

10 | PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13

HOW CAN I CHANGE?

Four Keys to Spiritual Growth

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Announcements

1. Welcome visitors!
2. This week's Fighter verse: Prov 3:9-10, "Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; ¹⁰ then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine."
3. Please sign up for our fellowship food items at Welcome Center.
4. Next week and the following are Photo Sundays. Get new photos taken for the church directory. Mary Klikas and David Beakey are our photographers.
5. Small groups start today: Feb 10.
6. I'm out of town at Biblical Counseling Conference, Lafayette, IN Mon-Fri

Introduction

Open your Bible if you will to **Philippians 2**. The title of our study this morning is: "How Can I Change?"

Christmas Series. Last week we dove into one of the most majestic places in all of Scripture. I really wanted to continue there this week, but I also want to help us keep moving in Philippians. So Pastor Michael and I have decided to go more slowly through Philippians 2:5-11 during the Christmas season this year. We will have long moved on from Philippians, but I think that will be the perfect time to go back and ponder on these magnificent truths.

Your Joy is Unassailable

The whole purpose of the book of Philippians is how your joy is unassailable, unchangeable, untouchable if your focus is on Christ. Paul is in prison. He's got lots of bad things happening. There are false teachers out there. But what does Paul say? Rejoice in the Lord always. For me to live is Christ and to die is gain. My setback is really a comeback for the Gospel. The point of Philippians is that if you keep your eyes on Christ, you will have fullness of joy. Turn your eyes on Jesus saints.

Paul says to them: I might die. I might return to ministry. But the possibility of trouble cannot rob you of joy. That's Paul in chapter 1.

Scripture Reading

Let's stand and read Philippians 2:5-13,

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

¹² 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, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure (2:5-13).

This is God's Word.

THEREFORE....

Paul's pattern in all his letters is to explain doctrine, and how it leads to duty and doxology. Paul says: Christ humbled himself for you. He was obedient unto death for you. He is exalted and ruling the world for your good. Therefore: what? Because Christ is your substitute and saves you from the wrath of God, and because he is your Lord: King of all kings and Lord of all lords: therefore... **“work out your own salvation in fear and trembling”** (2:12b).

Information should always lead to transformation. Is Jesus exalted on high? Is that seen in your life? If what happens on Sunday doesn't change our Monday, then the Sunday doesn't matter. We are not here just to sit and soak, but to live changed and abundant lives because of Jesus Christ. Seeing the glory and wonder of his cross and sacrifice for me changes everything. Seeing his exaltation in heaven changes and transforms me. I no longer want to worship the things that are in this world. I want to worship him.

I could have slept in today if all this is not real. But it is real, so let's listen. Let's get on the edge of our seats and be ready to live differently. Let's be changed into Christ's image.

Look to Christ

Christ laid aside his divine prerogatives. He emptied himself of his right to defend himself. Remember he said, “Are you not aware that I can call on My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions [50 to 100K] of angels?” (Mt 26:53). He refused to defend himself or stand up for his divine rights as God, but instead was obedient to the Father, even unto death on a cross.

It's Not Easy

You have to be connected to Christ in order to grow. But the pathway isn't easy. Paul has just said you need to put on the mind of Christ. You need to do what he did. The Christian life is a cross.

“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20).

“Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, **let him deny himself and take up his cross** and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Mt 16:24-25).

1. SPIRITUAL GROWTH IS PERSONAL (2:12).

*Work out your **own** salvation...*

This is your own salvation. It's your walk of **sanctification**. This is different than **justification**. In justification, we are passive, dead in trespasses and sins. In sanctification we are very much alive and applying the redemption we have in Christ to life.

We are going to get into this in a second, but for now take my word for it. When Paul says "work out your salvation" he's referring to an aspect of our salvation that we might call "sanctification" or simply **spiritual growth**.

Let me just say that we are called to work hard at our own spiritual growth. Paul says you are called to "**work out your own salvation**." It's intensely **personal**. God put his Spirit in you. The living God has indwelt you.

Your **mom and dad** can't live this out for you. Your pastor, your spiritual leader, your teachers cannot live this out for you. It's on you. Work out at your own salvation, your progressive spiritual growth. It's personal. It's **your personal responsibility**.

Grudem's Definition of Sanctification

SLIDE: Wayne Grudem says in his very helpful Systematic Theology: "Sanctification is a progressive work of God and man that makes us more and more free from sin and like Christ in our actual lives."¹ No one else can walk with God for you. This is your walk. So, work, because God works in you.

IT'S MY FAULT IF I'M NOT GROWING

It's your responsibility alone to grow in Christ. Listen, there are people that you will look to in the Christian life, that **will let you down**. There will be others that you really want to help you, but they are **unavailable**. Ultimately, your growth in Christ is your responsibility.

You cannot tie your growth in Christ to anyone else. Pastors are great. Godly examples are fantastic. Teachers are heroic. Parents who love Jesus are indispensable. But at the end of the day, you must trust in Christ and in Christ alone. "There is one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5). And salvation comes by him and him alone.

Here's the point: if you are not changing, it's not anyone else's fault. If you are not growing and changing, it's on you. Spiritual growth is your responsibility. If you aren't growing, you can't blame it on anything but you.

I'm not growing because I'm **single**. If I only had a spouse...

I'm not growing because of my **marriage**. If I only had a better spouse...

¹ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004), 746.

I'm not growing because of my **church**. If I only had a better pastor...
 I'm not growing because of my **job**. If I only had a better job...
 I'm not growing because... you get the idea, right?

Spiritual growth is your responsibility. You are called to "work out your own salvation." It's personal.

God's Put You Where You are for Maximum Growth

God is sovereign. He's put you where he's put you in order for your maximum growth. We believe this right? This is the truth of Romans 8:28-29, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son." Some days the state you are in is hard. I'm not talking about the cold winters in Illinois. I'm talking about marriage or singleness. It's hard to be single. You feel left out in a couple's world. But let me remind you that Jesus was single. Paul was single. Being single is hard in some ways. Yet Paul says it's better to be single so you can dedicate yourself to unhindered service for Christ. Well, maybe you say, if I was only married to a really godly spouse, I'd be able to better grow. Nope. That's not how it works. If you are not growing now, you won't grow if you are married.

Same could be said about married people. I'd grow if I had a better spouse. Nope. Sorry. God gave you the spouse he gave you for maximum growth. So let me repeat: it's your responsibility to grow.

Date Night Illustration

I think about my responsibility to grow in relationship with my wife. It's personal. Just imagine that Jill and I are getting ready for date night. And I say, "Jill, I know it's date night, but I'm going to have William take my place. He'll be just as good as me I promise..." Which one of you could take my place? No, no, no! That's not really how it works. The relationship can only get better and grow if I take personal responsibility to shepherd Jill and care for her and listen to her. It's intensely personal. I've got to commit for it to flourish.

It's the same way with God. **No one is going to grow for you.** If you are not growing in your walk with Christ, it's not anyone else's fault but yours. Sure other people can help you, but you are ultimately responsible for your growth. Growth has to be a priority in your life whether or not that person you've depended upon is there or not. You have to make this decision to prioritize your walk with God to "work out your own salvation." Ultimately Christ will build his church. Your ultimate shepherd is not on the elder team at Living Hope. There are many ok shepherds at Living Hope. We do our best, but we are all sinners. There is only one truly Good Shepherd, and his name is not Matt or Mike or Jose.... His name is Jesus Christ.

Christ is the vine and you are the branches. You must be sure you are connected to the vine. You must be sure you are walking closely with him.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO “WORK OUT” OUR OWN SALVATION?

What exactly does it mean to work out our salvation?

It means the degree to which you yield to the indwelling Spirit impacts the work he'll achieve through you and the changes he will affect in your life. You need to yield and choose to cooperate with the Spirit. Paul says in Gal 5, “Keep in step with the Spirit.” That's what it means to work out your salvation. It's work!

Scripture says Spiritual Growth is Hard Work

Yes, Scripture says that your spiritual growth is hard work. Are you going to add to your faith or not? Christ asks the question, “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?” (Luke 6:46). In other words, salvation always results in the believer working hard, following the Lord in obedience.

SLIDE: 2 Peter 1:5, “make every effort to add to your faith...” Growing in godliness is hard work. There is no place for laziness. We must exert ourselves to obedience with diligence. The believer is anything but passive in sanctification. And because our eyes have been opened to the absolute joy in Jesus, we know there is no happiness outside of growth.

Look at the entire passage beginning with verse 3. It's enlightening.

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, ⁴by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. ⁵For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge,⁶ and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness,⁷ and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. ⁸For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. ¹⁰Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. ¹¹For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pet 1:3-11).

This is hard work. If we don't work hard, Peter says we'll be:

- ineffective
- unfruitful
- so nearsighted we are blind
- we'll forget we are cleansed from our former sins

Instead, we need to work hard and practice these qualities so that we never fall and backslide.

SLIDE: Spiritual Growth is Compared to an Athletic Event

Paul said, “**train yourself for godliness**” (1 Tim 4:7).

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim 4:7).

SLIDE: Spiritual Growth is Compared to a Battle or War

“Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm” (Eph 6:13).

Paul says, “I have fought the good fight” (2 Tim 4:7).

“Endure hardness like a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Tim 2:3, KJV).

Spiritual Growth is like Working a Mine, a Field

Paul says: “**work out your own salvation**.” Interestingly, the word translated “work out” was the same Greek term popularly used for “working a mine” or “working a field.” In each case there were benefits that followed such diligence. The mine would yield valuable elements or ore. The field would yield crops. All the properties are there to prosper, but you have to work it. Paul’s point is clear: As we work out our salvation, we everything we need to grow in Christlikeness.² God’s given us the seed, but we need to water it and work it so it will grow. God’s given us the mine, but we need to retrieve the precious metals to enjoy their riches.

SLIDE:*Practical Things Can Do to Grow Spiritually*

- (1.) Read the Word – choose a topic or a book study or a Bible plan, but get into the Word!
- (2.) Get involved in Ministry – don’t just sit on your spiritual gifts. Use them!
- (3.) Pray – pray privately. Join the prayer mid-week prayer meeting.
- (4.) Fellowship – join a small group. Have church folk over to your home. Bring a meal to a sick person.
- (5.) Start a journal to record your spiritual growth – take notes for sermons and teachings. Record answers to prayer.
- (6.) Disciple a young believer – some of you know the Bible so well, but much of your knowledge is wasted. Find a new believer and begin praying for them. Have them over. Go through a book of the Bible together. Go through the Basics for Believers Bible Study (free from the church).

² Charles R. Swindoll. *Laugh Again* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 97.

2. SPIRITUAL GROWTH IS PROGRESSIVE (2:12).

Work out your own salvation...

SLIDE: SANCTIFICATION IS SPOKEN OF AS A PROCESS

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim 4:7).

We are to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 3:18).

“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18).

To continue to grow you need to daily be “renewed in the spirit of your minds” (Eph 4:23).

Psalm 1:1-3 shows the pattern:

“Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
² but his delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law he meditates day and night.
³ He is like a tree
planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.”

BUT ISN'T OUR SALVATION FINISHED?

“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”

Why do we need to work out our salvation? Isn't it already “worked out”? Didn't Christ do that on the cross? Isn't our salvation finished? Yes, from God's perspective, our salvation is finished. Christ gave the victory shout from his cross: “It is finished!” In that sense we are complete in Jesus. But we need to see our salvation from a bird's eye view: past, present and future.

Theologically, we can speak of our salvation in the past, present and future. The Bible says “by grace you have been saved.” That's **justification**. The Scripture also says you are “being saved” – day by day you are being conformed to Christ's image. That's **sanctification**. One day, when Christ returns, your salvation will be complete, and you will be given a renewed, immortal body that cannot sin, like Christ's glorious body. That's **glorification**. Calvin said, “salvation is taken to mean the entire course of our calling,

and that this term includes all things by which God accomplishes that perfection to which he has determined us by his free election.”³

A FULL SALVATION: PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

SLIDE: CHART

Justification: an event

So let me say after having looked at Christ on the cross – he was obedient unto death. It is finished. My justification is complete. I’m saved. I’m completely righteous in Christ. Nothing can separate me from the love of God in Christ. That’s glorious news. Amen!?

Can I ask you, have you been born again? There is a sense in which our salvation is an event. It is a line of demarcation. You pass from death unto life. You are transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of his glorious Son. You turn from idols to serve the living God. You are born-again. That’s an event. That’s our **justification**. We trust in Christ’s work on the cross, and sin is finished for us. He made an end of sin for us. There is now no **penalty** for sin, no condemnation. We are perfectly holy and righteous before God. We are adopted into his family. Now we can never work for this. We have to receive the perfect work of Christ by faith. Justification is not at all by human effort, but by the free gift of God.

Sanctification: a journey

But there is a part of our salvation that is unfinished and incomplete because it is a process. The **penalty** for sin is removed, but the **power** of sin is being removed as a process. There is a salvation that God has worked **in** us, but now he wants to work it **out** of us. We call that progressive **sanctification**. It doesn’t happen overnight. We are “being saved.” We are “predestined to be conformed into the image of God’s dear Son” (**Rom 8:29**).

So the second part of our salvation is a work deep in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. As many are purchased by the blood of Christ will be, throughout their lives, renewed in the spirit of their mind. The Spirit of God in regeneration indwells the Christian and creates in him or her a new nature. But the old nature is never completely eradicated. It stays around like a little monster that terrorizes us. We have to put it to death by choosing to obey God’s word and rely on the Spirit’s infinite power in us. There is a fierce battle every day for the Christian. It’s hard work. That’s what this text is all about. The seed that the Spirit plants in us is his own presence, and He is perfect. But the process is not perfect. It takes place at different speeds for people.

So when we are born again, we are like a baby or like a tree, and we need to grow! Our new nature has all the elements of perfection, but it needs to be (as our text says) “worked out with fear and trembling.” There is a **seriousness** and a **sweat** and a deep divinely authored commitment that God gives every Christian to grow in Christ.

³ Moises Silva. *Philippians: Baker Exegetical Commentary* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005) 118-119.

God has already worked in us first and given us everything we need in his Spirit and in a new heart and a new nature to overcome the old nature. No longer can sin ever have complete and total dominion over us. Even in Christians who backslide, they never stop hearing the voice of the Spirit and their own conscience.

So as we look at these verses, Paul is not telling us to work out our justification that we have already obtained by Christ's blood. Christ did it all. We can add nothing to that. We are perfectly righteous before the throne of God in heaven because of Jesus.

But what we are talking about this morning is your inner spiritual life. Paul says: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” God has wrought something powerful and eternal in you. That's something that can never be undone. You are loved and perfect before God's throne. But now you have to take what God has done in you and “work it out.”

Glorification: our final destination

And one day Christ will come, and we will be perfected in his likeness. I can't wait for that day! That's called **glorification**. It's our final destination.

When you look at Romans 13:11, Paul says that our salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. What does that mean? It is nearer to us now than when we first believed? It doesn't mean that we are still working on our salvation, trying to earn it. That is not what it means. Instead, what it means is the future glorification, culmination of our salvation, is still to come, and we are now closer now than when we first believed.

I am guessing, by the nature of the fact that you are breathing this moment, that you haven't experienced that final facet of salvation, but it could be today. For all who have been born again, I remind you that there is coming a day when we will see his face, and we will be reconciled to God in his fullness forever.

Today, we are talking about our **sanctification**. And the real question is: as a Christian, how can I change? Now if you are not a Christian, you cannot change in any meaningful eternal way. You are dead in your trespasses and sins. But if you are a new creation in Christ, you will be growing and changing every day.

Your spiritual growth is progressive. We all know you can't pay anyone to get in shape for you. You can't pay someone to eat right for you. No one can exercise for you. You can be very rich and very out of shape. Paying someone else to exercise doesn't get you in shape. If they could pay someone to exercise for them, they would. It doesn't work that way.

Same goes for our spiritual life. It's your soul. It's your life. It's your vitality. How strong do you want to be in your walk with God?

SLIDE: GOD'S GIVEN YOU THE TOOLS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Work out your own salvation, for **God is working in** you. God's given you everything you need to for spiritual growth.

You are blessed with “every spiritual blessing” in Christ Jesus (Eph 1:3).

You have “everything for life and godliness” (2 Pet 1:3).
 You have been made to be “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4).
“Those who seek the LORD lack no good thing” (Psa 34:10).

SPEED OF GROWTH VARIES AMONG CHRISTIANS

You may not progress at the rate of everyone else, but every Christian will grow. It’s a promise. We need to recognize that there are different speeds of progress in growth in the Christian’s life. Growth is not always at the same speed. There are many falls and times when a Christian grieves the Holy Spirit along the way. We cry out all along the way, “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Rom 7:24). And that is the whole point. A genuine Christian is constantly aware of his sin. He is constantly clinging to Christ as the only Savior and way of escape.

3. SPIRITUAL GROWTH IS PRAISE-DRIVEN (2:12).

Much more in my absence... Work out your own salvation... for [God’s] good pleasure...

Working out our salvation is easier when we are supervised, but Paul says: “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**, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work **for his good pleasure**.”

WE CAN’T RELY ON HUMAN SUPERVISION ALONE

Paul says your spiritual growth is not about my human supervision. He says: whether I’m with you as an apostle or away, whether I live or die, in my presence, but much more in my absence, “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” Why fear and trembling? Because it’s God who you are focusing on. There is an awe and wonder that God is working in us. It’s for “his good pleasure.” It’s because God is always present. We are aware of his presence with us. Human supervision alone is not enough because we are wayward. “All we like sheep have gone astray...” (Isa 53:6). We are, as the hymn says, “prone to wander.” We need the active ministry of the Holy Spirit in us.

P.E. Illustration

Anyone remember gym class? You remember P.E.? Get going with some calisthenics. And the gym teacher says, “Do 30 jumping jacks.” And you get going and start trying to doing them. While the teacher is there you there doing them, but when the teacher goes around the corner, you stop. **For some Christians, that’s their Christianity.**

Sunday Morning to Monday Morning

Sunday morning: we are praising God. We are in the Word. We are in prayer. Monday morning, Tuesday morning... not happening. The pastor’s not there to help you. Hopefully

you have some people in your life to propel you forward spiritually, but you can't ultimately depend on that. That's why Paul says, "but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.." All the more, you need to focus on God with "fear and trembling"! It's hard to grow spiritually when no one's around, but perhaps the most important part of your walk is what happens when no one's around to remind you. No one else can walk with God for you.

MY MOTIVATION FOR GROWTH HAS TO BE GOD'S GLORY

Ultimately my most powerful motivator for spiritual growth has to be the glory of God. My motivation cannot be to be approved by my spouse or my church. My motivation can't be to change my situation or change another person. My motivation has to be the glory of God. "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31).

We can't grow by focusing on people. We must focus on God. Look at Christ's example. Look at the majesty of God. Enjoy the comfort of the Holy Spirit as he speaks to you and guides you through the Word. If you start looking at people, you will become bitter and despairing, and you will lose focus.

A Vision of God

Isaiah got a vision of God, and he preached to a whole nation, even though they were disobedient. When you get a vision of God, and an awareness of God's presence, you overcome your sinful desires.

You cannot listen to your flesh. Your emotions, Eph 4 says are deceitful. Your heart still lies to you. You can't trust your heart. That's why if you want to grow spiritually you need the Word of God. You've got to get an awareness of God.

WE NEED AN AWARENESS OF GOD'S PRESENCE

Paul says: "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..."

There is a seriousness. It's a priority not because of Paul who may or may not be with them. It's a priority because God is always with us. That's the reason there is this awe and seriousness. There is an awareness of God that breeds fear, but not slavish dread. Awe and reverence for God.

The question is asked in Hebrews 2:3, "How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?"

Paul is not advocating a slavish terror, but a wholesome self-distrust. The Christian should fear lest his will not be continually surrendered to Christ, or lest the carnal traits of character should control the life. He must fear to trust his own strength, to withdraw his hand from the hand of Christ, or to attempt to walk the Christian pathway alone. Such fear leads to vigilance against temptation, to humility of mind, to taking heed lest we fall.

4. SPIRITUAL GROWTH IS PREDESTINED (2:13).

...for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for **it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.**”

SLIDE: GOD PLANNED YOUR SANCTIFICATION LONG AGO

Why do I say your salvation is predestined? God made this promise in so many places in Scripture.

- You are saved by grace through faith, “not of works.” Yet... “God has foreordained your good works that you should walk in them” (Eph 2:10).
- “You are predestined to be conformed to the image of God’s dear Son” (Rom 8:30).
- “God chose you before the foundation of the world that you should be holy and without blame before him” (Eph 1:4).
- **The Apostle Peter** said: We are “elect...according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:1-2).

GOD IS AT WORK IN YOU

So how can I change? The answer: you cooperate with the grace of God. The only way you can work out your salvation is if **God is working already in you**. You work out what God is working in you. When you were born again, you were given the down payment of your salvation: **the Spirit of God**. You got your first installment of heaven (Eph 3:14).

The Greek word for our work and God’s work is the same. We get our word “energy” or “energize” from it. **God energizes your work**. His Spirit indwells you.

SLIDE: The Apostle Paul: “I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6).

Paul also said, “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it” (1 Thess 5:23-24).

SLIDE: Long ago, God made a promise to guarantee your spiritual growth. He told the **Prophet Ezekiel:** “I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules” (Eze 36:26-27).

King David said, “The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, and He delights in his way. ²⁴ Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him with His hand” (Psa 37:23-24).

God works out what he has already worked in you. What has he worked in you? A new heart. He’s put his Spirit in you. Now, your “body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit” (**2 Cor 6:19**).

He works in you by his Spirit so that you can have total victory in any area of your life. Once you have trusted Jesus as Savior, you can begin living out what He’s given you, which is his abundant life. If you’ve given your heart to him, the Holy Spirit now indwells you—he is with you forever. It is God’s Spirit working in and through you that empowers you to live out your salvation.

PREDESTINED GROWTH DOES NOT MEAN LAZINESS

There is great tension in spiritual growth. Our justification is all God. We are dead in our trespasses and sins. He has to raise us from the dead. But once we are alive in Christ, we are to apply that redemption. That’s spiritual growth. Let me show you the tension in the Scriptures. If my sanctification is predestined, I mean, why do I need to work it out? The **answer:** God is working out his sovereign plan through you. The point is, because you have a new heart with new desires, you WANT to work out his plan through your life.

SLIDE

The Tension: We Work with God

Tension In Evangelism

Jesus says, “I will build my church...” right (Mt 16:18)? But then he tells us to build and to “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mk 16:15) and “make disciples of every nation” (Mt 28:20).

Paul says, “God gives the increase...” but that’s not how evangelism works. We don’t sit around saying: well God gives the increase. No, we strategize and go and preach. “Some plant. Some water. God gives the increase.” God gives the supernatural growth (1 Cor 3:6-8).

It’s that way in our spiritual growth. We plant and water every day through prayer, the Word, fellowship, instruction and teaching in the Word. And God has to speak.

Tension In Sanctification

To understand the principle of working out our salvation, remember...

Ephesians 2:8-10. It says there that our salvation is “**not of works**,” but that we are “**created in Christ Jesus**” as a new creation “**for good works**”. Do you see the balance? God plants a seed in us, but we are called to water it. As we water it, God gives the supernatural growth.

Paul says, “I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, **I worked harder** than any of them, though it was not I, but **the grace of God that is with me**” (1 Cor 15:9-10).

Same thing here in **Philippians 2:12-13**. You have to “**work out**” what God has already “**worked in**” you. Work out your spiritual growth. Cultivate the life of Christ in you. God is working right along with you.

Conclusion: Work Out What God Has Worked In

This is your own salvation. It’s your walk of sanctification. No one else can walk with God for you. This is your walk. Be encouraged to work, because God is working in you 24 and 7. One hundred per cent of the time, God is working in you his will and his good pleasure. We are called to “work out” what God has “worked in”! Amen!

Illustration: I love remodeling. Years ago, we remodeled Pastor Mike’s parsonage. It was completely dilapidated and destroyed.

What a joy that Gavin got a group of guys from Leopardo construction to volunteer. Over the course of a month. The materials were supplied, and we worked hard to remodel the entire place.

What a reconstruction project. Jesus is the great carpenter. He’s sent his Holy Spirit to remodel your life. He’s given you everything to transform you. He wants you to participate. He’s the great architect. Are you following him? Are you being transformed?

Life Group Questions

1. Paul begins his letters with doctrine. Philippians 2:1-11 was all about who Christ is and how he as God laid aside his divine prerogatives and rights as God to serve us. Paul then says, “Therefore...” “work out your **own** salvation...” (2:12). Talk about how looking at Christ helps us to grow in Christ and how **doctrine** should result in **duty** and **doxology**.
2. Justification is a work of God alone. Man is dead in sin and has to be raised up spiritually by God. How is sanctification a work of God that man cooperates with?
3. Spiritual growth is hard work. We are called to run like an athlete, battle like a soldier, plant like a farmer. What are some practical things you do to grow spiritually?

- Read the Word
 - Get involved in Ministry
 - Pray
 - Fellowship
 - Start a journal to record your spiritual growth
 - Disciple a young believer
 - What else?
4. Why are we to “work out” our salvation? Isn’t our salvation “finished”?
 5. Theologians talk about our salvation in three stages: justification, sanctification, and glorification. How is our salvation past, present and future, or another way to ask is: How are we saved, being saved and finally saved?
 6. What are some promises from Scripture that teach us we have all the tools we need for spiritual growth?
 - You are blessed with “every spiritual blessing” in Christ Jesus (Eph 1:3).
 - You have “everything for life and godliness” (2 Pet 1:3).
 - You have been made to be “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4).
 - “Those who seek the LORD lack no good thing” (Psa 34:10).
 7. Why is human supervision for sanctification not enough?
 8. Our main motivation for Christian growth is God’s glory. Talk about a situation in your life where your flesh wanted to do something selfish, but the Spirit of God caused you to do the God-honoring thing.
 9. If our holiness and growth are predestined, why do I need “work out” my salvation? *God has put his Spirit in me, and I don’t have to, but I want to!*