

## **Side By Side: Gospel Partnership in Philippians**

### **Work Out Your Salvation**

By [David Strain](#)

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#### **Philippians 2:5-13**

Now would you take your copies of the Scriptures in your hands and turn with me to Paul's letter to the Philippians, chapter 2. Philippians chapter 2. We're going to read from verse 5 through verse 18. You'll find that on page 980 in God's Word. Before we read, let's turn to Him together as we pray. Let's pray together.

*To whom else can we turn, Lord? You have the words of everlasting life so we come to You asking for mercy, asking that You would meet us and deal with us. Where our hearts are resistant and proud, would You humble us? Where we are backsliding, would You arrest us in our flight from You and bring us back? Where we are downcast, discouraged, would You so fill our eyes with the solidity and dependability of Your promises that our fears might be replaced with confidence? Where we have grown weary in well-doing, would You show us again Your promise to reward those who do not grow weary or faint and to remind us of the one who for the joy set before Him endured the cross and scorned its shame and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty On High that we might not grow weary but might indeed run our race with perseverance? Come to us. You know the array of the needs of our hearts. Speak Your Word to them with power to make us like Your Son, to call us out of darkness and into His light, and in all to get glory and honor to His name. For it is in His name we pray, amen.*

Philippians chapter 2 from verse 5. This is the inerrant Word of Almighty God:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

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.

Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

Amen, and we praise God that He has spoken to us in His holy and sufficient Word. May He write its truth on all our hearts.

### ***Therefore: The Christian Life in light of the Glories of Christ***

Paul, in verses 5 to 11, has been turning the diamond of the person and work of Christ and showing us the facets of how He is and what He has done. And in our passage this morning, in verses 12 to 18, we're going to see the implications of those rich and wonderful truths. Paul's concern is that we understand that the Word of God in general and the truth about Christ in particular has implications. It should be transformative. There's always a "therefore" after every glimpse of Christ. Our Puritan forbearers certainly understood that truth. William Perkins famously defined theology, the study of Biblical truth, as "the science of living blessedly before God." Archbishop James Usher, whose catechism influenced the writing of *The Westminster Standards* asks, "What do you call that doctrine which showeth the way unto everlasting happiness?" And his answer is, "It is commonly terms theology," or divinity - the study of the Word of God. "The way to happiness," he says, "is to be steeped in Biblical truth." The way to live the blessed life is to understand the "therefore" that is consequent upon the study of Jesus as He comes to us in the pages of Holy Scripture. And that is very much Paul's concern in verses 12 to 18.

Look at the first word of verse 12. Having shown us who Jesus is, having turned the diamond of His person and work and displayed its glory in a breathtaking manner in verses 5 to 11, he now says to us, "Therefore." "Therefore" - there are implications; there are consequences. Therefore seeing who Jesus is should change you in the following ways. There's always a "therefore" with every glimpse of the beauty and the glory and the grace of the person and work of Christ. In particular there are three things he shows us in this passage that follow from a clear view and a firm grasp of Christ as He's being presented to us in this passage.

## **I. Work**

And the first of them you'll find in verses 12 and 13. "Therefore, my beloved, as you've 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 first thing Paul says a true knowledge and grasp of the glory and grace of Jesus should promote and produce in our hearts if we're Christians is work. You see that word repeated again and again in those two verses. "Work out your salvation for it is God who works in you to will and to work for His good pleasure." Work is the product, the fruit of a firm grasp of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. And for Paul that really is another word for obedience. Look at the text again. "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now work out your salvation." Obedience is what it means to work out your salvation, to live out the reality of the saving grace of God in your life. Obedience and growing in personal godliness, for Paul, is not a matter, whatever Fannie Crosby says to the contrary, it is not a matter of "perfect submission, perfect delight." It is hard, relentless work. "Work out your salvation." There are no passengers carried along passively by the Holy Spirit who arrive at holiness without sweat and labor and diligence, daily effort. "Work out your salvation." It is not an effortless endeavor, the pursuit of holiness. It's hard work. You must work, Christian. That is the first thing to say about a clear grasp of the glory of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

How should you respond after you have trusted in Jesus to save you? You must labor for His glory by seeking obedience to His Word. "Whose fault is it if believers are not holy but their own?" asks J. C. Ryle. "On whom can they throw the blame if they are not sanctified but themselves? God, who has given them grace and a new heart and a new nature, has deprived them of all excuse if they do not live for His praise. This is a point," writes Ryle, "which is far too much forgotten. A man who professes to be a true Christian, while he sits still, content with a very low degree of sanctification if indeed he has any at all, and coolly tells you he can do nothing," Ryle says - these are Ryle's words not mine - "he is a very pitiable sight and a very ignorant man." Those were blunt days. "Against this delusion," says Ryle, "let us watch and be on our guard. The Word of God always addresses its precepts to believers as accountable, responsible beings." Listen to this now. "If the Savior of sinners gives us renewing grace and calls us by His Spirit, we may be sure He expects us to use our grace and not go to sleep." Paul here is seeking to awaken slumbering Christians who think the Christian life is a passive thing. He's seeking to awaken us to the reality that is a life of hard labor for the honor of Jesus who gave all for us, who held nothing back, who poured Himself out that we might be His own. Salvation is something we must work out, Paul says.

### **With Fear and Trembling**

And more to the point, we're to do it, notice, "with fear and trembling." Now there's two dangers we need to avoid as we think about fear and trembling. There are those who have such paltry, slight views of God that they have no categories by which to make any sense at all of this language of "fear and trembling." Their view of God is of some tame, safe, kindly, benevolent, indulgent even, Being who never demands too much, who never challenges or presses us to change our ways, whose always there to bail us out when we need Him, who smiles benignly upon us and rolls His eyes indulgently as we make mistakes along the way. Fear and trembling before such a God, fear and trembling is inconceivable. And then on the other extreme, there are those of us who have such exalted views of the glory and purity and sovereignty and holiness of God yet we've scarcely grasped the tenderness of the Father's heart towards us in Jesus. We hear these words, "fear and trembling," and we think what Paul means is that we're to be so afraid that God might wash His hands of us that we seek to stay in line with commands of Scripture, seek to stay obedient to His requirements of us lest at a moment's notice He will dismiss us and be done with us forever. We are to be scared of Him.

But do you see both of those are horrible distortions of the character of God? What Paul has in mind here, rather, is the fear and trembling of the heart of a child who knows they are beloved and who loves Abba Father and for whom the worst thing imaginable is grieving the love of their Father whom they adore. The worst thing is grieving Him who gave His Son for them. And so here is reverent, holy, childlike, trembling awe before the God who is infinite in holiness and infinite in mercy and tender love. Nothing grieves us more than the thought of trampling on His love for us with the careless indulgence of our sinful passions. That's what Paul has in mind. Work out your salvation and do it understanding as a child of God, that His love for you, His grace for you never indulges your sin but makes sin all the more horrid and despicable and ugly. How, seeing that He has loved us with such infinite perfect love, can we continue to live our lives as though they were our own to do with as we please? Doesn't the love of God make sin all the more sinful, all the uglier, before the brightness of the smile of His face such that the more we see that smile, the more we taste of His love, the more we loath the sin that continues to fester in our hearts. "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling."

### **The God Who is at Work in You**

That's our responsibility, but before we move on do notice how Paul balances that strong exhortation to diligence and effort and labor. Holiness is our calling, it is our responsibility, it is our duty, and yet we're to do it not in our own strength or power alone. We are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling "for it is God who works in you to will and to work for His good pleasure." The power to obey does not originate with you. Praise God, right? Praise God. What a comfort it is to know that He supplies strength and grace so that the holiness that is my

calling, my responsibility, my duty is also His promise and His commitment and His pledge to me. He will strengthen me so that I can say “No” to sin and “Yes” to godliness so that walking in paths of new obedience is possible for the child of God. You can obey. And if you are His child you will obey; you will gain the victory by His grace. That is His promise to you. Think of it now as you’ve battled day by day with besetting sin, often stumbling, often failing, often finding yourself wondering, “How can I be here again?” God says to you, “I am at work in you. I am working in you to will and to work for My good pleasure. I will not desert you to the predations of the enemy, to the power of remaining sin. I will not desert you. I am working in you and I will ensure one day you will gain the victory.” What an incentive and an encouragement it is to press on, not to grow weary in well-doing, knowing that the resources we have to bring to bear in our combat with sin do not define the limits of our victory. No, no, the resources of God, the resources of omnipotent might guarantee that our victory will one day be complete; not partial, but perfect. We will be made like Christ, therefore, brothers and sisters press on. You will cross the line. You will win the prize. He will bring you home. Do not grow weary in well-doing. So work. That’s the first thing Paul says.

## **II. Witness**

Then the second thing he says is that there is an implication of knowing and grasping who Jesus is. It has to do with effective witness. Work, now witness. Verses 14 to 16. “Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation.” Here’s what holiness should look like, particularly as it is lived out within the context of the fellowship of the people of God. Paul has, again and again, been pointing us to the call of God to unity and to mutual love and he reminds us of the mind that is ours in Christ - His humility and selflessness and servant-heartedness. And we are to have the same attitude among ourselves that is ours in Him.

And here he emphasizes those points again. Grumbling and complaining are awfully easy to do, aren’t they? Keeping our mouths closed and patiently serving even when things go wrong, even when we do not agree, even when there are tensions and differences, that’s a challenge; that’s hard to do. But notice what Paul says when we begin to do it, when we put others before ourselves, when we humble ourselves and become obedient as our Master before us has done - look what happens. He says, verse 15, “you will be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish, in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.” People begin to notice when Christians look more and more like Jesus, when they love one another with patience and humility, when they replace grumbling and complaining with words of encouragement and faithfulness, when they speak the truth of God to each other, encouraging one another and all the more as they see the day approaching. A

crooked and twisted generation see bright lights begin to shine. It's Paul's version of Matthew 5:14-16. In the words of our Lord, "You are the light of the world. Let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." It's both a challenge and also immensely exciting, isn't it? Holiness can't be hidden from the watching world. People will notice when you give yourself to living for Christ.

### **Holding Forth Jesus, the Word of Life**

There's another dimension, of course, to our witness. It's here in this text. Look at it again. We must live a life of humility and service and unity and compassion with one another but also we are to "hold fast the word of life." We shine as stars when we do both, when there's the life and also when there are the words. A better translation probably is, "holding out the word of life" or "holding forth the word of life." We shine as stars when we live in unity and fellowship and love for one another, all men seeing that we are Christ's disciples by our love for one another, and when we open our mouths to hold forth the word of life. Francis of Assisi, remember, famously said, "Go into all the world and make disciples and use words if you have to." Terrible, terrible advice! "Go into all the world and make disciples and use words if you have to" - there never was a disciple made who did not hear the words of eternal life. There is not a soul in heaven who did not repent and believe the Gospel because they heard good news. There's not one there, nor will there ever be one, who came to Jesus simply because someone else lived a holy life. They must understand why you live such a life, for whom, and by whose power you have been changed. You must point them to Jesus. You must hold forth the word of life.

Matthew Henry writes, "It is our duty not only to hold fast but to hold forth the word of life. Not only to hold it fast for our own benefit but to hold it forth for the benefit of others. To hold it forth as a candlestick holds forth the candle which makes it appear to advantage all around, or as the luminaries of the heavens which shed their influence far and wide." Are you a candle, he's saying, shining in a dark place among your friends and your family, speaking about Jesus and living for His praise? Are you a bright star, giving light in the nighttime of your college dorm, in your office environments? Does your character and your confession match? Does your life and your message cohere? Or are you so afraid to speak for Jesus because frankly you barely seek to live for Him? You don't want anyone looking at your life. The answer to that, brothers and sisters, is not to refrain from speaking but to repent your backsliding and seek grace available to you to walk in new obedience and then open your lips to speak for the name and renown of Jesus. Work, then witness.

### **III. Worship**

And then finally the third component Paul highlights for us as part of a faithful

response to the person and work of Christ that he's been showing us is worship. Work, then witness, then worship. Verses 16 to 18. Paul is talking to the Philippians about his ministry. He does not want to have labored in vain. He's seeking to leverage by every means he can, every legitimate leverage he has to bring to bear on the Philippians he is using to promote in them a life of fruitful obedience. And he says to them, "I've been laboring. And you say you love me? Well then won't you obey? Won't you work out your salvation with fear and trembling?" He would say to you, "How many pastors have you had? How many men of God have preached the Word of God and for how many years have you heard the good news about Jesus proclaimed? For how long has this congregation been under the sound of Gospel proclamation and faithful, Biblical exposition? One hundred seventy-seven years!" Paul would say, "Please be sure that their labors have not been in vain. Produce fruit in keeping with righteousness. Believe the Gospel and live for God's glory. Oh, make certain that those who have been set over you in the bonds of pastoral ministry do not labor without fruit to show when the great day dawns." That's Paul's concern.

### **Worship: An All-of-Life Attribute**

And as he does, he says to them, he describes his ministry, doesn't he, as "a drink offering that's being poured out." He's using a word borrowed from the Old Testament sacrificial system to describe an act of worship. It's extraordinary. What he's saying is, "This life of ministry, given entirely for the good of the church of Jesus Christ and the glory of Jesus' name, is itself an act of worship." And he wants the Philippians to join him in making a similar act of worship that covers the whole of their lives. Look at the passage again. Verse 17 - "Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you should be glad and rejoice with me." He wants their faith and his life together to be an offering that brings honor and glory to God. I am persuaded that the Scriptures command the people of God to gather Sabbath Day by Sabbath Day to offer worship regulated according to Holy Scripture. There is a distinctive Lord's Day worship requirement resting upon the people of God. And yet that doesn't mean that our whole lives are not to be acts of worship. In fact, I think Paul would say to us when you gather on the Lord's Day for worship, if worship really does not characterize your whole life, if you're not seeking to live to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, how can you hope to do so when you take His name on your lips in praise on the Lord's Day? You may go through the motions on the Sabbath Day morning, but if you're not seeking to live consistently for His praise Monday to Saturday it may well be that you will find all your praises and prayers are empty, hollow things before God with whom you have to do when you offer them on His day. Paul wants all our lives as well as the work of an hour on the Lord's Day to be given up to God in worship and in praise.

## Godliness and Gladness

And notice as we conclude that Paul says that such a life is a life of profound joy. Godliness and gladness are ordinarily connected. This is not a life of austerity and morbidity and regret, thinking of all the pleasures we have forfeited as we've sought to live for Jesus' praise. Not at all! Paul says, "As I pour out my life in seeking to be obedient to the call of Jesus upon me, and as I urge you Philippians to do the same, such a life is the good life. Such a life is a life of gladness and joy. I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me." The happy life and the holy life ordinarily go together. True joy and true godliness ordinarily go together. You rob yourself of deeper joys when you forsake obedience for the fading pleasures of the worldling.

So there is a "therefore" that always follows every glimpse of Christ in the Gospel. There are implications. For Paul here, those implications have to do with work - work out your salvation resting on the promise that God is at work in you to will and to work for His good pleasure. It has to do with witness - as you live for Him people begin to notice. And it has to do with worship - this life to which He calls us is a life that brings pleasure to God, brings glory to His name. It is itself worship in which He is exalted and honored. And such a life is a life suffused with joy. Who would not want such a life? May the Lord be gracious to us to give this life to us all by His grace and for His glory. Let's pray.

*Our Father, we praise You that You love us and have given Your Son for us who, having bled and died instead of us, now reigns at Your right hand and by His Spirit is at work in us to will and to do for Your good pleasure. In the strength such a promise provides, would You send us from this place to work and witness and worship for Your glory. In Jesus' name, amen.*

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