

Work out your salvation...

Philippians 2:12-13

12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. (Philippians 2:12-13 NIV).

Introduction:

Work both attracts and repulses us. There are times when work is an excellent thing. When it enables us to accomplish the things that we want to do. When we achieve something through thorough work, we not only feel good about ourselves, but we feel good about what we have achieved. At times like these we feel that work is a worthy human endeavour.

At other times, however, we can feel that work is a necessary evil. But it remains true that work certainly is the only way through which we can succeed and reach our goals.

Work is necessary for human existence. But does it have a role to play in our spiritual lives? In our text today we are told to work out our salvation. What does that mean? Can you earn your salvation by doing work? What kind of work is our text talking about?

Let us look at the steps we can take that will enable us to work out the salvation that God has provided for us. The first step we must take is that we must...

1. Understand that God is already at work in us.

Before we can understand the first verse of our text we must first look at the second (verse 13).

...for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

This verse gives us the perspective we need in order to apply what God is asking us to do. It tells us that God is already at work in our lives. What we are reading here was written to Christians. This is not a message to unbelievers telling them how they can be saved. Paul was writing to Christians who were already saved. So this is not a message concerning our need to work for our salvation. We are not being asked to earn our salvation. We are being asked to work out our salvation. In other words, we are being asked to work out what God has already given us.

Works does not save us. Paul, who also wrote Ephesians, tells us there how we are saved.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9 NIV)

Salvation is accomplished by God's initiative. We can't save ourselves. All the works that we may do, when added together, will simply not be enough. Our problem is sin. Because of sin we will never be able to achieve perfect virtue, no matter how many works we do. Perfect righteousness is what we must achieve in order to earn salvation, and that is impossible for us to accomplish. God stepped in and sent Jesus to get done what we could not do. He died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin. Our sins can now be forgiven through his work, not ours. And we can now stand in his perfect righteousness.

God began the work. He took the initiative. He reached out to us in the first place. God loved us before we acknowledged his existence. God loved us while we were still in sinful rebellion against him. The salvation of the human soul is a work only God can perform.

The second step we must take is that we must...

2. Receive God's Passion And Power For Our Lives

...for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. (v. 13)

God is doing two things in our lives. God is at work in you to **create the desire** to follow him and to **give you the power** to do it.

God is at work in your life to create the desire in you that will motivate you to follow Jesus. If you are willing to tell the truth, you must admit that there are times when you do not desire to follow Jesus. There are times when we desire to go our own way. There are times when we do go our own way.

We might as well be honest with God. He knows the real condition of our hearts. We should not make an excuse and say, "God, I really wanted to obey you." What we should say instead is, "God, I disobeyed you and only did what I wanted to do. Would you please forgive me and create within me a desire to do your will?"

This is precisely what God desires us to do. And this is what he is doing in your life. His Holy Spirit is at work in you to change your heart. His Holy Spirit is at work in you to change your mind. You are being changed into the image of Christ. It doesn't happen overnight. Little by little you are being shaped into the spiritual person who reflects the life of Christ.

God is also at work in you to give you the power to act according to his good purpose. Simply having the desire is not enough. You also need the power to carry out the desire. God is at work to give you that power.

Jesus promised the disciples that when he went away, they would receive power. They were to go to Jerusalem and wait until the power came. And the power would come when the Holy Spirit came upon them. They would be filled with the Holy Spirit and thus filled with God's own power. When the Holy Spirit fills us, we have the power of God dwelling within us.

We must not only understand that God is at work, we must also receive what he is doing in our lives. We must surrender to his work in us. This will lead us to a final step.

We must...

3. Engage in obedient cooperation with Him

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling...(v.12)

We may now look at the first verse in our text. Now that we understand what God has done and what God is doing in us, we can be encouraged to join him in his work. This is really the central message of our text. **We are called to work out what God has already given us.** Salvation is a process. We forget that it is a process, because of the way we use the word "salvation". When we ask someone whether they are *saved*, what we are really asking is whether they have made a *commitment to Christ*.

Salvation, on the other hand, refers to the fullness of God's redemption. Salvation begins with regeneration; we call it being born again. It continues with sanctification; the process of spiritual maturity whereby we are progressively conformed to the image of Christ. It culminates in glorification; when we receive our spiritual bodies and are brought into the actual presence of God. If you are Christian, you are now in this second stage of salvation, namely sanctification. **This is where you are to work out what God has given you.**

How are you to work out your salvation? What does it look like to do that? *In order to answer these questions, we must clearly understand the extent to which our salvation must impact our lives.* That can be summed up in one word: completely! There is no area of our lives that can be left untouched by our relationship with the Lord. God desires that over time, every area of our lives must become transformed. The longer we follow the Lord, the greater the growth into his image. But this will not happen unless we plan for it to happen. We need to take **intentional steps** in order to grow spiritually.

APPEAL:

Why do we think that all we must do to be Christians is to intellectually accept Christ? What do you do to work out your salvation? Are you spending time becoming better informed about the God you claim to follow? He has given you a Book to enable you to do that. Do you read it? Do you seek to understand what it says? There are many ways you can do this. The Bible is the one book that has probably been written about more than any other book in history. Do you improve yourself by the opportunities that are provided to grow in knowledge of Christ through the Holy Scriptures?

How much time do you spend in prayer?

This is another way to discover God's will for your life. It is a place of fellowship with him; a place of submitting to him; a place of worship; a place where you can receive spiritual strength. Are you seeking to apply the truth that you receive from the Bible and the Holy Spirit's direction to your life in acts of service? Are you taking the time to evaluate your lifestyle in the light of God's truth? Remember, it is the whole of our lives that God desires.

Work out your salvation with fear and trembling...Understand that as a Christian you are living in the presence of the Holy God who dwells in you through His Spirit.

God wants us to present him not occasional acts of devotion, but the everyday lives that we live. He wants both our hearts and minds. He wants us to be fully devoted followers of Jesus. He wants the effect of our salvation to be worked out into every attitude, action, habit, and relationship that we have. And the good news is that he is at work in us to enable us to work out that salvation.

In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

To discuss this sermon outline, you are welcome to contact the Rev Andries Combrink at info@cpk.co.za