

Working Out Our Salvation

Introduction (Text: Philippians 2:12-18)

- A. **Would this have been a shocking word to the Philippians? It is to us: “... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”** Those Paul was writing to were already Christians. What can this mean—work out your salvation?
- B. The word “salvation: comes from the same Latin word as “salve,” an ointment for healing. **To be saved is to be made whole.** In Greek the word is *soteria*, meaning not only salvation, but preservation.
- C. **While there is a beginning point in our salvation experience, the point of repentance and baptism-justification-the time of our faith commitment to Jesus Christ—this is only the beginning.** We are to “**work out**” our salvation, to grow into maturity, into the full stature of Christ.
- D. **Paul does not mean for this section to be a complete dissertation of how we work out our salvation. In truth almost everything Paul writes was to that end. In this passage, however, these are signal clues for us.**

#1: Obedience

- A. *Soteria*, salvation, involves faith (**Ephesians 2:8; 2 Timothy 3:15; 1 Peter 1:9**). **Paul’s great message of salvation was that we are justified by grace through faith. We do not properly understand Paul’s meaning of faith unless we know that the primary ingredients of it are trust and obedience.** When Paul talked about the Thessalonians’ coming to faith (**1 Thessalonians 1:8**), he wrote of their **obedience**. In **Romans 1:8** he wrote of “**your faith**” and in **Romans 16:19** of “**your obedience**,” clearly meaning the same thing. In **Romans 1:5**, he used the actual phrase “**...the obedience that comes from faith**,” probably meaning “*obedience which is faith.*”
- B. “**Do everything without grumbling or arguing**,” Paul says in **verse 14**. He is talking about the Philippians’ style of getting along with each other, to be sure. But since this follows the admonition to work out salvation with fear and trembling, it also suggests the content of what they are to do without grumbling and arguing. **They are to obey—to take God at His words, to act with the conviction that the promises of God in Christ are true.**
- C. **Dag Hammarskjöld**, a rare example of a modern mystic who was also a man of the world, while living his busy, productive life, bore an eloquent and challenging witness to the meaning of obedience: “**I don’t know who—or what—put the question, I don’t know when it was put. I don’t even remember answering. But at some moment I did answer yes to Someone—**

or Something—and from that hour I was certain that existence is meaningful and that, therefore, my life, in self-surrender, had a goal.”

- D. **This statement not only witnesses to obedience, but to servanthood. And the *who* who puts the question is God.** If you want a biblical example, none is clearer than that of **Mary, the mother of our Lord. “I am the Lord’s servant,...May your word to me be fulfilled” (Luke 1:38).**

#2: *Abandonment*

- A. **Obedience is the one essential to working out our salvation. For Paul there was a degree of obedience that deserves special note: abandonment.** The extravagance of his obedience is almost shocking: **“...I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, ...” (Philippians 2:17).**
- B. **My biggest problem, not only as it relates to how I express my obedience to Christ but in my basic approach to life, is an unwillingness to give up control, to abandon myself in faith to the Christ-life process.** When I press myself, I have to confess that I can’t believe my life’s going to be good unless I can control it, unless I can make the plans and dream the dreams and then work for their fulfillment. I am not alone in this, and I believe it is the source of a great deal of our human misery. **Our trust in Christ must bring us to the point of abandonment, a willingness to “pour out our lives,” believing that we don’t need to, nor can we, control the future. The future belongs to God.**
- C. It is easy to miss another important point Paul is making as he talks about abandonment. We pour out our lives **“as a drink offering,”** as a sacrifice, for the sake of others. Jewish as well as pagan sacrifices were normally accompanied by a libation of wine (**2 Kings 16:2; Jude 7:18; Hosea 9:4**). Priests not only poured libations of wine, but of blood, thus the connection between the two in Christian liturgy. Though such literal priesthood and sacrifice were replaced by the once-for-all offering of Christ, Paul found the metaphor meaningful. **As an apostle of the Gentiles, Paul saw himself as the priest presenting to God the Gentiles as an acceptable offering. He also saw himself as an offering, a sacrifice on behalf of others. We need to recover that dimension of the priesthood of all believers—the willingness to offer ourselves, to abandon ourselves in sacrificial ministry for others.**

#3: *Rejoicing In All Circumstances*

- A. Even though I am in prison, Paul says, being poured out as a sacrifice, **I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with**

me” (2:17-18). This recurring theme of Paul’s is an essential ingredient in working out our salvation.

- B. “...with fear and trembling,”** then does not mean nervous apprehension with which some would say we are to face the Last Judgment. **The word translated fear (*phobos*) does not here denote fright or dismay or alarm in the face of danger or loss. As often in the New Testament, it denotes the awe that persons experience in the presence of God. With trembling wonder, they are to recognize God’s presence. In all circumstances, even in pain, suffering, loss, death, prison, uncertainty, perplexity, the salvation process is going on for those who love and trust the Lord. So, rejoicing is the order of every day.**
- C. Archbishop Anthony Bloom, the Russian Orthodox,** who has written so helpfully about a life of prayer, spoke about the ordinary person living the contemplative life in the every day world. He used an image he said he had gotten from Evelyn Underhill. This is a marvelous picture of happy obedience, of rejoicing in all circumstances: **“A Christian should be like a sheep dog. When the shepherd wants him to do something, he lies down at his feet, looks intently into the shepherd’s eyes, and listens without budging until he has understood the mind of his master. Then he jumps to his feet and runs to do it. And the third characteristic, which is no less important: at no moment does the dog stop wagging its tail.”**