

**Working Hard But Taking No Credit**  
**Philippians 2:12-13**  
**Part 1**

I know that each of us, if we were totally honest as professing Christians, would say that there are certain things about ourselves that we would like to see changed. There are things in our lives that we don't want to be there but they are. And there are things we would want to be there but they are not. There are things in our lives that we would want to change. Things that would make our lives better and the lives of others, but who is responsible for those changes? Are we responsible for those changes? Or is God responsible for those changes? Another way of asking this question would be, "Is God responsible for our sanctification?" Or "Are we responsible for our sanctification?"

Philippians 2:12-13, the passage that we will begin to consider this weekend, addresses this question. Let us read these verses, **"So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling. (13) For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."** These two verses answer the question that I have asked.

If you are interested in becoming a better person, if you are interested in pursuing holiness, then you need to understand these verses.

How does this passage fit into the total context of the book of Philippians? These two verses introduce Paul's final appeal for professing Christians to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. In this final appeal to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, Paul will introduce to us three different concerns. The first concern is contained in **Philippians 2:12-13**, the verses that we have just read.

I would hope that as professing disciples of Christ, we would pay close attention to this final appeal and to Paul's specific concerns. I would hope that after we finish examining the first of Paul's concerns, we will be truly moved to give even greater attention to live a life of obedience and with even greater confidence.

His first concern is that they work out their salvation. Paul wants to make sure, in expressing this concern, that the professing believers at Philippi would not just sit on their hands and live a very passive Christian life. He does not want them to think that a life of holiness will just happen because they have professed faith in Christ. And in expressing this concern, he addresses the role that professing believers play in their sanctification. Let us read **verse 12**, **"So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling."** The key phrase in this verse is **"work out your salvation."**

Working out our salvation does not mean that we work for our salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9). No one will be saved through works. What does **Ephesians 2:8-9** tell us? **"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; (9) not as a result**

**of works, that no one should boast.”** How do we acquire salvation? Salvation is a gift of God and must be received as we would receive any other gift, which is by faith. Nothing else is required.

Hopefully everyone here this weekend has done this. Hopefully everyone in this room this weekend at some point in time in your life became convinced that you were a sinner and that you could not save yourself. Hopefully everyone in this room this weekend at some point in time recognized the miserable state that you were in, and desiring to be set free from sin and all of its consequences, reached out and took that gift believing that Christ, as the only begotten Son of God through His death on the cross, did for you what you could not do for yourself, which was to pay the debt of sin that you owed. If working out our salvation does not mean that we work for our salvation then what does it mean?

Working out our salvation means that we will exert the necessary effort to live out a life of obedience consistent with the gift of salvation that we have received. Look at how this passage begins, **“So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation.”** Paul was impressed with how the Philippians had sought to live their lives obediently when he was with them. And he is even more impressed with their effort to live their lives obediently since he left them. It would appear that when Paul was there in Philippi, it somehow limited them in the full expression of their obedience but after he left the full expression of their obedience was more prominently displayed. The same thing happens all the time today in the body of Christ; people step up when they have to.

When Paul left the Philippian Church and was ultimately imprisoned, the church needed to step up and they did. Rather than the church floundering, it prospered. Why? Because they were continuing to live out lives of obedience. Obedience is clearly on Paul’s mind when he speaks of working out their salvation and therefore we must understand this phrase in this way.

In various churches, when the pastor leaves, I have seen many churches flounder. Hopefully if something happened to the elders of Valley Bible, there would be a movement of the Spirit of God in the hearts of this church to do whatever was necessary to sustain and advance this work. And in doing this I believe that people could say the same thing about our church as Paul said about the Philippian Church. They not only obeyed when their leaders were present, but they obeyed even more after their leaders were no longer around to help them.

What kind of effort does he expect from the Philippians and from us? The verb “work out” (KATERGAZOMAI) is a present imperative and communicates a very strong and consistent effort. Paul is expecting that the Philippians would continually be exerting themselves to live out a life of obedience. We cannot be comfortable with a strong effort once in awhile or a half-baked effort most of the time.

Are we being passive in respect to obedience? In respect to working out our salvation? If you see that you are an impatient person, what are you doing to change it? What effort are you exerting to change?

What effort are you putting forth to put off the things that should not be there and put on the things that should be there? If your life is characterized by impatience, are you exerting the effort to search out the Scriptures for help? Are you committing those helpful passages to memory? Are you committed to examining your life carefully and prayerfully in light of what you are learning about patience from the Scriptures and taking positive corrective actions to become a more patient person? Are you making sure that if your impatience does express itself, that you avenge the wrong, asking for forgiveness when it is appropriate and doing whatever is necessary to correct the damage that you have done? Are you a negative, critical, judgmental person? What effort are you exerting in order to change? Are you searching out the Scriptures in the area of your weakness? Are you committing helpful passages to memory? Are you committed to examining your life carefully in light of what you are learning about a negative, critical, judgmental spirit and taking positive corrective actions to become a more uplifting and encouraging person? And are you making sure that if your negative, critical, judgmental spirit expresses itself, that you avenge the wrong by asking forgiveness when it is appropriate, doing whatever is necessary to correct the damage that you have done? What effort are you putting forth to put off the things that should not be there?

Let us go back to the original question that we asked. Based on what we have learned from **verse 12**, “Who is responsible for making us the people that God wants us to be?” Or saying it another way, “Who is responsible for our sanctification?” Based on Philippians 2:12, we are responsible for our sanctification, for living out who we are in Christ, and if we fail it is our fault (Exodus 14:10-16). If we fail to be patient it is our fault. If we fail to be a positive, supportive and encouraging person, it is our fault. It is no one else’s fault. It is not our wife's fault. It is not our husband’s fault, it is not our children's fault. It is not our parent’s fault. It is not our teacher’s fault. It is not God’s fault. It is totally and completely our fault.

I would like us to look at a very interesting story of deliverance in **Exodus 14**. In this story the children of Israel have just fled from Egypt and were being pursued by the Egyptian army. Now I would like to pick up the story in **verse 10**, “**And as Pharaoh drew near, the sons of Israel looked, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they became very frightened; so the sons of Israel cried out to the Lord. (11) Then they said to Moses, “Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt? (12) Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying ‘Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians?’ For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.” (13) But Moses said to the people, “Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the Lord which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. (14) The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent.**” At this point in time if I were to ask you, “Who is responsible for the deliverance of the nation of Israel?” How would you answer? I would think you would have to say, “God is totally responsible for the deliverance of the nation of Israel.” In fact he is so totally responsible for their deliverance that Moses tells the children of Israel to do what? “**Stand by and see the salvation of the Lord.**” Now isn’t this wonderful, all that they have to do is to simply stand there with their hands in their pockets and do nothing. The deliverance is totally the

responsibility of God and all they have to do is to make sure that they simply find a nice comfortable spot to station themselves while God works the deliverance. But this is not the end of the story.

Let us now go on to **verse (15), "Then the Lord said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to Me? Tell the sons of Israel to go forward. (16) And as for you, lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, and the sons of Israel shall go through the midst of the sea on dry land."** Yes, God was going to do something pretty spectacular, but it was fully dependent upon the children of Israel taking advantage of God's provision and exerting the effort to get from one side of the Red Sea to the other. God could have incinerated the Egyptian army but He chose not to do that. Rather He chose to put the children of Israel in a position to work out their own salvation. Let me ask you this question: if the people of Israel chose not to move forward, who would have been responsible for their failure? They would have been responsible.

And the same thing is true for us today. God may have provided us in Christ the opportunity in this life to become more and more like the person of Christ, to live a life of obedience, but we need to work at it. We need to work out our salvation. This is not something that should be ignored. It is very important. The importance of us responding to this command and therefore responding to Paul's concern has serious consequences. Let us again look at **verse 12**. But this time let us look at the very first word of the verse, "so then."

The particle "so then" at the beginning of verse 12 helps us to see that the command to "work out your salvation" is a Christian's necessary and proper response to the exaltation of Christ. Let us again read the verses that describe the exaltation of Christ but this time let us read the first phrase of **verse 12, "Therefore also (in light of the humiliation of Christ) God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, (11) and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."** Now read the first part of **verse 12, "so then"** in light of **Philippians 2:9-11**. In light of the exaltation of Christ we need to exert a strong consistent effort to live an obedient life. How can we confess Christ as Lord and say that we have bowed our knee to Him if this is not true of our lives? This understanding helps us to appreciate the next part of the verse.

Look at the verse again, **"So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling."** What does Paul mean by the words "fear and trembling?"

The word "fear" (PHOBOS) first had the meaning of flight, that which is caused by being scared; then, "that which caused flight." We get our English word "phobia" from this Greek word. This word in and of itself is a very strong word. But Paul wants to strengthen it even further. Look at the next word.

The word "tremble" (TROMOS) means "to shake involuntarily with fear, excitement, cold etc." We get our English word "trauma" from this Greek word. This word very graphically portrays to us the depth of the fear that Paul wants us to feel as we work out our salvation, or in other words,

as we live out a life of obedience. He wants us to feel this depth of fear because if we fail to manifest, by the way we live our lives, the necessary and proper response to the exaltation of Christ, which is the working out of our salvation, it puts the genuineness of our so-called faith in question and this can have some very serious and eternal consequences.

Listen to **Matthew 7:21-24**, “**Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. (22) Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ (23) And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’**” We need to work out our salvation with fear and trembling because we know that there will be those who in fact are self-deceived. We know that there will be those who think that everything is okay, based on certain religious activity, but who have failed to demonstrate that they have bowed their knee to Christ by their obedient lifestyle. We need, as the disciples of Christ, to take an obedient lifestyle seriously. We need to take it so seriously that the pursuit of it is accompanied with a healthy fear. You might think what I have just shared with you is an oxymoron. How can you possess a healthy, deep-seated fear of God?

Why would such a fear be healthy? Why would the fear of failing to live out a life consistent with our profession of faith be so healthy? It is healthy because it serves us. It is healthy because it makes our lives better, not worse. If this fear made our lives worse then it would be unhealthy.

But it does not make our lives worse; it makes our lives better. Our lives are better because the fear of failing to work out our salvation with its potential consequences helps us to do the very things we want to do and the consistent practice of doing these things give us the assurance of our ultimate salvation.

A healthy fear of the Lord is not a bad thing. It is a good thing (Psalms 34:1-9). The Psalmist had no difficulty understanding that the fear of God was a good thing. Listen to **Psalms 34:1-9**, “**I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. (2) My soul shall make its boast in the Lord; the humble shall hear it and rejoice. (3) O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together. (4) I sought the Lord, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears. (5) They looked to Him and were radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed. (6) This poor man cried and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. (7) The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them. (8) O taste and see that the Lord is good; How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him. (9) O fear the Lord, you His saints; For those who fear Him, there is no want.**” If I were to ask you this weekend, “do you fear God?” I would hope that you would say yes.

## CONCLUSION

Paul is giving to us a final appeal in his conclusion to the section of Scripture that we have entitled “walking in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.” In this appeal he expresses three concerns. The first concern is that we work out our salvation. His first concern is that we possess

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a healthy fear of the Lord and therefore, make a concerted effort on a consistent basis to live a life of obedience.

We need to love the Lord who died for us, but we also need to fear the Lord who has been exalted to the right hand of the throne of God and who has been entrusted with all judgment.