



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Our Work and God's Work

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13

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Serving as an effective legislator or elected official is hard work. To start with running a campaign requires a great deal of effort. Then holding office calls for long hours and lots of travel. Serving effectively requires studying and understanding a large number and great variety of complicated issues. Serving your constituency calls for a profusion of phone calls and meetings. It all amounts to a lot of hard work.

Living as a good citizen of heaven requires hard work. The Christian life has been described as a battle, a race, and as a hard working farmer toiling in his fields (2 Timothy 2:3-6). How do we grow in our knowledge of God and His Word? How do we change and grow in our Christian lives? When we recognize and acknowledge a sin, weakness, or failure, how do we change? ***It requires hard work on our part, even as we depend upon God working in our lives.*** This enigmatic but vitally important truth is what Paul describes in our passage for study today:

¹²So 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; ¹³for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.
Philippians 2:12-13

Paul is dealing with issues of division in the Philippian church. He has exhorted the believers there to have unity in love and purpose. He challenged them to do nothing out of selfishness but to be humble and to regard others as more important than themselves. His pointed charge was to “have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:1-5). Paul then describes this attitude demonstrated by Christ as He left the glories of heaven, came to earth to suffer and die for our sins (vs. 6-11). We then see the grand exultation of Christ in verses 9-10. This is the truth Paul is referring to when he says “So then...” His mandate to “work out our salvation” is rooted in the truth of the gospel he had just shared. He is calling us to live in light of the suffering and exaltation of the Son of God.

We find here two truths: as believers, we are to work, and God is at work in us. Contemplating this will help us better live as citizens of heaven in this challenging world.

WORK OUT YOUR SALVATION

What does Paul mean when he exhorts us to “work out” our salvation? Paul did not say “work for your salvation”. He did not write “work towards your salvation” or “work at your salvation”. The Bible makes it clear that salvation comes only through repentance and faith in Christ, not by any work we might do.

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.
Ephesians 2:8-9

This opens up for us two different aspects of Bible truth which are vitally important for us to understand. These are the truths of ***justification*** and ***sanctification***.

Justification is the **once and for all act** by which God makes us right with Him through faith alone in what Christ has done for us on the cross. Our sins are forgiven, and Christ’s righteousness or goodness is credited to us, so that we might be saved, have a right relationship with God, and enter into His holy presence. This is when we become a citizen of heaven.

Sanctification is the **ongoing process** by which we grow in our Christian life and become more like Christ in our daily lives. This is “conducting ourselves in a manner worthy of our citizenship in heaven”. In our passage Paul is referring to the work and process of sanctification, of becoming more like Christ. He says to “work out” the salvation which is already possessed. The idea is to bring to completion or ultimate fulfillment. Earlier in his letter Paul encouraged them with the truth that God had begun working in them at the time of their salvation: ***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.*** (Philippians 1:6) He is encouraging them to “work out” that salvation, to bring it to completion and fulfillment as it is expressed in their lives and relationships.

BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATOR / ELECTED OFFICIAL BUDGET WEEK BIBLE STUDY

THURSDAY, MARCH 17 12:00 NOON TREASURER'S CONF. ROOM (EB 54 IN BASEMENT OF EAST WING)

Our Work and God's Work (Philippians 2:12-13)

Paul was encouraging the Philippian believers to “work out their salvation” in respect to the division and strife that was taking place in their church. This was due to pride, selfishness, and self-seeking on the part of at least two of their members (Phil. 4:1-3). They were saved; they were believers; and God was calling them to “work out” that salvation so that it was demonstrated in their relationships with each other.

When we repent, trust Christ, and become believers and citizens of heaven, our lives are not immediately transformed so that we are perfect like Jesus. While there may be some great immediate changes, we continue to deal with what is called remaining sin, or indwelling sin. The Bible also refers to it as “the flesh” or “the old man”. It may be pride and selfishness like in the Philippian church. It may be lustful thoughts and actions. It could be a short fuse and angry temper. Whatever the specific case, every believer will have to work to overcome these things until the day they die.

There are two ways we can strive to “work out” our salvation. The first is to work at doing away with these sinful habits and characteristics from our lives. This is spoken of as “putting to death” sinful things (Romans 8:13) or “putting aside” wicked attitudes and actions (Colossians 3:8). The second way we work is to avail ourselves of the tools God has made available for us to help us change and grow. We might refer to these things as the “means of Grace” God has provided for us. God commands us to live holy and righteous lives, and He has provided for the means to do so. He has given us ***His Word***, and it takes work to study it, learn it, and effectively apply it to our lives. He has given us ***prayer*** to help us grow closer to Him and seek His help, and it takes work to pray regularly and consistently. He has given us the ***fellowship of a local church*** where we hear the preaching of the Word and find encouragement and accountability from our fellow citizens of heaven. It takes work to be an active and effective member of a local body of believers, more than just attending church once or twice a week.

Paul says we are to work out our salvation “**with fear and trembling**”. This does not mean we live in some abject fear of God or worry about losing our salvation. It is talking about a humility and holy reverence in our pursuit of living for God. There is a real vigilance and circumspection in our lives as we consider the importance of becoming more like Christ. When we consider the exaltation of Christ, we realize the importance of putting these things into practice. Such an attitude will certainly help us as we seek to work out our salvation.

If you are at all like me, there have been times when you have recognized things in your life you have needed to change. You’ve made commitments, worked at some of the very things mentioned above, yet have struggled to see any real change or growth. Like me, you have become discouraged. That is when we can rejoice in the second truth Paul shares. We work out our salvation because **God is working in us.**

GOD IS AT WORK IN YOU

Paul shares an amazing and encouraging truth – that God is at work in the hearts and lives of His children. At the time of salvation the believer is given a new life and with it new desires. This is what Jesus referred to as being “born again” (John 3:3-8). We see this as Paul shares that God is at work in us both ***to will*** and ***to work*** for His good pleasure. That we even have a desire to live a life that is pleasing to God is a testimony to the work of Grace in our lives. We work out our salvation because God is working in us.

This presents us with a kind of paradox with which we will struggle to understand and practice. We are exhorted to work, but we can only do so because God is working in us. There is both human effort, and reliance upon God’s work. Christian growth requires our most strenuous effort but is nonetheless totally dependant on God’s power.

CONCLUSION

We could easily take pages considering and discussing what this truth means to us, that we have a responsibility to work yet we are totally dependent upon God’s work in our lives. Let us just close with a few principles that might help in thinking further about this amazing passage.

- **GOD GETS ALL THE GLORY FOR ANYTHING THAT CHANGES OR IS ACCOMPLISHED IN AND THROUGH OUR LIVES.**
- **WE MUST CONSCIOUSLY LIVE IN A STATE OF CONSTANT DEPENDENCE UPON GOD.**
- **WE ARE TO PURSUE GOOD ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS IN A SPIRIT OF JOYFUL DEPENDENCE UPON GOD’S HELP.**