

"Working Out" Your Salvation

Introduction

Perhaps you have heard someone say, "I'm saved; I just don't act like it." Or maybe you have heard a church leader insist that a person can be saved, live a "worldly" life, and still get to heaven. Is this really possible? The Scripture passage explored in this study answers this question.

The Verses

Philippians 2:12-13 (New International Version)

¹²Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed--not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence--continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

Philippians 2:12-13 (GOD'S WORD® Translation)

¹²My dear friends, you have always obeyed, not only when I was with you but even more now that I'm absent. In the same way continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling. ¹³It is God who produces in you the desires and actions that please him.

Philippians 2:12-13 (my translation)

¹²Dear friends, you have always obeyed, not only when I was present, but even more so when I was away. So, as you have done in the past, continue to do now: Work out your salvation with fear and trembling. ¹³After all, it is God who is working in you, not only enabling you to obey, but also enabling you to have the desire to obey!

Things to Think About - a Study guide

- According to v. 12, what key word characterized their actions and life? Does this word characterize *your* actions and life? Why/why not?
- How serious was their obedience? Did they obey when nobody was looking? How does *your* obedience compare to theirs?

The word "continue" is very important, for it refers to an *ongoing* activity. Salvation is not a "do something once in the past" event. It's a way of life.

- Look carefully at the words. Does this passage tell you to work "for" your salvation? "Working it out" doesn't *cause* salvation; rather is it the *expression* of its presence. (Some people misinterpret this and get things backwards.)

- What attitude must accompany the "working out" of your salvation? Why must this attitude be present (v. 13)? Do you have this attitude?
- Do you have an attitude of humility and an awareness of your complete dependence on God for salvation? Or do you have a lazy, careless attitude, confident that you can constantly ignore (and disobey) the King of Kings, and *still* be saved?
- What does God do in the life of the person he saves? Are those things happening in *your* life? You may claim you are a Christian, but if these things are not occurring in your life, what does this passage imply about your salvation?
- Is this command *mandatory* or *optional*? The apostle knew full well that they would obey it. (After all, God was working in them!) Are *you* going to obey it? Why/why not?

This passage shows us the interaction between God's sovereignty and human responsibility. These are separate concepts that *always* complement or parallel each other. It may be difficult for you to understand how they interact together, but that's OK. If you understand that these two concepts *never* go against each other, you will be able to focus on *your* obligations and let God "worry" about his! Do what he tells you to do and thank him for the power he gave you to do it. As you become more familiar with God's Word, you will learn more about how these concepts go together.

- According to these verses, what are your obligations? What are some ways you can fulfill them? (Some of the following questions may help you answer this.)

One of the ways these people were told to "work out" their salvation is seen in the context (the previous verses). Paul tells them what they must do, in verses 3-4, and then gives them an example to follow (Jesus), in verses 5-11.

- Since these verses were also written for us, what effort are you making, to obey the commands found in them? (If you weren't aware of these verses, what can you do to start obeying them?)

Other Scriptures command us to "strive" to make certain about our salvation. Why? Because *many* who claim to be saved will be surprised at the Day of Justice, when Jesus tells them, "Depart from me; I never knew you." A typical passage would be Luke 13:23-30. Look at the command in v. 24.

- Are you obeying this command, or are you just going to rely on wishful thinking, false hopes, and "luck" to get you into heaven?

Scripture also tells us *what* we must do to make our salvation certain. 2 Peter 1:3-11 is an example. We are first told that God has given us everything we need for life and godliness - v. 3-4. It is because of this, that we must "strive" to do the things mentioned, beginning in v. 5. (Since God has given us what we need, we have no excuse if we choose to *not* obey this command.) The passage ends with a promise that those who do these things will be saved. (There is *no* such promise for the person who claims to be saved, yet *doesn't* do them.)

- Read this passage. What are you doing to obey these commands?
- Based on your response to the above question, what does God say about your salvation?

Salvation is a serious matter. If, at the Day of Justice, you discover that you threw away God's free gift of salvation, by your unwillingness to "work it out," you cannot reverse the clock and try again. When you hear the words, "Depart from me," you cannot undo it. Never.

We haven't really examined the issue of "fear and trembling," but maybe you might want to look for other verses that deal with this issue. This isn't a fear that someone might have, when he is afraid that he will lose his salvation. Rather, it is the proper response that *all* should have toward the eternal, holy, infinite God - a reverential fear that is bound together with love.

- Read Psalm 2:11. What does this passage say about this issue?

Everyone is going to someday have a fear of God. The only issue is what type of fear it will be: a reverential fear mixed with love and joy, accompanied by mercy and forgiveness... or a horrifying fear mixed with the fire of justice. It's your choice.

Back to the issue of God's role in salvation. If God is working in your life, you *will* work out your salvation. If you haven't been doing so, it is because you love the world and what it offers *more than* you love God. You are unsaved and trapped in the world's way of thinking. You need to start praying that God will change your attitude about what the world offers - even the *good* things it offers.

- According to Romans 12:2, what needs to happen?
- Consider the example of Moses, in Hebrews 11:24-26. What was his view toward what the world offers? What is *your* view toward such things?

Salvation involves a radical change in your whole attitude about life, the world, and what you value. When you see the world's values for what they *really* are, and you begin to desire God's ways *more than* you desire the world's ways... then you will know that God is beginning to work in your life.

When you begin to *trust* God, you will begin to *obey* him. So when you see this happening, rejoice! Do what Philippians 2:12-13 tells you to do, and cling to God's promises. It is by his power that you continue to work out your salvation. And since he has promised to complete the good work he has begun (Philippians 1:6), you have nothing to worry about!