

WORK OUT

Whew! The Apostle Paul is an amazing wordsmith. His "hymn of Christ" about humility in Philippians 2:5-11 leaves you breathless. He means to. And he means to spur you on to follow Christ, in every way...

So in verses 12-13 he writes, ***"therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."***

The "therefore" is there for all the things he wrote in verses 5-11. Specifically in 2:9 he said, "therefore, God" -- referring to God's response to the humility of Christ, who obeyed Him to the point of death. Now He says, "therefore, you." Why? Because for those who have put their trust in Christ alone for salvation, Jesus is not only our example, but our very life-source and life power. We should obey as He obeyed.

Paul appeals to apostolic authority as he encourages his beloved Philippian friends to follow Christ. No longer with them as pastor, he writes from prison as mentor and coach, about humble obedience.

So he says ***"work out your own salvation."*** Is this puzzling? We know salvation is by faith, not by works. Paul proclaims in Ephesians 2:8-9: ***"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works."***

So what does Paul mean here in Philippians? The meaning of words is always determined by context. Paul's next words clarify the context. He says work "with fear and trembling." Ahh, he's painting a word picture of an obedient servant, following Christ's example in verses 5-11.

Paul uses the same fear-and-trembling phrase in Ephesians 6:5 as he admonishes bondservants to obey their masters. In Philippians 1:1 he refers to himself and Timothy as slaves of Christ. The phrase conveys humbling yourself before someone greater, with rights over you.

Ephesians 2:10 continues the same thought when it says ***"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."*** So if we are saved, then we are to strive to please our Master to whom we belong. He bought us, redeemed us by paying the penalty for our sins. If you're saved by Christ, your new moment-by-moment reality is no longer your own personal pursuits, but rather to fulfill the purpose of your Master.

Here in Philippians, Paul says it this way, ***"work out your own salvation, with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."*** This also echoes what he wrote in his introduction -- words of eternal encouragement, that come what may, God's purposes would surely be fulfilled. In Philippians 1:5 he says, ***"I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion."***

If you are saved, remember the three tenses of salvation. Scripture says you have been saved, and you are being saved, and you will be saved. Salvation past tense is your "justification." It's being "in Christ" from the moment of being made right with God by putting your faith in Jesus Christ alone. Salvation present tense is your "sanctification." It's "Christ in you" for the synergistic process of becoming more Him through the sufferings of life. Salvation future tense is your "glorification." It's the completion which occurs when you enter eternity, "with Christ" in His presence forever.

So verses 12-13 tells you not how to be saved, but rather how to live as a saved person. God began this good work, so since you have been saved by Christ, then work out this salvation as God works in you. He gives both the "want to" and the "how to" as the Holy Spirit works *in* you and *through* you and *for* you.

God keeps His promises. He works in you as you work out. So, let's get to work!