

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

We are presently examining Philippians 2:12-13. Let us read these two 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 address the issue of who is responsible for our sanctification. These two verses address the issue of who is responsible for making us the kind of people that God would want us to be.

This is the specific question that these two verses will address, but looking at the bigger picture, 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, a theme that was initially raised all the way back in Philippians 1:27. In this final appeal to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, Paul introduces to us three different concerns. The first concern is contained in the verses that we have just read.

What is Paul’s first concern? Paul’s first concern is that they work out their salvation. This is a very important command. It is something that obviously God wants us to do, but what does it mean? First of all as we made clear to you two weeks ago, working out our salvation does not mean that we work for our salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9). It is impossible for us to earn or merit our salvation since salvation is to be received as a gift from God on the basis of faith. But if working out our salvation does not mean working 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. Hopefully each of us this weekend who profess to be followers of Christ are actively putting forth the effort to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. Have you been doing this over the past two weeks? Are you putting out the effort to put off the things in your life that you know are displeasing to God? And are you putting out the effort to put on the things that are pleasing to God? Working out our salvation means that we are willing to exert the effort to become what we know we should be in Christ.

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. If I am impatient or angry, if I neglect the Word, prayer, fellowship or outreach, it is not my wife’s fault, it is not my children’s fault, it is not the church’s fault and it certainly is not God’s fault. It is totally 100% my fault. Why? Because I am completely responsible for my sanctification, for exerting the necessary effort to live out a life of obedience consistent with my salvation.

We not only learned two weeks ago what the command to work out our salvation meant, but we also learned that working out our salvation, putting out the effort to live a life consistent with the gift of salvation, is the proper response to the exaltation of Christ. This is why we see **V. 12** beginning with the conjunction “so then.” In light of the exaltation of Christ described in **VV. 9-11**, work out your salvation! In light of the fact that Christ has been exalted to the right hand of

the throne of God and has been given all authority and power including the right to exercise all judgment, Paul commands the Philippians to work out their salvation.

How are they to work out their salvation in light of Christ's exalted position? With fear and trembling. We work at many things. We work at getting an education; we work at getting, keeping and succeeding at our jobs; we work at finding, keeping, and nurturing various important relationships; sometimes the level of effort that we expend in the pursuit of these things can be rather impressive. But there is nothing that should be more important to us than responding to Paul's first concern, which was that professing Christians work out their salvation. The importance of this command is communicated to us very graphically by Paul when He commands the Philippians to work out their salvation with fear and trembling.

Why would we be so devoted to this effort that we would do so with fear and trembling? Because exerting the necessary effort to live out a life of obedience consistent with our salvation tells us whether we are saved or not saved. How do we know this? We know this from many passages in the New Testament, but we don't have to look any further than **V. 13**. And it is this verse that we will examine this weekend which will complete the thought that we began two weeks ago.

We have been asking ourselves the question, "who is responsible for our sanctification? Who is responsible for making us the people God would have us to be?" In looking at **V.12** we decided that we are totally responsible. That is only a partial answer. In order for us to answer the question completely we must now go to **V. 13**.

Let us again read these two 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.**"

Who is responsible for our sanctification? Verse 12 teaches us that we are. And verse 13 teaches us that God is. Based on Philippians 2:13 God is totally responsible for our sanctification and all the praise, honor, and glory for our success should go to Him. When we fail it is our fault and when we succeed it is to His credit.

I would hope that this truth will give us the balance necessary in order for us not to become despairing when we fail or proud when we actually succeed. Let us take a closer look at this verse.

We will begin by taking a look at the very first word. The word "for" ties **V. 12** with **V. 13**. The Philippian Christians are not left to themselves to achieve such a high spiritual goal such as working out their salvation. There is amongst them and in them an energizing force. Who or what is this energizing force? The energizing force that is amongst them and in them is God Himself. What did **Verse 13** say, "**for it is God who is at work in you.**"

God is the one whose power drives our sanctification (John 15:5). In fact, without God's

energizing power working within us, we could produce nothing that would be acceptable to Him. What does **John 15:5** tell us? **“I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing.”** His power propels us forward toward righteousness and away from sin.

How much power does He have? He has all power. He is the omnipotent God. Is there anything too hard for Him to do? And the answer is, of course not. What does the Scripture teach us? With God all things are possible (Matthew 19:26).

Who is responsible for our sanctification? Are we responsible? Or is God responsible? The answer is yes! This seems like a paradox. It seems like two conflicting thoughts. And I would certainly have to concede that it certainly seems to be this way at least from our perspective. But we need to understand that this is not the first time that this has happened in the Scripture.

Let me ask you a question. Is Jesus a man or is He God? The answer is what? Yes! He is 100% man and He is 100% God. How can this be? I don't know. It is the truth, but it is beyond the ability of man to fully understand.

Let me ask you another question. How many gods are there? There is only one God. Who is He? Is He the Father of Jesus? Or is He the only begotten Son of the Father? Or is He the Holy Spirit? The answer is yes! How can this be? I don't know. It is the truth but it certainly is beyond the ability of man to fully understand.

The same thing is true of our sanctification. Who is responsible? Philippians 2:12 tells us that we are totally responsible. And Philippians 2:13 tells us that God is totally responsible.

For some people these biblical paradoxes may cause them to question the validity of the Christian faith. But hopefully for us it does not cause us to question the validity of our faith but rather confirm it. Let me ask you a question: Can you project your mind to the beginning of time? Someone here might say, “Yes I can do that.” Well if you are one of those people let me ask you this question: What preceded the point in time where your mind has projected itself? I doubt if you will be able to tell me. Let me ask you another question: Can you project your mind to the end of the universe? Someone here might say, “Yes I can do that.” Well if you are one of those people, if you have projected your mind to the end of the universe, let me ask you a question: What is on the other side of where you have projected your mind? I doubt that you will be able to tell me. There is no one here who can fathom or put their arms around the concepts of infinity, whether that is in terms of space and time, and certainly we should not expect ourselves to be able to put our arms around a God who inhabits all of it. What does Isaiah 55:8-9 tell us? God is speaking and He says, **“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,” declares the Lord. (9) For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.”**

Yes, there are paradoxes presented to us in the Scriptures concerning the person of God and the work of God, but this should only cause us to marvel at His vastness, power, and glory. But let us not forget that it is this awesome, magnificent, glorious God who Paul tells us is at work in us.

What is God working in us to do? God is working in us to will and to work His good pleasure.

What is God's good pleasure? In the context of this passage God's good pleasure is that we would work out our salvation. It is God's desire for us as His children to personally exert the necessary effort to live a life of obedience consistent with the gift of salvation that we have received. This is what God is doing in us. How is God going about accomplishing this? There are two things that God will energize in us in order to accomplish His good pleasure. What are those two things?

If God is in us He will energize our will (John 6:45-65). What makes a Christian want to turn from a certain sinful behavior to a righteous behavior? It is the energizing work of God. If we have in fact embraced Christ as our Lord and Savior by faith and God is now presently in our lives, be assured of this, that He will be working in our lives in such a way that we will want to turn from sin to righteousness.

Every time we have this desire present in our lives to expend the effort to work out our salvation, we should be thanking God for this because that desire is truly the product of His work in our lives.

Someone might ask, "does God actually work in us to energize our wills?" Of course He does. Certainly, this is not the only place in the Scriptures that we see this. In fact we would never have desired to come to Christ in the first place if God had not worked on our behalf to make us willing to embrace His Son as our Lord as Savior. What does **John 6:45** say? **"It is written in the prophets, and they shall all be taught of God. Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me."** **John 6:65** says, **"For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father."** If God is not involved in energizing our wills, people will not have the effectual desire to come to Christ or to continue with Christ.

Is it possible for a true born again Christian to be indifferent about making positive changes in their lives? Is it possible for a true born again Christian to be indifferent about the pursuit of holiness, about the pursuit of sanctification? The answer is absolutely not. If you are here this weekend and you see this desire flourishing within your life it gives clear cut evidence that you are a child of God and that He is in your life. If you are here this weekend and you are a professing believer and you do not have this desire to work at making positive changes in your life, to pursue holiness then one of two things is going to happen. If you are a true born again believer, God will work in you to energize your will. He is going to do something to bring about a change of attitude. If you are not a true born again believer, you will not be looking at making positive changes in your life. You will probably continue to view yourself very favorably and puzzle over why everyone may not be as crazy about you as you are about yourself.

There are two things that God will energize in us in order to accomplish His good pleasure. First of all He will energize our will. What is the second thing?

If God is in us He will energize our work. What does the verse say? **“For it is God who is in you, both to will and to work His good pleasure.”** It is one thing for people to say that they want to do this or that, but it is quite another thing for them to expend the effort to accomplish this or that. But in the case of God’s work in the life of His children, we can be assured that not only will we desire to see changes, we will expend the necessary effort to bring about those changes. The verse does not say, **“For it is God who is in you, to will His good pleasure.”** The verse says, **“For it is God who is in you both to will and to work His good pleasure.”**

Do you have areas in your life that are troubling you? That seem to have a grip over you? Hopefully two things are true of your life this weekend. Hopefully you see a continuing desire to make positive changes in that area of your life and secondly you see yourself continuing to exert the necessary effort to bring about a positive change in that area of your life. These are the two things God will be energizing in the life of every born again Christian to bring about His good pleasure. These are the two things God will be energizing in your life in order for you to work out your salvation.

Will He be successful? And the answer is absolutely. What did Philippians 1:6 tell us? **“For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.”** We may not yet be perfect, but we are moving inch by inch in that direction.

Who is responsible for that movement? According to Philippians 2:12 we are completely responsible for that movement and if we fail it is totally our fault. According to Philippians 2:13 God is completely responsible for that movement and as we succeed He alone should receive the glory and the honor and the praise.

### CONCLUSION

How are we to work out our salvation according to Paul in Philippians 2:12? We are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. Why is this? Because working out our salvation is a litmus test of the genuineness of our faith. It is a clear testimony to us that God is in fact in our lives to will and to work His good pleasure.

If you are a child of God here this weekend, the working out of our salvation is not only assured but it will exceed our wildest expectations (Ephesians 3:20). Listen to the benediction that Paul gives at the end of Ephesians 3 after He has just prayed that they would be filled with all the fullness of God. **“Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundant beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, (21) to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.”**