

Philippians 2:12-18 (NKJV)

As we begin, let's look back at the verses prior to our passage for today, so we can understand what Paul is saying.

In verse 5 Paul says, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." What follows in verses 6-8 is a picture of what was on Jesus' mind. Jesus came to humble himself by laying aside his glory, rights, and privileges to become a man, just like us. He didn't come as a king or emperor, but as a bond servant, the lowest of social status. Then he humbled himself even lower to the point that he was obedient to God, even to the point of death on a cross. Jesus came with a mind to lower himself.

God had something different on his mind. His mind was to raise Jesus up, to lift him higher and exalt him with a name above every name. That all men would know that Jesus Christ is Lord. God's plan was to exalt him because Jesus was obedient. He did what the Father asked him to do.

¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now 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 do for His good pleasure.

¹⁴ Do all things without complaining and disputing, ¹⁵ that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, ¹⁶ holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or laboured in vain.

¹⁷ Yes, and if I am being poured out as a *drink offering* on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. ¹⁸ For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me.

"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now more in my absence,"(v12). Paul calls them beloved, he has great affection for them, because he knows their hearts and minds are set to obey God. This obedience is what causes Paul to rejoice and give thanks, because they not only heard and received the Word, they put it into practice. The result of hearing God's Word is obedience, to do what it says.

Paul goes on to say, as you obeyed when I was with you and when absent from you, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."(v12). What does it mean to work out your salvation?

Here are three things working out your salvation is not.

1. It is not working for your salvation. You can't work to earn it. Being a good person and doing all the right things, does not mean you will be saved. Ephesians 2:8,9 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not by works, lest anyone should boast."
2. It is not you left to your own ideas of salvation. Romans 10:9 says, "if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."
3. It is not you doing it by yourself. The Ephesians passage says, "It is a gift from God."

The good news is that you have salvation, if you have been born again and received salvation as Ephesians and Romans declare. You have been saved, your name is in the Lamb's Book of Life. Rejoice!

What does it mean to work out your own salvation then?

It means that you obey what Jesus taught, and what Scripture commands, and you put it into practice every day in your life. For example: Jesus said to love your neighbour as you love yourself. This is a hard saying, because you might not have good feelings about your neighbour. In fact you might be angry with them and slander them or even hate them. You may feel they are speaking evil about you. What did Jesus say? - bless them, pray for them, even love them. You are probably thinking, easier said than done. Yes! And that's why you have to work out your salvation.

Now for some really good news. You are not working at salvation alone. God is actively working your salvation in. In Verse 13 it says, "for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for his good pleasure." This is a team effort, God doesn't leave you to figure it out all alone. He has given you the tools you need in Scripture, they are the truths of His Word, such as forgiveness, repentance, humility, honour, love. The Spirit is working in you enabling you to love your neighbour.

How does the Holy Spirit work in you?

The Holy Spirit's role is to be our Helper (John 14:16), one called alongside to help us live as God intended. John 14:26 says the Helper "will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I (Jesus) said to you." In John 16:13 He is called, "the Spirit of truth...and He will guide you into all truth." The Spirit's role is to remind you of God's Word and then help you apply it.

An example; you are reading Matthew 6:9, the Lord's Prayer and you continue reading verses 14 & 15. "For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." You pause and thank God for the forgiveness you have received, and then you hear this small voice speaking a name. It's someone who hurt you in the past, either by their actions or words. The thought comes to mind (it is really the Holy Spirit), have you forgiven them for their sin against you? When this happens it is the Spirit working in you to work out your salvation.

Final point, the phrase, "work out your salvation with fear and trembling." What does it mean? We are told not to fear, that God's perfect love drives out all fear (1 John 4:18). The fear you should have is a fear that God's purpose and pleasure are not being fulfilled in you. It is motivated by the desire to please God, to obey Him, and to "shine as lights in the world." (v14).

I want to close with these words from Jude 24-25. "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Saviour, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever." Amen.