

Work Out Your Own Salvation

Samuel Clemens wrote, in true Mark Twain style, "Few things are harder to put up with than a good example."

Sometimes good examples can be a pain, because while they inspire us on one hand, they frustrate us on the other.

The most annoying thing about a good example is that a good example alone can't change us. We might admire some great person and their story might inspire us, but it can't empower us to be great too. It takes more than an example on the outside, it takes power on the inside.

Obviously for a Christian the greatest example of living is Jesus Christ himself.

The New Testament book of Philippians uses the example of Jesus to challenge us to Christian unity. Being believers makes us all part of the same family. *Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.* (Philippians 2:1,2)

Almost every New Testament book repeats this theme over and over again.

Christians are to be characterized by love. But Christians are human beings. They're children of Adam as well as children of God so they tend to have a problem with maintaining that love.

Jesus said, *This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.* (John 15:12) He gave us His own example. The writer of Philippians said, *Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.* (Philippians 2:5) Again we're given the example of Christ.

We read about Jesus humble, loving example and we agree with it. But how do we go about practicing it? How could any of us mere mortals, ever hope to achieve what Jesus Christ achieved?

It almost sounds presumptuous to even try to imitate Jesus. Warren Wiersbe writes,

“Here we are, trying to develop humility, and we seem to be exercising pride by thinking that we could imitate the Lord Jesus Christ.”

What were going to see today is how Philippians 2:12-16 teaches us to use the example of Jesus in our lives.

Open your Bible to Philippians chapter 2, page 1043

As we go through these verses today I want you to pay real close attention to what the Bible says here. It's in this passage that we are giving the two sides of our own Christian experience.

We're given man's side and God's side. I honestly believe that more Christians get into trouble because they take one half of this truth and neglect the other side.

I. The Bible Commands Us To Live Out Our Christian Faith

If we know Jesus Christ as Savior that's supposed to translate into a godly life. There are many clear verses that tell us that the Christian life is God's work in us.

Hebrews 13:20 *Now the God of peace make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight.*

II Corinthians 4:7 *But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.*

Galatians 2:20 *I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me.*

So there's a real stress on God's power and God's working. But then there are other verses which sure seem to say that we have the responsibility to do the work ourselves.

In Ephesians 4 we read commands like, stop lying, don't steal, deal with your anger, speak the right words

Colossians 3:8 *But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.*

So what you end up with is both of these concepts, God's power and our responsibility, being clearly taught. And what we have very often is people gravitating to one extreme or the other. That seems to be our human nature.

I've heard sermons and read articles where people have taught that since it is God who works and we are insufficient to do anything of ourselves, then somehow we have to step back and let God produce holiness in us.

They often use the illustration of the hand and the glove. We're supposedly like a glove. A glove in and of itself can't do anything, right? Put a glove beside a piano and what happens? Nothing.

But now let a pianist put her hand in that same glove and suddenly the glove is capable of making beautiful music. The sufficiency isn't in the glove. It's in the hand that empowers the glove.

So then like gloves on a hand we simply sit back and let God work through us to produce righteousness and good works.

And then out of this grows all kinds of other ideas about a second work of grace and God instantly making us holy through some kind of experience and a viewpoint that says sit back and watch God do it all.

Now there's some real problems with that view so some people want to jump to the opposite extreme.

They pick up on the human responsibility side of the scriptures and emphasizes human works exclusively. And so there's this constant push to get out there and work for God. To get it done as if it all depended on us.

Never forget this. Satan is satisfied if you are imbalanced in life. Satan loves to push us to extremes because when we pick up on one teaching of the Bible to the exclusion of a corresponding teaching we're neglecting a whole area of God's truth and we even end up misunderstanding the part we overemphasize.

Here's what I've noticed. Those believers who only focus on the verses that talk about God, the Holy Spirit's working in our lives, seldom get much done for God. They become very introspective and caught up with their own Christian life and their experience with God, but not much practical work gets done for the Lord.

On the flip side, those Christians who only view the scriptures as teaching our human responsibility to serve the Lord are usually very busy but eventually they burn out. The Christian life isn't something we live by our own steam and if you've ever tried it for a while you know how frustrating it can be.

And so we have this tension in our lives. Is it Christ living His life out through me, or am I supposed to go get busy and serve him? Is it the power of the Holy Spirit or is it the power of Ed Regensburg?

So, I want you to notice some thing as we look at our passage for today. The Bible treats these two truths as indivisible. Don't let that throw you. It's like God knows all but we still pray. God is sovereign in salvation but we still tell people that they have to believe in Christ. Don't ever let theological questions get in the way of your serving God.

In verse 12 we're going to see the human side. The part that involves our own effort. Verse 12 says, *work out your own salvation*.

And then in verse 13, right on the heels of verse 12, we get the other side, *because it is God who works in you*.

As almost contradictory as those two principles seem, God puts them side by side. The Bible doesn't emphasize one and neglect the other.

And what God was telling us, through the pen of one of His apostles named Paul, was that there's a real relationship between the two. Both are important for us to understand. And to emphasize one without the other will only lead to frustration and failure in our lives.

Paul begins in verse 12 by commanding the Philippians to live out their Christian faith and so he writes... **Read verse 12**

One of the cardinal rules of biblical interpretation is always read verses in their context. When people say things like, "You can prove most anything from the Bible, they're usually isolating verses from the others.

A second cardinal rule is to pay attention to basic grammar.

So many times I've heard this verse been wrenched out of its context and forced to mean work "for" your own salvation. Reading it that way would turn the whole message of the Bible upside down.

It would imply that although God is holy and 100% righteous, He knows that no one will be as holy as He is so He only demands partial righteousness from people. Maybe 50% or 47% , whatever.

People who see forgiveness from God in these terms take this verse as a statement that salvation, or eternal life, can be earned so we have to work for it.

But this verse doesn't teach anything like that. There are over 150 verses in the Bible that teach that eternal life comes by faith.

God never lets down His standard of Holiness, it's as perfect as He is. Rather He came to earth as Jesus Christ, took on flesh and died on the cross to take the punishment that his own holiness requires.

God himself, because of His own righteous character, had to punish sin. He had to say, *the wages of sin is death* but then He chose to make the sacrificial death payment for sin Himself.

That way He hasn't lowered His standards of holiness and justice, but He's still free to show us love when we trust Him for our forgiveness.

Notice this verse doesn't say, "work for, toward, or at your salvation."

The Bible says, *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.* (Ephesians 2:8)

You can't earn a gift, or it's not a gift. And because salvation is a gift then we know for sure there's something that won't be in heaven. Ephesians 2:9 says, *not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

Working out your salvation is like me giving you a plot of land and telling you to "work it." If I give it to you it's yours, but if you don't work it, all it will produce is weeds, not crops. If you do work it, it will produce a fruitful harvest.

The farthest thing from Paul's mind, as he's writing this letter to the Christians in Philippi, is the idea of working for salvation. Instead he's saying something very different.

What he's doing is giving the Philippians the human side of their responsibility in the Christian life.

Notice verse 12 starts with the word "wherefore." NIV "therefore" NASV "so then."

Verse 12 is drawing a conclusion from what in the first 11 verses. And verses 1 - 11

has nothing to do with salvation.

This is why we have to read verses in their context. The theme has been the example of Jesus Christ in humility. The example of Christ as He laid aside His glory to come to planet earth. Jesus laid down His life for us and we're to follow His example and give of ourselves for one another.

And the conclusion that Paul draws is now, in light of the example of Christ, work out your own salvation, work out the position you have because of salvation.

If we are saved, if we're forgiven, we're called to be Christ-like. We're called to have His mind. That means we're supposed to have the same view of life. Christ was a humble servant. He prioritized the glory of the Father above Himself. Therefore, to work out your salvation means to live out a Christ-like, humble life.

If you've trusted Christ as Savior your position is perfect in Christ so practice your position.

Remember, these people were saved long before Paul wrote this letter to them. He addressed this letter to the saints in Philippi.

He obviously wouldn't be challenging non-Christians to have the mind of Christ. That would be absurd and so he's not calling on his readers to do something in order to be saved, but to do something because they are saved.

That's context and now here's basic grammar.

The verb translated "to work out," *katergazomai*, carries the meaning of "work to full completion." In the NIV it's often translated "accomplished," "achieved," "produces."

Katergazomai was used to describe getting all the gold or silver out of a mine. This would have conjured up a lot of familiar imagery to the Philippians since Philippi had been a mining center for years and was honey combed with gold and silver mines. The goal that God has is to make us like Jesus. Romans 8:29 says He's conforming us to the image of His Son. That comes from working out our salvation. Mining it to get every bit of value from it.

Now that's the human side of the Christian life. It's something that we are commanded to do.

The action is "work out your own salvation." Practice the unity your salvation speaks of. Practice the humility that we have Jesus' example of.

And we're given the attitude we should have. We're to work it out with "fear and trembling."

Paul used the terms "fear and trembling" at other places and I'd like you to see how looking at those give us a basic idea of the meaning.

First there's **I Corinthians 2:1-5 Page 1012**

Here he's saying, "when I came to Corinth to preach the gospel to you who had never heard of Christ I was very careful not to come with eloquence and rhetoric. I didn't want you to believe because I talked you into it. Rather I wanted to trust God to convert you to the truth. And so he says, "I was with you in fear and in much trembling."

"I didn't want to impress you with my preaching because that wouldn't be real conviction and trust in Christ on your part. That would just be an emotional or intellectual experience. I am totally inadequate to do the work of God so my trust is in the Holy Spirit's power."

And so fear and trembling have to do, first of all, with a recognition of God's power being sufficient and not our own.

Then another place where we find that same phrase is in **Ephesians 6:5 page 1041**

There were thousands of slaves in the Roman empire at this time and many became believers in Christ. To those slaves Paul says, don't resist or run away, rather obey your masters with humble obedience, as if you were obeying Christ.

The way Christianity dealt with slavery in the 1st century wasn't to call for a slave revolt, but rather for Christ-like slaves who in turn won many of their masters to Christ. As the gospel progressed, slavery fell apart from the inside out.

So the second thing we can see is that "fear and trembling" also carried the idea of an attitude of humble obedience.

Turn back to Philippians 2 So going back to Philippians what we have is a command to live out our salvation in our every day life with an attitude of humble obedience to Christ, recognizing that we are totally unable in ourselves to do the work of God.

So, have the mind of Christ, follow His example, realizing your inadequacy to do it on your own.

Now, you can't be proud of what you can't do, can you?

Therefore, an attitude of fear and trembling produces humility and humility provides unity among Christians.

And that's the whole context of the passage. Now, so far what we've had is this: the example of Jesus Christ, and then a command to be like Him. To work to put human effort into our Christianity. But as we work for Him, behind that effort, there is to be the recognition of our own inadequacies to get the job done.

And if the Bible just stopped at the point we'd be in big trouble. After all who can be like Jesus Christ? We're just sinful, weak, people. Human responsibility without divine power equals frustration and failure.

I. The Bible Commands Us To Live Out Our Christian Faith

II. God Himself Is The Source Of Our Spiritual Power

Read verse 13

Notice again verse 13 starts with a very significant word. It is the word “for.”

Verse 13 gives us the reason why we are to live out the Christian life with humility, recognizing our own inadequacies because it's God at work in us that enables us to be like Christ.

And here's where these two corresponding truths of God's power and our working come together and blend as one.

The only way we are going to be able to have the mind of Christ and work at serving one another is if we depend upon God's power to enable us to get the job done. It is not all us, and it is not all God. It is God working in us and through us.

God's heart for is that we should put the welfare of our brothers and sisters in Christ above our own. To serve for the joy of serving.

Now again, that kind of attitude toward others isn't natural. There are two things that work against us to keep us from loving others like we should.

#1. We don't always want to.

#2. We can't.

By nature we don't have the desire or the ability to put other people above our own wants because our sinful heart is selfish. Down deep inside we consider our own good instead of the good of others.

In light of this problem, the Bible tells us, it is God who works in you. You work out but it is God who works in you. He works on our will so we become willing.

God plants the desire within us. God gives us the ability to fulfill that desire.

He works in us *both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*

The word “work” in verse 13, *energeo*, from which we get “energize,” means “to work effectually, to work completely, to fully fulfill a purpose.”

What is God's purpose? What is His good pleasure? Back to verse 2 again, that we should be *like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.*

Remember “God's commands are God's enabling.” He doesn't ask us to do what He doesn't enable us to carry out. And that is exciting. And the more we yield to Him and serve Him in this power, the more He makes the desires of our heart to be in line with His perfect will.

Our responsibilities, the things that we are supposed to do, are an outgrowth of the power, and the grace and the working of God in our life.

Now, if we work out our own salvation, believing that God is at work in us there will be some positive results.

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III. The Evidence That We're Living Out Our Faith Is A Gentle Spirit And A Willing Heart

Read verses 14, 15

The Old Testament Book of Deuteronomy gives Moses parting words to the children of Israel before they were to enter the Promised Land.

If there was ever a bunch that complained and disputed it was them. The Israelites complained about every thing. When they were in Egypt they complained about being in Egypt. When they got out of Egypt they complained because they were out.

They complained because they had nothing to eat and when God gave them manna they complained because they didn't have meat.

They complained 40 years and when they got into the Promised Land they were still complaining.

A lot of Christians are like that. And I believe in context Paul is writing about the arguing and the jealousy that can go on among Christians who don't think like Christ.

A good example of that is in Acts 6 where Luke records for us, *Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.*

In the very beginning all Christians were Jewish converts. Some were Greek speaking and some Hebrew speaking. The Hebrew speakers looked down on the Greek speakers. The Greek speaking group started complaining. Now the church resolved the problem. But if they wouldn't have a drastic split could have taken place in the infant church.

That would have been a terrible testimony to all the non-Christians who were keeping an eye on this new group.

Peter used that same word translated “grumbling” in I Peter. I Peter was written to suffering believers who were being persecuted for their faith. The non-believers were watching them too, and Peter challenged them to watch their testimony in the world.

And in Chapter 4 and verse 9 he writes, *Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.* Take care of your fellow believers in love, without friction and fighting.

If we have the mind of Christ, living out Jesus' example through the power that God has given us then there wouldn't be bickering and complaining. There wouldn't be murmuring and disputing among Christians.

And then the result would be... **Read verse 15**

Jesus said, *By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.* (John 13:35)

He didn't say “All will know you are my disciples if you all go to church, or if you talk religious talk, or if you part your hair a certain way, or vote Republican.”

He said, “The world is going to know you belong to Me if you have love for one another. If you're a humble servant of other Christians, in love esteeming others more important than yourself. “

Then, in the eyes of the watching world, you will be several things.

Blameless, harmless, children of God without fault, lights in the world.

1. “Blameless” means blameless in the judgment of others. When the people around you look at you they aren't struck with obvious faults. The word *amemptos* is the word the Greeks used for a lamb “without blemish” when they translated the Old Testament.

2. “Harmless” means unmixed. It was used of the Greeks to speak of pure gold, unmixed with any inferior metals.

The people around us will know that our motives are pure and innocent.

3. “Children of God” doesn't mean that you'll become God's child by loving other believers, but that others will see that your God's child. He is love and if you love others, it will be obvious that you share His nature. Like saying “You're a chip off the old block.”

4. “Without Rebuke” is rooted in the same word as translated blameless.

5. “Lights in the World” Back in Deuteronomy God said the Israelites lost their identity because they became like the crooked and perverse idol worshipers all around them. God brought them into the land as His torch to bring the light of God in darkness. That light was extinguished and darkness covered them all. Those who had looked for light didn't see any light, because Israel became like the crooked and perverse generation around them.

Have the mind of Christ and you will stand out in this world. You'll shine like a light in the darkness.

And the final result... **Read verse 16**

Jesus told His disciples to go into all the world and make disciples, teaching them the things He commanded. The early church took that commission to heart. They offered the word of life to all those they came in contact with in day to day living. Their own

friends, their families, their neighbors, the people at work and Christianity spread like wildfire.

But you know it wasn't long until people began to get the idea that sharing their faith was someone else's job. Today so many think that belongs to the Pastor or to the missionary but not to them.

But the Bible says here, if you're working out your own salvation; if you're mining it's riches; if you're thinking like Jesus; then not only will you love other Christians but that love will spill over to all those around you.

Through your life, through your words, you'll be holding forth the word of life.

Paul then closes his thought with a personal touch. He had worked hard in Philippi. He had been beaten, jailed and humiliated to get that church started.

And now he's saying to them, "If you really care for me, then make all this a part of your life and when all of the tabulations are in at the judgment seat of Jesus Christ, I will have a reason to celebrate. I won't have spun my wheels. I won't have labored in vain."

Good examples are tough to follow because good examples may inspire us, but they can't give us the ability to be as great. That is, unless the good example is Jesus Christ. When we realize that He lives within us, and that His Holy Spirit is working in our hearts, and then we yield our bodies to Him for His use, we are able to work and labor to serve but to do it in God's strength and following His leading.

How do the people in your network of life see you this morning? Blameless and harmless? Do you shine as children of God holding up the Word of life to the world? Or has your light been extinguished through complaining and disputing, through division and lack of love?

This was no small issue with Paul. But you know even more importantly, it's no small issue with God. God's desire is to reproduce Himself in every Christian. Is His image coming through clearly in your life?

It takes faith to exercise a submissive, humble mind. We have to believe that God's promises are true and that they are going to work in our lives just as they worked in Paul's life and in the life of Jesus. God works in us through His Word, through prayer and through His Spirit. We work out God's truth in daily living and service. God fulfills His purposes in us as we receive and believe His Word. Life is not a series of

disappointing “ups and downs.” Rather, it is a sequence of ins and outs. God works in - we work out! The example comes from Christ, the energy comes from the Holy Spirit, and the result is joy!