

Work it Out

Here we go again with another installment in our series from the New Testament Book of Philippians. We are in the middle of chapter 2, if you would like to follow along.



We are calling the series **Joyride**, because **joy** is an important *big idea* in these 4 chapters of Philippians; we can find the words **joy** and **rejoice** throughout... including in today's passage.

The Book of Philippians is about **joy**... but it is mostly about the Gospel, the **Good News** of Jesus Christ. Let's talk about the Gospel.

First let's talk about *religion* in general.

What is religion for? I'm sure we could come up with a long list of reasons why people pursue religion. Among the reasons, in various forms and ways of stating it, I'm sure that people would say that *religion is for making **God** happy...* our way to make God happy with us, to earn the *favor* of God, a god or gods... and perhaps ultimately to *earn **salvation***.



I'm sure that there are lots of Christians who think along these lines... that they are Christians to please God, to get blessed, and to make it to Heaven. In our Christian culture (increasingly more of a *post-Christian* culture) it seems natural that if one would go looking for a religion to please God, one would pick the religion of the culture to give it a try.

Religion is mostly just work **for** salvation.

But is that the Gospel?

No, that is **not** the Gospel. The Good News of Jesus Christ, the Gospel, is that we are saved by **grace** alone. We may not deserve it; we can't earn it... yet God's love saves us when we believe in Jesus... when we turn to Jesus, when we trust Jesus, when we turn from our ways and follow Jesus.

The Gospel is not primarily a matter of work; the Gospel is a matter of faith.

Does that mean that there is *no work* for Christians, no work for *Gospel people*? Well, not exactly.

There is important work.

For example, there is the work of *living up to* these Christians lives we are given by faith. We *ought* to **act** like it. We ought to be following Jesus, and in so doing, becoming more like Jesus.



That is a lot of work. **We work these Christian lives as worship to God... not work so that we *can* be saved, but rather work *because* we are saved.**

There is also the **work** of *showing others the way*, sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ, proclaiming the Gospel. Others need to see and hear and know. That is a lot of work too... but this also is the sort of obedience we gladly do, because we love God, and we love people. Showing others the way is worship too.

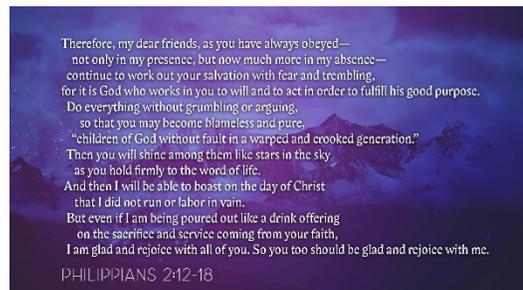
So... how does that work **work**?

I think there are some good answers in today's text.

Let's read this out loud together:

¹²Therefore, 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, ¹³for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

¹⁴Do everything without grumbling or arguing, ¹⁵so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” ¹⁶Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky ¹⁷as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. ¹⁸But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. ¹So you too should be glad and rejoice with me. ¹



¹ The New International Version. (2011). (Php 2:12–18). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Work out your salvation... notice that it does not say work **for** your salvation. The Gospel is faith, not work... grace, not earning it.

Work out your salvation... notice also that it doesn't say work **up** your salvation. The Gospel is not merely some clever philosophy or system that we put together to save ourselves.

It says work **out** your salvation... which brings me to one of my favorite illustrations (so favorite that I know some of you may remember me using this before).

Since it is a 5th Sunday of a month, we call these 5th Sundays family friendly and enjoy having our kids with us in this service. Perhaps our kids would like to get closer so you can see what is going on.

I have a lump of dough (cookie dough) representing us.

And I have this red icing representing the Gospel.

When we believe, the Gospel goes right to the center, filling our hearts... replacing hearts of cold stone with hearts of warm flesh.

It is sort of ironic, I suppose, that I put **icing** on the **inside**. Icing is typically for the outside. **But the Gospel is not applied to the outside, like icing; the Gospel is applied to the heart.**

Those who think that Christianity is merely a matter of a sweet, beautiful exterior are missing the point; they are not doing it right.

So here we have the Christian life, with the Gospel on the inside... but that isn't good enough either. If it merely stays isolated at the center, then the two things we talked about earlier are not getting done:

1. The entire life isn't changed (transformed), and
2. Other's can't see it or be impacted by it.

So... how are we going to get it from the inside to the outside... and all the way throughout? We have to **work it out**.

Our work, powerfully enabled by the Holy Spirit, works that salvation throughout our lives and thoughts and actions... all the way through and out to the exterior. Through obedience, and study, and discipline, and fellowship, and life's circumstances and such, what is inside gets worked out.

It says

work out your salvation with fear and trembling²

I think words like “fear and trembling” can be a bit confusing; we easily equate **fear** with **being afraid**. But that isn’t the meaning here. It isn’t a matter of being afraid of God, or even afraid that we’ll not do it right and find that we aren’t saved after all. Here “with fear and trembling” goes more to the **seriousness** of the task. This is hard, important work... perhaps the highest work to which we are called as we worship God with our lives, and display God through our lives.

Of course it is serious work, as it is God’s work in and through our lives.

for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.³

Before we get to this next paragraph in our text, I want to consider *religion* again, and our common pursuits of it... asking the question “what is religion for?” We said that religion can be thought of as our work to make God happy with us.

I think **religion is also often something we pursue for *our own* happiness. We often hope that religion will make *us* happy.**

There are all sorts of *blatantly* spiritual pursuits that promise happiness. We can head down to the highway and find places that promise aligned chakras and rearranged chi, fortune telling and even various potions. We can find churchy things that promise blessing, prosperity, friends, openness and welcome.

And then there are the countless more *subtly* spiritual pursuits that promise happiness, that people often take more religiously (I dare not list them because I might list one of yours or mine).



² The New International Version. (2011). (Php 2:12). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

³ The New International Version. (2011). (Php 2:13). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Again, I know that there are Christians who are in it merely for their own happiness. (Don't misunderstand; I'm not at all opposed to happy Christians... I actually prefer them.) But the Gospel is more than just happiness... in fact, it promises suffering.

It is in our text:

¹⁴ Do everything without grumbling or arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.”⁴

Grumbling and arguing... well that implies that this work is hard, perhaps sometimes confusing or even controversial.

It says that the Gospel is worked out in the context of a *warped and crooked generation*, which indicates that there may be obstacles, even persecution.

Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky ¹⁶ as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. ¹⁷ But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.⁵

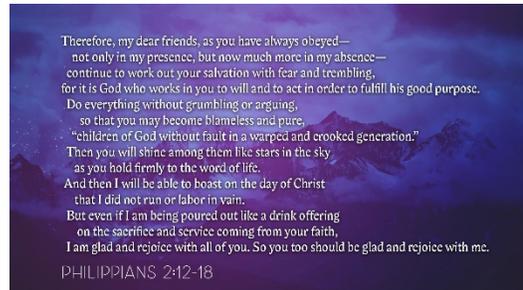
Here Paul speaks of his own suffering. He uses a word like **run**, bringing up images of an athlete who trains and *leaves it all on the field* of competition. He uses a word like **labor**, reminding us that *Gospel people* are called to be obedient servants of God, and servants to one another.

He uses the imagery of **sacrifice**, of **worship** like a drink offering being poured out. This work is worship.

But Paul doesn't keep the work and suffering to himself. I like the way the ESV translates the final verse:

¹⁸ Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me. ⁶

Likewise, *in the same manner* you should experience that joy; we should experience that joy. And how is that?... through **suffering**.



⁴ *The New International Version*. (2011). (Php 2:14–15). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁵ *The New International Version*. (2011). (Php 2:15–17). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁶ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Php 2:18). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

That makes sense, doesn't it? It aligns with the illustration.

Working out the Gospel, getting what God puts inside to permeate our being thoroughly, all the way out so that all can see... well, that is pretty tough on the dough.

Can we adopt such an attitude? It is the *Gospel attitude*.

Every time we are squeezed, punched, kneaded, pulled apart and reconstituted is another opportunity for salvation to be worked out... for the Gospel to be more thoroughly integrated... for what is inside to be worked out to the outside where people can see, understand, and perhaps believe.

What is the Gospel for?

Is it merely just to make God happy with us?

Is it merely just something to sooth us, to make us happy?

Do we need to change our minds today, or at least realign our minds again?

Today is a day to believe... believing Jesus for our salvation, and trusting Him as that salvation gets worked in us and out through us.

