**Philippians Chapter 2:12-18**

**Pastor Peterson**

**The Steps to Unity**

**C.** **Working Out One’s Own Salvation or Deliverance, 2:12–18**

(2:12–18) **Introduction**: this passage is still dealing with unity—unity in the church and unity among believers. But the passage is unique because it brings up the great subject of salvation. Keep in mind that salvation means deliverance and that salvation is of God. It is God who has saved and delivered you: “For by grace are ye saved” (Ep. 2:8–9). But once you are saved, go to work—work out your own salvation and deliverance. Salvation is not stagnant and complacent. A saved person is not to be sitting around doing nothing and letting the chips fall where they may. A saved person is to get up and go to work. He is to do all he can to work out his own deliverance. This is the subject of the present passage. If the church is to be unified—if believers are to walk in a spirit of unity, then they must look at their salvation—at the whole scope of their life and the glorious salvation God has given them—and they must do all they can to work out their own deliverance.

1. The first work: to work out one’s own salvation (deliverance) with fear and trembling (v. 12).

2. The second work: to work at obedience—to work out the stirrings of God within the heart (v. 13).

3. The third work: to work at not complaining (v. 14).

4. The fourth work: to work at being pure (v. 15).

5. The fifth work: to work at witnessing (v. 16).

6. The sixth work: to follow the example of sacrificial labor (vv. 17–18).

**1** (2:12) **Salvation—Deliverance**: believers are to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling. Remember Paul is in prison being held on false charges. There is a good chance he will be executed. He is not sure he will ever see and share with the Philippians again. Therefore, what he is now writing is carefully chosen. So far as he knows, these words could be his last words to the Philippian church. This is the reason we need to pay close attention to the instructions.

What does it mean to work out your own salvation? The word *work out* (katergazesthe) means to work on to the finish, to completion, to perfection. It always means to complete the effort and the work begun; to accomplish it perfectly; to bring it to completion. The point is: do not go half-way in salvation. Do not take bits and pieces when there is a whole parcel. Do not be satisfied with a little when you can have much. Go on, grow until salvation is completed in you. It is *your own* salvation. No friend, no pastor can work it out for you. You alone must do it.

The point is clearly stated: once God has saved a person, that person is to get busy obeying God. He is to take hold of the new life and salvation God has given him, and he is to work on it until it is completed and finished, that is, until God takes him home and perfects it.

Note that the Philippians are an excellent example. Paul says that they had always obeyed God, not only when he was with them, but also when he was away. Now, as he was facing death, he wanted them more than ever to work out their salvation—to continue obeying God until their salvation was completed and perfected.

Note also the words “fear and trembling.” Life is not a bed of roses. It is full of trial, pain, hurt, tragedy, disease, accident, loss, temptation, sin, evil, corruption, and death. Every human being experiences such things until he comes face to face with death. Life is sometimes beautiful and wonderful, but reality is what has just been listed: life is a journey of trials until the point of death. And no amount of denial or camouflage can hide or escape the fact. The only thing that can bring abundance of life is the *absolute confidence* that we shall live eternally in a perfect world. What is the point of mentioning all this? The point is forceful: we are expected to work out our own salvation and to do it with fear and trembling.

⇒ We are to fear and tremble because of the trials and temptations of life. Anyone of them can throw us or cause us to buckle under. The world and its temptations and trials are strong and the flesh is weak. We can slip into sin and failure before we know it unless we are constantly working out our deliverance—fearing and trembling lest we fail.

⇒ We are to fear and tremble lest we disappoint the Lord. He has saved us, and He has gone to the ultimate limit in order to do it. He has demonstrated a perfect love for us by taking all our sins upon Himself and bearing our punishment for us. Therefore, when we sin and fail, it cuts His heart to no end. For His sake—to keep from hurting Him—we must work out our salvation, fearing and trembling lest we do cut His heart.

⇒ We are to fear and tremble because we are to face the judgment seat of Christ. If we sin, we shall be judged and judged severely. Though we may try to reason away the fact, our thoughts about the judgment of God do not affect God’s judgment one iota. Every one of us who sins and fails to work out his own salvation shall be judged and suffer loss—great loss. Scripture teaches nothing else. For this reason, the reason of judgment, we must work out our salvation—work it out with fear and trembling.

**“And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Mt. 10:28).**

**“But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him” (Ac. 10:35).**

**“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Tit. 2:11–12).**

**“And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man’s work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear” (1 Pe. 1:17).**

**“And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul” (De. 10:12).**

**“Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!” (Ps. 31:19).**

**“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” (Ec. 12:13).**

**“Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread” (Is. 8:13).**

**2** (2:13) **Salvation—Obedience**: the second work of salvation is to obey. Believers are to work out their salvation by *working at obedience*—by obeying the stirrings of God within their hearts.

**“It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (v. 13).**

The word *worketh* (energon) means to energize. God arouses, stirs, and energizes the heart of the believer to do God’s will. This is a most wonderful truth. Just think about it: we all experience movements and stirrings within our heart toward God. These stirrings are of God. God is working within us—energizing us—giving us both *the will and power* to do what pleases Him.

As stated, this is a most wonderful truth. Our duty is to grab hold of the stirrings—not to let them pass. We are to grab hold of them and do exactly what the *stirrings* are arousing and energizing us to do.

**Thought 1.** This is a most wonderful truth. It means that God does not leave us alone to work out our salvation and deliverance. He works within us: moves, stirs, energizes, and arouses us to get up and get to it. And whatever the energy points toward is what we need to do. God uses the energy and stirring to direct and guide us. The point to see is that God is forever working within us—never leaving us alone—working and stirring us to complete our salvation.

**Thought 2.** The tragedy is this: ignoring, neglecting, and refusing to respond to the stirrings and workings of God. When we feel the stirrings, we desperately need to respond and do whatever God is stirring us to do. Just think how often the stirrings are rejected, ignored, or neglected. How often we continue to sit or go about our own affairs instead of heeding the working and stirring of God. How complacent and lethargic we are. Just think how much growth we lose and how often we must cut the heart of God to the core—all because we choose the things, possessions, and activities of this world instead of Him and His stirrings.

**“For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth [makes alive] whom he will” (Jn. 5:21).**

**“It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life” (Jn. 6:63).**

**“But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring [stir] all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (Jn. 14:26).**

**“Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove [convict and stir] the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (Jn. 16:7–8).**

**“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Ro. 12:1–2).**

**“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know [be stirred to know] the things that are freely given to us of God” (1 Co. 2:12).**

**“And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins” (Ep. 2:1).**

**“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God” (Col. 3:1).**

**“But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you ye shall abide in him” (1 Jn. 2:27).**

**3** (2:14) **Murmuring—Division**: believers are to work out their salvation by working at not murmuring and disputing or arguing. The word *murmuring* (goggusmon) means to mutter, murmur, grumble, and complain. Note: it means the quiet, soft, behind-the-back, undertone of murmuring and grumbling. It is the kind of criticism, dissatisfaction, fault-finding and gossip that goes on within small groups or cliques.

The word *disputings* (dialogismon) means arguments, outward and vocal questionings, and expressions of doubt. Simply stated, it is just as Scripture says: disputes or arguments that have broken out into the open.

Note several significant facts.

a. Murmurings and disputes are not to be allowed in the church. As the verse says: *all things* are to be done without murmurings and disputings. If murmuring begins among a clique or even between two people, the spiritual leaders of the church are to deal with it just as Christ laid out (see outline and notes—Mt. 18:15–20). It is not to be allowed to fester. Murmurings, unless they are stopped, will lead to disputes, turmoil, and divisiveness.

b. Murmuring and disputes are *never of God—never*! This is the very point of this charge. *All things*—nothing is left out—are to be done without murmuring and disputes.

c. Murmuring and disputes were the very sins that brought judgment upon so many Jews in the wilderness wanderings of Israel.

**“Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer” (1 Co. 10:10; see Nu. 20:2f; 21:4).**

d. The person who murmurs and disputes is not working at his salvation or deliverance. He is doing the very opposite: working to bring judgment upon himself.

**Thought 1.** The results of murmuring are far worse than people ever think. This is the primary reason God forbids murmuring and disputes in no uncertain terms. Murmuring …

• hurts

• damages

• divides

• tears down

• downs a person

• opposes God’s will

• hinders progress

• stymies growth

• misleads people

• is self-centered

• says “look at me”

• elevates selfish opinion

• pushes people away from Christ and the church

**“For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?” (1 Co. 3:3).**

**“For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults” (2 Co. 12:20).**

**“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others” (Ph. 2:3–4).**

**“Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers” (2 Ti. 2:14).**

**“And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient” (2 Ti. 2:24).**

**“Go not forth hastily to strive, lest thou know not what to do in the end thereof, when thy neighbor hath put thee to shame” (Pr. 25:8).**

**4** (2:15) **Purity**: believers are to work out their salvation by working at being pure.

a. Believers are to work at being *blameless* (amempto): free from fault and censure; to be faultless; above reproach and rebuke. The believer is to live a blameless, faultless and pure life, both in the church and in the world. No one is to be able to point to the Christian and accuse or blame him with anything. The Christian is to be clean, unpolluted, spotless, holy, righteous, and pure before man and God.

b. Believers are to work at being *harmless* (akeraioi): unmixed and unadulterated. It is the idea of flour or grain passing through a sieve to separate the pure from the impure. It means that our thoughts and lives …

• are not to be polluted by watching, reading, and listening to worldly and sexual attractions

• are not to be given over to worldly and sexual attractions

Our thoughts and lives are to be pure, clean, uncontaminated, and unpolluted.

**“I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple [harmless] concerning evil” (Ro. 16:19).**

**“That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ” (Ph. 1:10).**

**“That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world” (Ph. 2:15).**

**“For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens” (He. 7:26).**

**“And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (2 Ti. 4:18**

**“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 24).**

c. Believers are to work at being *without rebuke* (amoma): without blemish, spot, or defect. This is a word that is taken from the Old Testament sacrifices made to God. The idea is that the believer is to live and walk upon earth under the eyes and scrutiny of God. He is to walk without any blemish, spot, or defect.

However, note a fact: the believer lives in a crooked and perverse generation. The world is wicked and evil, twisted and perverted; therefore, the believer has a difficult path to walk. But walk he must, for he is to be the light of the world. He is to shine as a light in the world. He is to reflect the purity and holiness of God Himself.

**“Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid” (Mt. 5:14).**

**“For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth” (Ac. 13:47).**

**“For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light” (Ep. 5:8).**

**“That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world” (Ph. 2:15).**

**“Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do” (1 Th. 5:5–11).**

**5** (2:16) **Witnessing**: believers are to work out their salvation by working at witnessing. The wording is descriptive: “Holding forth *the* word of life.” Imagine! There is a *Word of life*. Men can live, truly live—both now and forever. Men never have to die.

⇒ It is like saying the fountain of youth has been discovered with one difference: the Word of life not only brings eternal youth, it brings perfection—a perfect world and a perfect life.

⇒ It is like saying the cure for cancer has been discovered with one difference: the Word of life not only cures the cancer, it injects the energy of everlasting life into the other cells of the body.

But note the terrible tragedy! So many of us do not hold forth the Word of life. We hold back. We do not share the message of the glorious gospel of life. The Word of life is just what it says: it is the message of life that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**“I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (Jn. 10:10).**

**“And I give unto them eternal lfe; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (Jn. 10:28).**

**“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved” (Jn. 3:16–17).**

**“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life” (Jn. 5:24).**

**“Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed” (Jn. 6:27).**

**“But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life” (Ro. 6:22).**

**“But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Ti. 1:10).**

**“In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began” (Tit. 1:2).**

**“And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life” (1 Jn. 2:25).**

**“Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life” (Jude 21).**

**Thought 1.** The one thing we must work at is holding forth the Word of life. The Word of life is the only hope for a world that reels under the weight of so many desperate needs, especially the desperate need to handle sin and evil and the terrible destiny of death.

**“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Mt. 28:19–20).**

**“And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mk. 16:15).**

**“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Ac. 1:8).**

**“We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak” (2 Co. 4:13).**

**“Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God” (2 Ti. 1:8).**

**“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Pe. 3:15).**

**“Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name” (Mal. 3:16).**

**6** (2:17–18) **Sacrifice—Labor**: believers are to work out their salvation by following the example of sacrificial labor. Very simply stated, Paul had offered himself as a sacrifice to serve men. The picture is that of the sacrifice and offerings made by people to the heathen gods. Paul had taken his body and offered it as a sacrifice and service for people. He lived for nothing else except to hold forth the Word of life to people. His body was totally sacrificed for that purpose and that purpose alone.

**“And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Lu. 9:23).**

**“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Ro. 12:1–2).**

**“For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Co. 6:20).**[[1]](#footnote-1)

1. Leadership Ministries Worldwide. (1996). [*Galatians–Colossians*](https://ref.ly/logosres/posbkjv69ga?ref=Bible.Php2.16&off=-16725&ctx=d+rejoice+with+me.%0a%0a~C.+Working+Out+One%E2%80%99s) (pp. 279–283). Chattanooga, TN: Leadership Ministries Worldwide. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)