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To Will and to Work for His Good Pleasure

[Philippians 2:12-18](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philippians%202%3A12-18&version=ESV) Key Verse **13: “For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”**

Introduction:

Paul wants the Philippians to work out their own salvation. So we want to know the meaning of working out of their own salvation. Mainly, it means for them to grow in the image of Jesus Christ. Then, it will bring the unity of the church. Verse 13 says “**For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”** We can think about what the will of God is and his good pleasure.

**Look at verses 12-13.**

**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.**

1. What do you think it means to “work out” your salvation? What do you think it means to work out your salvation with “fear and trembling”? ([Gen 19:17](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis%2019%3A17&version=ESV), [Mt 24:17-18](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2024%3A17-18&version=ESV)**,** [Luke 9:62](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%209%3A62&version=ESV))
2. What do you think it means to “work out” your salvation?

“Work out” their own salvation means to do their best for their salvation. Here, “salvation” could mean more specifically “sanctification”. We can divide our salvation into three: justification, sanctification, and glorification. “Justication” can happen when one is born again or saved. “Glorification” can come when we go to heaven. So “sanctification” is a growing process in the image of Christ and conforming to him.

God saved us (justification). That does not mean there is nothing that we can do or should do for our own salvation. There are tons of areas where we should work out our own salvation although our salvation comes from God only. [**John 3:27**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%203%3A27&version=ESV) **says, “John answered, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.”**

1. What do you think it means to work out your salvation with “fear and trembling”? ([Gen 19:17](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis%2019%3A17&version=ESV), [Mt 24:17-18](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2024%3A17-18&version=ESV)**,** [Luke 9:62](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%209%3A62&version=ESV))

[**Gen 19:17**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis%2019%3A17&version=ESV) **(When Lot is fleeing the Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah)
 17 And as they brought them out, one said, “Escape for your life. Do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley. Escape to the hills, lest you be swept away.”**

[**Matthew 24:17-18**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2024%3A17-18&version=ESV) **17 Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house,
 18 and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak.**

[**Luke 9:62**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%209%3A62&version=ESV) **62 Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”**

“With fear and trembling” means no one should take his/her salvation from God for granted. Since salvation comes from God and God alone, the recipients must all the more work out their salvation. That is why in the Bible there are many commandments given to believers who are saved.

They need to grow into the fullness of Christ, which can be called ‘sanctification’ or ‘actual change of one’s behavior’. People come to churches where people’s actual lives have been changed. “Working out one’s own salvation with fear and trembling” is the very sign of a good church.

We need to work out our salvation with fear and trembling because it is the gift of God. Our salvation is not something that we can purchase with our own good works or merits. It is such a precious gift of God and a blessing beyond our understanding. Therefore, we should work out our salvation with “fear and trembling”. “Fear” means “awesome respect”.

1. Application: How are you working out your salvation with fear and trembling?

Never taking God’s salvation for granted but always being thankful and deny my desires to obey God.

1. Who is driving our works? What could be an example of a “work” for his good pleasure? What does it mean to “will” for his good pleasure? How can verse 13 help us to discern which of our works and our wills are from God?

1. Who is driving our works?

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

God is driving our works. It is the will of God for us to work out our salvation (sanctification) with fear and trembling.

1. What could be an example of a “work” for his good pleasure?

“Sanctification” can be an example of the work of God’s good pleasure. God is pleased when we are sanctified. Jesus prayed for the sanctification of his disciples. **John 17:27 “17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”**

1. What does it mean to “will” for his good pleasure?

It means our sanctification is the will of God, and it brings pleasure to God. God is so pleased and happy to see our sanctification. “Good pleasure” means God’s pleasure is truly “good” one. “Good” means to bring glory to God and blessings to us.

1. How can verse 13 help us to discern which of our works and our wills are from God?

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

If our works and wills bring “good pleasure” to God, they are what God desires. Otherwise, they may come from our own desires.

1. Application: How is God working in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure?

God wants me to grow and be sanctified as much as I am willing. He helps me in every way to be holy, using all circumstances, challenges, suffering in my life, and my own desires.

Additional notes from Question 1 & 2 (v. 12-13)

**Look at verses 12-13.**

**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.**

What is the meaning of ‘work out’ one’s own salvation?

 V.12-13 are related to the previous passage. Paul said in verse 12, “**Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed”.** Philippian church members obeyed Paul who was their shepherd. They were obedient. That is the reason why God could work among them powerfully, and many great blessings from God were given to them.

“**not only as in my presence but much more in my absence”.** When Paul was present they obeyed Paul well. Now Paul was in prison. But Paul believed they would obey him much more in his absence. Usually, people do not obey well when someone is absent although they were obedient to him when he was present with them.  However, Paul trusted that they would obey him even more in his absence.

“**work out your own salvation”** - We have already received salvation. But Paul said, “work out” your own salvation.

“**with fear and trembling**’ - it means they should work out their salvation in a very serious mindset.

Why did he say it? The reason is in verse 13. **“it is God who works in you”.** It is because God is the one who works.

**“both to will and to work for his good pleasure”** - “Sanctification” is the will of God and also the work of God. The truth is great encouragement for believers because God works for them. It is God’s determination and will to sanctify us.

“Work out our own salvation” means to participate in the salvation which Jesus has already given us. “Work out our own salvation“ means we let his salvation displayed and revealed in our own lives through faith and obedience. Jesus has already achieved “justification, sanctification, and glorification”. The salvation or the fruit of salvation should come out through us. “Work out” means we really let God’s salvation bear fruit in our lives. Sanctification comes through faith and obedience.

Great salvation has been done through Jesus’ death and resurrection. Our old self died with Jesus. Our new self arose with Jesus. It is done. It is finished. “Sanctification” means to grow in Jesus’ image.

Through his death and resurrection, Jesus has already achieved all salvation and transformation. Through the sanctification process Jesus’ image should come out. V14-15 shows what is the outcome of such salvation and sanctification. It is like “shining stars without blemish… “ It is fully transformed and shines like Jesus’ light in the world.

For this purpose, the Holy Spirit works in us. We should let the Holy Spirit work in us. For that purpose, we should deny our desires.

God is already working so hard for such salvation. God is the one who made it happen. Jesus finished our salvation. God is the main worker. We should cooperate with God as God works for our salvation.

**“And 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.”** (Php 1:6) Through the Holy Spirit we are born again. God continually works until Jesus comes again. Then God’s salvation will be complete.

We can say “We need to work out our own salvation which is ours in Christ Jesus.” Jesus’ complete salvation was already given to us. We just need to experience it in our lives.

Even though Jesus made such a perfect salvation we need to work together with him to experience this salvation. It is similar to using a million dollars given to us. Even if we have one million dollars we cannot take advantage of it until we use it.

Here is the thing. Salvation is given to us for free. It is the gift of God. But to experience the salvation working in us and through us, we need to work together with God. God does not do everything by himself.

God created all things. But God does not do everything. God really wants the salvation to work in us. So sometimes God uses certain suffering. When we obey God and follow his direction then we can experience his salvation work.

The point is this. We can be sure of our salvation because it is God who is doing it. The fruit of God’s work is granted because God is the one who works.

Another reason why we should work with fear and trembling. If God works and we do not work, it means we are resisting God’s will and work. This is a very serious sin and problem. It is God’s will, and if we do not follow, we resist God and oppose God and even rebel against God.

Since we don’t know how much is our portion and God’s portion in this salvation work, we should do all we can do as if we are completely responsible without self-righteousness or legalism.  At the same time we should depend on God as God is completely responsible.

Once saved always saved?

“Once saved, always saved” is not a sound doctrine because salvation includes “sanctification”. People are drawn to churches where people’s actual behavior is changed and sanctified. Who will believe Christ if they claim to believe in Jesus and their practical life is not changed but they keep sinning? Unbelievers will see these Christians hypocrites, and they will turn away from believing in Christ. No doctrine that promotes sin comes from God. That is why Jesus and Peter said

“[Matthew 5:16](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%205%3A16&version=ESV)

“In the same way, let **your** light shine before others, so that they may **see** **your** **good** works and give glory to **your** Father who is in heaven.”

[1 Peter 2:12](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Peter%202%3A12&version=ESV)

“Keep **your** conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as

evildoers, they may **see** **your** **good** **deeds** and glorify God on the day of visitation.”

Paul himself is a good example. In Php chapter 3, he said he wanted to be found in God’s righteousness through faith in Jesus instead of boasting of his flesh. But he struggled so hard to know Christ, and his power of resurrection, and suffering. He wants to reach the goal God set for him for the prize. There is no room for sinning. Indeed, we need to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling.

There are people who start with good faith at the beginning but later failed. 1Ti 1:19 “**holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith”**

It would be better for us to work out our own salvation “with Fear and trembling heart” instead of relying on the ‘once saved always saved’ doctrine and becoming complacent.

**Verses 14-16.**

**14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing, 15 that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, 16 holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.**

1. What behaviors will distinguish us from the crooked and twisted generation? (14) How much different will we be from the world if we do all things without grumbling or disputing? (15b) Why is it important for us to be visibly set apart and easily identifiable, especially when it comes to evangelism and preaching the gospel?

1. What behaviors will distinguish us from the crooked and twisted generation? (14)

**14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing,**

Doing all things without grumbling or disputing. Most of the time, people do things with grumbling or disputing. Grumbling or disputing shows the existence of different opinions among people who are doing things.

Paul said, “doing all things” without grumbling or disputing.

1. How much different will we be from the world if we do all things without grumbling or disputing? (15b)

**“in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,” -** There will be great contrast: crooked and twisted generation vs. shining lights in the world. Jesus said to his people in Mt 5:13-16. “You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.”

1. Why is it important for us to be visibly set apart and easily identifiable, especially when it comes to evangelism and preaching the gospel?

Because our different behaviors from the world deliver powerful messages of the gospel. It demonstrates what the gospel is and who gospel believing people are. It is great contrast between people in the world and evangelists or preachers of the gospel.

**4 Do all things without grumbling or disputing, 15 that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, 16 holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.**

Great contrast between people of the world and Christians

People in the world: (doing things)  grumbling or disputing, full of blame, crooked and twisted

Christians: no grumbling or disputing,  blameless, innocent, no blemish, shining lights in the world, holding to the word of life

1. What does it mean to “hold fast to the word of life”? How can holding fast to the word of life help us to not grumble or dispute with one another while we work out our salvation?
2. What does it mean to “hold fast to the word of life”?

It means to believing the word of life and obeying it. It means not to obey the word of the world or one’s own desires.

1. How can holding fast to the word of life help us to not grumble or dispute with one another while we work out our salvation?

When we hold fast to the word of life, the word of life gives us the power not to grumble or dispute with one another.

Additional notes from v.14-16

**Verses 14-16.**

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“Grumbling or disputing” can stop only when church people are sanctified and work out their own salvation.

**Do all things without grumbling or disputing, 15 that you may be blameless.** If you do all things without grumbling or disputing, you can be blameless and innocent children of God. Jesus has the image of “doing all things without grumbling or disputing.

If church members do not grumble or dispute but do all things without grumbling and disputing it means they are children of God. If there is grumbling and disputing in a church, it means they are not changed full yet.

**that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God.** “Children of God” means people with the image of God.

What God works among believers is to change people to grow in the image of Jesus Christ. Paul really wishes such a transformation (growing in the image of God) may happen.

If they really changed and blameless they will **“shine as lights in the world”.** Christians say “I am saved”. If unbelieving people do not see any image of God from Christians they would not be persuaded to believe the gospel. Those Christians remain at a child's level of Christianity.

Paul really wanted Philippian church people to grow in the image of Jesus.

“A crooked and twisted generation”. This is a description of the world according to Paul. It is in contrast to “Shine as lights in the world”

**in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, 16 holding fast to the word of life.** - The world is ruled by wrong ideas and a world value system. For example, one world value system is “people in authority exercise their authority over people under them.” But Jesus said, “Not so with you.”

The value system Jesus’ disciples had is different. So Paul told them not to follow the crooked generation but hold fast to the word of God.

**“holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.”** - Even though we believe in Jesus we are heavily influenced by the world since we live in it. Our tendency and habit follow our old ways. Only when we **hold fast to the word of life** can we grow in the image of God.

Holding to the word of God means first of all to believe the word of God and obey it.

Jesus said his people will be salt and light of the world.

Mt 5:13-16.13 **“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. 14 “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.**

Jesus said, “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.” God has a high standard for his people.

**“so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.”** - Paul’s work is to transform them into people in the image of Christ. When Jesus comes again and if he cannot find his image in them, Paul’s work is in vain or his labor is in vain.

Paul’s focus for his ministry is to grow in the image of Christ among Christians.

What should be the focus of our bible students and our children? - growing in the image of Jesus and being transformed through the word of God, becoming the salt and light of the world.

What church leaders found is this. We focus on “justification” (salvation by faith) too much. Sanctification was not emphasized enough, and Christians could not live as salt and light of the world. Then they were not attractive to unbelievers. Outside, people can see Christians as selfish and narrow-minded, and hypocritical.

So we need to grow in the image of Jesus. Church leaders or anyone in a leadership position should help Christians to grow in the image of Jesus.

**Verses 17-18**.

**17 Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. 18 Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.**

1. How is Paul describing himself? What do you think he is trying to communicate to the Philippians when he says that he is being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of their faith? Why do you think he was able to rejoice, even though he is about to be poured out like a drink offering? What can we learn from this?

1. How is Paul describing himself?

(v.17) drink offering

He sees himself as poured-out drinking offering upon the altar of sacrifice for the faith of the Philippians. He used a subjunctive mood (even if I am poured out as a drink offering)

1. What do you think he is trying to communicate to the Philippians when he says that he is being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of their faith?

He taught them that they should see themselves as a sacrificial offering to the Lord, but together with him.

Drink offering always comes with other offerings. So Paul wanted to tell them he is like a drink offering for their sanctification.

1. Why do you think he was able to rejoice, even though he is about to be poured out like a drink offering?

Because he knows he and the Philippians together would become a holy sacrifice to the Lord.

1. What can we learn from this?

We should not regret our service for the Lord and our bible students, knowing that our labor would produce our children and us to transform us into a holy sacrifice to the Lord.

Paul wants the Philippians to rejoice with him. He does not want them to feel sorry for his sacrifice because his work is in vain. He wants them to rejoice with him.

Additional notes from v. 17-18

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Additional question: Why are these verses related to the previous passage, and why is Paul suddenly talking about drink offering and sacrifice?

Basically, Paul was saying the Philippians are sacrifice acceptable to God. To Paul, helping them is for them to become an acceptable sacrifice to God.

If we read Old Testament drinking offering was not offered by itself. Drinking offering was always given together with other offerings such as animals or grains. You pour a drink offering of wine or oil on something else.

Paul worked hard for them that they might become sacrifice acceptable to God. In a way, Paul worked together with them. When Christ comes and finds many blames from the Philippians Paul would be ashamed. But if there is no defect, Paul would be honored.

**I am glad and rejoice with you all. 18 Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.** Paul was saying I am very glad to work with you like a drink offering for your salvation (sanctification).

What is our salvation? We can say it is to become an acceptable sacrifice to God, bearing Jesus’ image. If the Philippians are transformed into the image of Christ, they would be united, and Paul would rejoice.

Another point - Each individual should be an acceptable sacrifice to God. But at the same time, the whole church, as one body, should be an acceptable sacrifice to God. It is because our maturity is revealed through how much we can be able to unite with others and work with them. Many people may says, “I am mature and I know God well” But if that person cannot work with others in unity he needs to grow more. In order to work with others and form one unity we should grow.

When Jesus prayed for his disciples in John chapter 17, his first prayer topic is for them to be one. His second prayer is for them to be sanctified.

**Θέλω / Thelō (To Will)** To will, have in mind, intend
 1. to be resolved or determined, to purpose
 2. to desire, to wish
 3. to love, to like to do a thing, be fond of doing
 4. to take delight in, have pleasure

[**Isaiah 55:7**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah%2055%3A7&version=ESV) **7 let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts;
 let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.**

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