



## Work Out Your Salvation

In the verses leading up to today's passage, we were told of the incredible humility our Savior exhibited by dying on the cross, His subsequent exaltation by the Father to the name (authority) above every other, and that every person who has ever lived and will live will one day bow to Him as King of Kings (see [Phil 2:5-11](#)). Now the apostle Paul turns his attention to the readers of his letter and some of the things we must do as Christians.

***So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.*** [Philippians 2:12-13](#)

We once again see Paul's heart and love for the Philippian church as he addresses them as "***my beloved.***" We are all commanded to love our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ ([John 13:34](#), [1 Peter 4:8](#), [1 John 4](#), etc.), and Paul reminds his readers that everything he is writing is wrapped in love. While there is no harsh correction, this sets the stage for the exhortation and charge to press on in the work of ministry and submission to God: "***Just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence.***"

As we've seen time and time again in Scripture, surrender to God's will is absolutely necessary and a key trait of any true Christian. We cannot live for ourselves with no regard for what pleases our heavenly Father and still call ourselves believers. Here in context for the Philippians, they are told to do so even more now that Paul is away. And this echoes the same surrender to God the Father that Christ demonstrated for us in the preceding verses. Christ models for us how to live a life of obedience to God (cf: [Heb 2:17](#), [4:15](#)).

And what is one way Paul said we should obey? To ***work out your salvation with fear and trembling.*** The Greek words here tell an interesting story. ***Work out*** is from *katērgazomai* and is also translated *to bring about* or *accomplished*, like a determinate action. Scripture does not support that we earn salvation through works (cf: [Eph 2:1-9](#)) but we are told that "works" are evidence of our salvation (cf: [James 1:22-27](#), [Rom 2:13](#)). And notably, in the Greek these latter references to "work" are from the word *ergon*, which is more like *deeds*. So *katērgazomai* and *ergon* should not be confused as they really mean two different things. Remember, salvation is only by grace through faith, and those are a gift from God (cf: [Eph 2:8-9](#))

The *working out* of our salvation should instead be considered more an active, thriving pursuit of God and our faith. We do this through prayer, bible study, and living out our belief by loving others, giving sacrificially, and surrendering our will. It's having an utmost reverence of our God, with a healthy ***fear and trembling*** of the Almighty.



Let's talk about this fear and trembling statement. The lost do not live with any real fear of God; the dismissal of God's supreme authority and power over our eternal destination are clear indications that one does not understand just how serious the consequences of unbelief and disobedience are. Inversely, a true believer fears God, and if you do a quick word search on this phrase you will find dozens of verses which affirm that fearing God goes hand-in-hand with belief, wisdom and salvation (see [Prov 1:7](#), [Psalm 111:10](#), [Matt 10:28](#), etc.)

The Greek word for **fear** is phobos and is quite compelling. It can mean *panic*, *terror* and *intimidation*, but also a *sense of awe* and *reverence*. Because **trembling** (tromos) means "to tremble or quake with fear," my belief is both are applicable for believers. We are not called to live in fear of losing our salvation or of God's judgment and wrath (cf: [1 Thes 5:9](#), [Rom 8:15](#)), but, as my pastor once put it, Jesus is no joke. We should never take lightly our salvation or relationship with God. It must be the single most important thing in our lives and be guarded at all costs, even if that means it costs us our lives (cf: [Matt 24:13](#), [James 1:12](#), [Rev 12:11](#), [Rev 14:12](#)).

The great news is that **"it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."** Yet again, the Greek helps add proper context here, since we have now encountered three different words that are translated "work" in English. The one here is *energeō* and conveys an active *working* or *building*. God continues His work in our salvation through the Holy Spirit, convicting us of sin and granting us the ability to resist it, giving us insight and wisdom when we study His word, giving us the strength to love others when it's really challenging, and loving and fearing Him.

And finally, we are presented with the big, bold why: this is all **for His good pleasure**. We were saved to bring God glory and joy and to be to Him as a sweet, aromatic offering ([Eph 1](#), [Ps 141:2](#), [2 Cor 2:15](#)). It is through His enduring work and perfect will that we are empowered to do so; all we must do is surrender and obey. What great joy and comfort this should bring! And what deep gratitude and thanksgiving we owe our precious Savior and God.

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