Christ here, but it is also dependent on each one of us walking out a faithful witness to the Lord in public and in private. The unity we enjoy here at Antioch is not perfect; there will always be little skirmishes here and there because we are sinners. But our unity, the bond of peace we enjoy, is dependent on each of us working hard to be at peace with one another.
- Paul is going to expand on this idea as he moves forward, showing us how as a church and as individuals in the church are to work out our own salvation. "Do all things without grumbling or disputing," he says, in the very next passage. But the key word in this passage today is work. Tim Challies had a good word on this recently on his blog:
- "I want to have 10 percent body fat. I set that goal a while ago and even managed to get really close to reaching it. But eventually I found out that I want to have 10 percent body fat just a bit less than I want to have 13 percent. There's a key difference between the two: While 13 percent requires moderate effort to gain and retain, 10 percent requires strict discipline. I soon learned I just didn't want the goal enough to put in the effort to achieve it. I didn't meet my desire with discipline." Then he adds, "I often consider the people I've known who set an example of unusual godliness. I think of well-known Christian men who lived godly lives in the public eye and who carried out unblemished ministries. I think of unknown and unnoticed women who lived equally godly lives far outside the public eye. What did they have in common? What was the key to their holiness? I believe it was their discipline. They disciplined themselves for the highest godliness. They were spiritual athletes who ensured their highest desires supplanted their baser desires. They achieved godliness because they aimed at godliness."
- Colossians 1:29, "For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me." Who is doing the toiling? Paul. Who is struggling? Paul. How is he doing it? "With all His energy that He powerfully works within me." In that we trust.
- **Trust**
- This is an amazing truth in verse 13 that we must understand and believe and hold onto. It is God who works in us, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. The word in this verse is *energeo*, from which we get the word, 'energy.' It is God who energizes us, empowers us, enables us, strengthens us. He does it! Apart from Him, we can do nothing. But look! He energizes so that we can both want to do **and** do His will for His pleasure. Peter says it like this in **2 Peter 1:3**. Then in verse 5, "For this reason, make every effort..." God has given us everything we need. So, make every effort. Paul said to Titus, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled,

upright, and godly lives in this present age.” (Titus 2:11-12) God has saved us, and God is training us, but our part is to BE trained. We cannot do it without His power, but He will not do it without our obedience! Will it be hard? Yes. Will God do it for us? No. Will He help us? Yes. Are you struggling with putting away a particular sin in your life? The very fact that you are struggling to put it away and not just make peace with it is evidence that God is working in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure. Rejoice in that! Your Father loves you!

- Paul says, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. Most would say that means, with awe. Awe towards God. I like what Alistair Begg says here, and it’s worth writing in your Bible. “I am living where I am always visible....” There is never a moment in the day when any word, deed, thought or motive is invisible to God. “knowing that I am always understood...” You may think no one understands you. But God does. God has never misunderstood anybody or anything. Ever. “and rejoicing that I am always loved.” That’s the great mystery. Because if we knew what was in each other’s hearts, we wouldn’t be sitting here together this morning. God sees us and knows us, perfectly and loves us anyway. Perfectly. We can trust Him.
- Prayer: In your heart, name that area in your life where you are struggling to put away a sin, or to begin or maintain an area of discipline God has called you to. Thank God that He is working in you to want to do it. And receive His grace right now in the promise that He will help you do it.