

## Work out what God works In

**Text:** Philippians 2:12-16

### Introduction:

1. This exhortation flows on from the previous – ‘wherefore’. The Apostle has just held up the perfect example of the Lord Jesus Christ and now he turns the focus back to the Philippian Christians and their responsibility to live Christlike lives.
2. This section contains key teaching on the subject of sanctification. Let’s remind ourselves of the three phases of our salvation. They are summarized in three great Bible words:
  - Justification – deliverance from the penalty of sin. This is salvation in its past aspect as it takes place at the moment of salvation.
  - Sanctification – deliverance from the power of sin. This is the present, ongoing aspect of my salvation whereby I grow in conformity to the image of the Son of God.
  - Glorification – deliverance from the presence of sin. This is the future aspect of my salvation when I stand complete in Christ’s presence with a new body.
3. These verses deal with the second aspect of our salvation, namely, our sanctification; that ongoing growth process whereby we become more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ. Let’s study three facets of sanctification as taught in these verses:

### I. THE PRINCIPLE OF SANCTIFICATION (VS. 12)

This involves:

#### A. Maturity (Vs. 12a)

1. ‘wherefore’ = Paul links what he is about to say to what he has said previously. Is the logical conclusion to the appeal to have the mind of Christ.
2. “my beloved” = reveals Paul’s affectionate love and concern for the Philippian church.
3. “always obeyed” = the Philippian Christians had been submissive to Paul’s leadership.
4. “not as in my presence only” = they had been obedient when Paul was present among them. This was commendable but would not be enough. Some people only live right when a godly authority is watching over them.
5. “now much more in my absence” = Paul did not want the Philippian believers to be dependent on him for their walk. He wanted them to grow and develop to maturity to where they would live for God irrespective of whether he was there with them or not. Our desire and goal should be to see believers grow from babyhood to adulthood.

#### B. Activity (Vs. 12b)

1. The Responsibility to work out our salvation – “work out your own salvation”.

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- a. “work out” = means “to carry out to the goal, to carry something to its ultimate conclusion. We say, ‘the student worked out a problem to its ultimate conclusion.’ Christlikeness is the ultimate conclusion. Salvation is spoken of here in the sense of sanctification. They are to see to it that they make progress in their Christian lives.” (Wuest)
  - b. Notice it is “work **out**” not “work **for**”. Paul is not instructing them to earn their salvation as they were already saved. He has already referred to them as ‘saints in chapter 1:1 and also calls them ‘brethren’ several times in the book. It is also clear they already possess salvation as they are instructed to work out their “**own** salvation”. He is exhorting them to work out their spiritual position in Christ (sanctification). We obey God not in order to be saved but **because** we are saved.
  - c. The same truth as that which is found in Ephesians 2:10 is being emphasized. We are not saved by works (Eph. 2:8-9) but we are saved unto good works (Eph. 2:10).
  - d. The practical out workings of salvation are in view. God requires our cooperation and participating in the work He is seeking to accomplish in our lives for His glory.
2. The Reverence with which to work out our salvation – “with fear and trembling”.
    - a. “fear and trembling” = describes the reverential fear of God. Fear is something on the inside; trembling an outwards manifestation of that inward fear.
    - b. The fear of God is a motivator to godly living. We are not motivated by terror of one who is evil but by godly awe, reverence, respect and fear of One who is Holy and Good. It means we are not to take this matter of Christlike living lightly.
    - c. Hebrews 12:28-29 “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with **reverence** and **godly fear**: For our God is a consuming fire.
    - d. “This fear is self-distrust; it is tenderness of conscience; it is vigilance against temptation; it is the fear which inspiration opposes to high-mindedness in the admonition, ‘be not high-minded but fear.’ It is taking heed lest we fall; it is a constant apprehension of the deceitfulness of the heart, and of the insidiousness and power of inward corruption. It is the caution and circumspection which timidly shrinks from whatever would offend and dishonour God and the Saviour.” (Ralph Wardlaw, *Lectures on the Book of Proverbs*).

## II. THE POWER FOR SANCTIFICATION (VS. 13)

Verse 12 and 13 form one unit. Verse 13 is a welcome relief to those who have realized that the command of verse 12 is an impossible one! Verse 12 presents human responsibility, verse 13 the Divine enablement.

### A. The Person working in me (Vs. 13a)

1. ‘for’ = gives the explanation for the previous command.

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2. "it is **God**" = the Christian life is of God from start to finish. We could not save ourselves and we cannot sanctify ourselves! Our part is to cooperate with God, allowing Him to work His work in and through us.
3. "worketh in you" = lit. "in-working". Our word 'energize' is derived from the word 'worketh'. God energizes the yielded believer to live a sanctified Christian life. The Holy Spirit is the agent of this working as He indwells the believer. God works in His physical creation and He also works in His spiritual creation.

### **B. The Particulars of His working in me (Vs. 13b)**

What is God producing in me and to what end is it working? God produces in me:

1. The passion for His good pleasure – "to will". The word means "to desire" and has emotional connotations. God's working in me results in me having a fervent desire to live for Christ.
2. The power to do His good pleasure – "to do". Same verb as 'worketh' (to energize). God gives us both the desire and the enablement to do His "good pleasure". He produces in us the will to do His will and the spiritual energy to do it.
3. Illustration: An electrical appliance is useless unless it is connected to a power source. Living the Christian life is impossible unless we rely on the power of God.

## **III. THE PRACTICE OF SANCTIFICATION (VS. 14-16)**

The Apostle now moves from the general to the specific, from the principle to the practice. "The first command dealt with the believer's vertical relationship to God whereas the second command deals with horizontal relationships to situations and people." The commands touch on several practical areas of our lives:

### **A. Our Words (Vs. 14)**

In this verse Paul returns to the theme of spiritual unity in the assembly which he began in Vs. 2-3 of the same chapter.

1. Murmurings are to be absent from everything we do (Vs. 14a)
  - a. 'murmurings' = to grumble, mutter, complain. The word was used of the cooing of doves. Same word translated 'grudging' in 1 Peter 4:9. Complaining is the fruit of carnal discontent. We need to watch out for this not only in personal life and family life but also in church life.
  - b. Illustration: The murmurings of the children of Israel.
    - i. The children of Israel directed their murmurings against God's man Moses but this was ultimately against God Himself.
    - ii. 1 Cor. 10:10 "Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer."
  - c. Illustration: The murmuring widows in Acts 6:1.
  - d. J.D. Pentecost defines 'murmurings' as an "outward expression of an inner lawlessness and rebellion that shakes the fist in the face of God and repudiates His right to rule, that questions His love and His wisdom."
2. Disputings are to be absent from everything we do (Vs. 14b)

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- a. 'disputings' = thoughts and reasonings; dialogue and argument. It is "discussion or debate with the underthought of suspicion or doubt" (Wuest). Murmurings in the local church inevitably lead to debates and disputations; divisive arguments amongst the brethren.
- b. Evidently there was a threat to the unity of the church in Philippi with carnal discontent and debates being expressed in the congregation.
- c. Note: There are many issues and problems churches have to deal with and work through but they must be dealt with in a Biblical and Spirit-filled manner.

### B. Our Walk (Vs. 15a)

The connective word 'that' reveals the desired outcome of the previous command. The Apostle's desire is that they will behave as children of God in a wicked world.

1. Sincere Children – "blameless and harmless".
  - a. Blameless = not deserving of censure. No just cause for blame. This is a vital qualification of the pastoral office but it is not confined to that office. God's desire is for every believer to live a blameless life. Our goal is not to have anything in our lives that would hinder or harm Christ's reputation in this sinful world.
  - b. Harmless = unmixed or unadulterated. It was used to describe solid gold jewelry without any alloy. The believer is to live without a mixture of evil; he is to be pure. He is to live so as to not cause harm or injury to others; to live in peace as far as possible with his fellow man (Rom. 12:18). Illustration: Mix a teaspoon of dust into a cup of water.
2. Spotless Children – "without rebuke". Has a similar meaning to the word 'blameless. It refers to "a Christian life that is not spotted with reproach for one's sin and lawbreaking" (Cloud). We are to keep ourselves unspotted from the world. James 1:27 "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, *and* to keep himself **unspotted** from the world."
3. Separated Children – "in the midst of".

We are called to live a godly, separated life in an ungodly world. Two descriptions of the world are given. It is:

  - a. Crooked = means "that which is curved rather than straight" (Gromacki). It is crooked in the "sense of turning away from the truth" (Wuest). It means "bent or warped" (Cloud). What a true and accurate description of our nation and our world!
  - b. Perverse = "that which is distorted and twisted" (Gromacki). It means "to turn or twist throughout or to distort, corrupt" (Cloud). It has a similar concept to the word 'crooked' but is stronger word.
  - c. Note: We need to have an accurate, Biblical perspective of the world in which we live. We are not to love it (1 John 2:15-16) or make a friend of it (James 4:4). We need to remember that we are strangers and pilgrims in this world. 1 Peter 2:11 "Dearly

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beloved, I beseech *you* as **strangers and pilgrims**, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;"

### C. Our Witness (Vs. 15b-16)

We are to be a witness for Christ in this crooked and perverse world in which we live. We are to:

1. Shine the Light (Vs. 15b)
  - a. The picture of the light shining – “among whom ye shine as lights”. The Greek word ‘lights’ was used of the heavenly bodies such as the stars. Jesus said. “Ye are **the light of the world**. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.” (Matt. 5:14) Jesus Christ is the light source for the believer (John 8:12; 9:5). Our part is to let Christ’s light shine through our lives to others.
  - b. The place the light shines – “in the world”. The darker the night, the brighter the light. Thank God for faithful believers down through the centuries (e.g., the dark ages) who have faithfully help up a candle in the darkness.
2. Share the Word (Vs. 16)
  - a. Their responsibility to share the Word.
    - i. “holding forth” = means “to hold forth so as to offer” (Wuest). This is to be our constant endeavor as believers, to offer the hope of salvation to a lost, dark and dying world.
    - ii. “the word of life” = what a wonderful description of the Gospel and the Word of God. It is a word, meaning it must be shared and communicated. It is life, meaning it brings life to the spiritually dead if they will respond to it.
    - iii. The Great Commission is the main task for the church and every Christian.
  - b. Paul’s response to their sharing the Word.
    - i. ‘that’ = the results Paul anticipated.
    - ii. “I may rejoice” = Paul wanted to be able to rejoice at Christ’s appearing that the Philippian believers had gone on for Christ in their lives.
    - iii. Gromacki: “Paul not content with merely a good start. He wanted his spiritual children to go on to maturity and holiness. He wanted them to be right both in position and practice.”
    - iv. Wuest: “If the Philippian saints would live as Paul commanded them he would have ground for glorying when the Lord Jesus comes for His saints for he would not have run his Christian race in vain or have bestowed exhausting labor on the Philippians in vain.”

### Conclusion:

1. Are you responding to God’s inner workings with submission or stubbornness? Are you allowing God to have His way with you?
2. How is your testimony for Christ in this world? Are you shining for the light of Christ and sharing the life-giving message of the Gospel? Or are you a carnal, complaining and divisive Christian?