

# Jesus Is Lord: Work It Out

## Philippians 2:12

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**Big Idea: We pray for victory when we should be acting in obedience (Jerry Bridges)**

## Intro

Welcome back to our sermon series called **Jesus is Lord**. We are in the book of Philippians, a letter written by an Apostle named Paul to a church located in the city of Philippi. Out of all the churches Paul founded (maybe 20+), the people of Philippi were the ones who gave him the most joy. And the writer was encouraging the church with this resounding anthem used 15x in this prison letter: Jesus is Lord.

**Thousands of years ago, The Word of the Lord addressed a struggle we still have today.** Mahatma Gandhi once famously said: “I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.”

May this phrase never be uttered of us! ***The most powerful expression of our faith and testimony is to work out your salvation before others.*** The idea that faith in the Lord Jesus does not impact life is a foreign thought in the NT. Christ’s death on the cross and his universal Lordship are not abstract theological concepts far removed from the nitty-gritty problems of everyday life (Hansen, 170)

If you have ever wondered how faith in Jesus changes your life, today’s message will bring clarity. Here is the big idea: We pray for victory (which is already given) when we should be acting – working out- in obedience.

If you, like Gandhi, have been turned off by followers of Christ, my prayer is that today you have an open heart to the Words of the Messiah.

**Read Philippians 2:12-18**

**Prayer**

## Body

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**Your responsibility is to work out (2:12)**

The first word we encounter in this passage is the conjunction **therefore**. God's therefore (2:9) is matched by the Christian therefore in 2:12. The reaction of the Father to the humble sacrifice of His son was that God highly exalted Him (2:9). The right response of the follower to the atoning sacrifice of the Son is to highly exalt him. **Gandhi's frustration was this: I do not see Christians exalting their Christ!**

The work of the Christian carries the marks of obedience, responsibility, and sensitivity. For Paul, your obedience is measured by conformity to the Gospel.

Because He is Lord, therefore, I must respond in obedience to the cross of Calvary. And do not be fooled, disobedience, unbelief, apathy, and laziness is a response. **So what is our work?**

**Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling (2:12).** First we are to work out. It is God who works in you so that you may work out. It is a responsible work in the sense that we are to shoulder responsibility for seeing that the work get done.

**κατεργάζεσθε** the very verb choice is notable. Chrysostom explained this compound form as indicating "with great effort, with great care." **It is impossible to tone down the force with which Paul here points to our conscious activity in sanctification**

The care for the individual soul belongs to the individual; responsibility for personal spiritual growth is committed to the person. **Your spiritual growth is your responsibility**, and others should see it. Growth takes active work in the Spirit. How are working to Grow in grace? What is your plan?

Before we continue we must address two erroneous interpretations and two attitudes, which are deadly to the Spirit:

It would be easy to read Paul's Words and think: If I am to work hard then presumably I contribute my part. Paul is not advocating a "God of the gaps" where you go as far as you can, then leave the rest for God. You contribute nothing to salvation. It was God who began and continues the work.

An opposite, yet equally detrimental attitude is this: If God works in me then I don't need to work hard at following Jesus Christ. You must work like a slave to follow Jesus Christ. Paul is not telling believers "to let go and let God."

**No the Apostle is remind the church that the pursuit of righteousness is His (Jesus), the responsibility for righteousness is yours!**

**Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling (2:12)**

Remember who Paul is writing to in the Philippian church (Acts 16). **Lydia- a wealthy successful business owner. Slave Girl- who was abused, demon possessed, disadvantaged and set free by the Gospel and Jailer- a man who found his complete identity in his job. To Lydia Paul was urging, use your wealth for the kingdom. To the young girl- find your identity in Christ not your past. Work out your salvation. To the jailer- find your fulfillment not in your work but your working out salvation!**

Working **out**- the present expression of God's promise of salvation. Building the community to be an earthly demonstration of heavenly citizenship takes both individual and corporate effort. *What we are doing today is working **OUT** our salvation. The greatest expression of our faith is working in daily grace our salvation to the glory of our Father.*

The greatest change agent in the world, the a constant sign of God's common grace, is the church of Jesus Christ living in the Spirit of the Living God. We are not to work in, work up, or work in hiding. **Matt. 5:14** "You are the light of the world. A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden.

**When you work out your salvation, others see Christ working in you.**

**Continue- Work out your own *salvation* with fear and trembling (2:12).** The call to salvation is not a one time event. Rather, as you have run well, you must continue to run even better all the way to the finish line. As you are already marked by your courageous commitment to Christ, you must continue to live out the meaning of that commitment in every area of your lives (Hansen, 171).

It is this long obedience in the same **direction which the mood of the world** does so much to discourage. *When the path of obedience to Christ becomes steep and dangerous, pleasure seekers look for an easier way. Religious tourists hunting for sensational entertainment, instantaneous enlightenment, and emotional excitement will jump on the newest rides and take quick shortcuts, but they will no be found with pilgrims on the long, hard road following the footsteps of Christ, who was obedient to death—even death on a cross* (Ibid, 172).

The enemy is not concerned with the gospel seed that fell among the road and was eaten by the birds, or the seed that quickly grew and was scorched, or the seed that had shallow root and was choked by the thorns. The threat to the gates of hell is the follower who continues daily to work out His/her salvation! My beloveds, continue to work.

**Work out your own salvation with *fear and trembling* (2:12).** If you are to continually work out. Paul now gives us the how: **Fear and Trembling**—our work it so be sensitive. It is a sensitive awareness of the *preciousness of the salvation* given to us, resulting in a trembling concern lest we fail to live up to our privileges and to enjoy the richness of the divine benefits.

We all fear something. The adversary does not want you to fear the Lord but the world. And he wants you to assume that if you fear what others fear then your fears are normalized: spiders, snakes, darkness, people pleasing, failure, never getting married, having enough money, not good enough, or having the perfect family. This fear only leads to paralysis.

Rather, **righteous fear** leads to power and glory. God does not want you to cower in his presence as if He is ready to strike you dead at a moment's notice. No- we no have condemnation in Jesus Christ. *This is not the fear of a lost sinner before the Holy One, but the fear of a true child before the most loving of all fathers; not a fear of what he might do to us, but of the hurt we might do to him.*

The fear of the Lord is the best way to dispel the attitude of selfish ambition or vain conceit that so quickly ruins social harmony within the church (Hansen, 176).

### **Work out your salvation with Fear and Trembling**

## **Because of Christ, God is working in you (2:12)**

You are tasked to work Out your salvation because God is working in you for your salvation!

Verses 12 and 13 are linked together as effect and cause: our work is the **effect**; God's work is the cause of our **work**. We work because God works (Hansen, 178).

### **We respond and work because we rest in the promises of Jesus Christ.**

There is more to verses 12-16a than a list of commands; it is also a list of **reassurances**. There is a balance between what we are to do and to strive to be and, on the other hand, what is already true of us. By statement or implication, the directives are: obey, work, do, be blameless, shine, and hold fast. The **reassurances** are God is at work, you are God's children, you are lights (Motyer, 126).

What a glorious thought to know that God is working in you to will and to work according to his good purpose because you are God's child and you shine like stars.

### **Will and Ways**

The power of Christ is not that he changes our behavior, even more, he changes your delights which leads to different deeds.

We like to think it's the thought that counts but this is not true spiritually. What if I made your favorite birthday cake and instead of sugar I used salt. My intentions were right but my actions were wrong. Now what if I purchased you a nice cake only because I wanted something in return. Now, the cake is delicious but my attitude rotten.

This is the power of the Spirit of God: he is working in you to both will and to work according to his good purpose. And without the grace of Christ, we would never work for good or will for Good.

**We pray for victory when we should be acting in obedience In Christ we have victory, because God is actively working in us!**

# Response

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From 1991 to 2007, Fuller Theological Seminary's School of Intercultural Studies conducted a survey among 750 Muslims who had converted to Christianity. Those surveyed represented 50 ethnic groups from 30 different countries. Here were the most-cited reasons for conversion to the Christian faith:

1. Christians practiced what they preached.
2. Christians appeared to have loving marriages in which women were treated as equals.
3. Christian-to-Christian violence was less prominent than Muslim-to-Muslim violence.

*The greatest impact that you will have on the world is to work Out your salvation with fear and trembling in the daily graces of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

In Christ, God is working in you. This word describes work which achieves its purpose, the outcome is guaranteed in the end. Remember your identity. In Christ your identity is not longer a sinner but a saint who has victory. Why do you pray for victory when obedience is needed?

The ability to pursue righteous is because of Christ. The responsibility to pursue is yours. Will you renew your commitment to work out your salvation today?

**Today will you work it out?**

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Maybe you are here today and you have been working FOR your salvation. And deep down you know you are not right with God but you want to be.

8 For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift— 9 not from works, so that no one can boast.

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- Philip II of Macedon seized valuable mining territory and named location after himself in 400 BCE
  - In 42 BCE site of battle between Octavian and Antony who defeated Brutus and Cassius
  - 1<sup>st</sup> city visited on 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey (Acts 16:12)
    - Attended prayer meeting on banks of river (Acts 16:12)
  - No synagogue (only needed 10 Jews)
  - Heavy roman and pagan character (Acts 16:21)
  
  - Appears to be last of Prison Epistles
    - Long period of imprisonment had elapsed
    - Abandonment by friends
    - Length of time required for journeys by friends
    - Expectation of release
  - Philippian church sent Epaphroditus to Paul with a gift (2:25-30)
  - Paul wanted to ease worries about his imprisonment (1:15-18)
  - Addressed disunity in the church (2:1-11)

Overview: Philippians is a joyful letter, but its undercurrent is a sober realization that time is running out. Paul himself was facing a possible death sentence; the church was tensed up, ready for the assault of a menacing world and for the insidious encroachment of false doctrine (Motyer).

**Philippi** was in fact ‘Rome in miniature.’ (Motyer). As a colony, its newly minted roman citizens enjoyed freedom from scourging and arrests and the right of ‘appeal to Caesar.’ The coins of Philippi bore Latin inscriptions (Motyer).

Thus a city with a famous past and a privileged and proud present was about to hear the good news of a status conferred not by man but by God, proclaimed by a man who had come to see all human and

inherited dignities as so much rubbish in contrast with the surpassing worth of knowing the Lord Jesus Christ (Motyer).

Out of all the churches Paul founded the people of Philippi were the ones who gave him most joy (Wright, 84).

**Phil. 2:12** Therefore, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, so now, not only in my presence but even more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

God's therefore (2:9) is matched by the Christian's therefore (2:12), and that, in a nutshell, is what this passage is about (Motyer, 125).

Just as God assessed and then reacted to the worth of his Son's life of obedience, so the Christian must ponder the example of Christ and determine upon a worthy response (ibid).

There is more to verses 12-16a than a list of commands; it is also a list of reassurances. There is a balance between what we are to do and to strive to be and, on the other hand, what is already true of us. By statement or implication the directives are: obey, work, do, be blameless, shine, and hold fast. The reassurances are God is at work, you are God's children, you are lights (Motyer, 126).

The Christian life is a blend of rest and activity --- not alternating from one to the other, but a blend in which, at one and the same moment, the Christian is both resting confidently and actively pursuing (Motyer, 126).

For Paul, obedience is measured by conformity to the gospel of Christ (Hansen, 170).

Silva's translation and explosion: therefore my loved ones, [In view of Christ's obedience, I call upon you once again to live as Christian citizens:] in the same way that you have always shown an obedient attitude, I urge you to bring about with all godly fear your own salvation

The work of the Christian carries the marks of obedience, responsibility, and sensitivity (Motyer, 127).

**Work out**—it is a responsible work in the sense that we are to shoulder responsibility for seeing that the work get done (Motyer, 127).

The care for the individual soul belongs to the individual; responsibility for personal spiritual growth is committed to the person (Motyer, 127).

The plural form of the verb work out and the pronoun you can be seen as corroboration that Paul's command should not be interpreted in a merely individualistic sense as a requirement for each individual to work for personal eternal salvation but in a corporate sense as a call for the whole community to rebuild social harmony (Hanson, 173).

Lydia- Slave Girl- Jailer

Working out- the present expression of God’s promise of salvation. Building the community to be an earthly demonstration of heavenly citizenship takes both individual and corporate effort.

**Continue-** as you have run well, you must continue to run even better all the way to the finish line. As you are already marked by your courageous commitment to Christ, you must continue to live out the meaning of that commitment in every area of your lives (Hansen, 171).

It is this long obedience in the same direction which the mood of the world does so much to discourage. When the path of obedience to Christ becomes steep and dangerous, pleasure seekers look for an easier way. Religious tourists hunting for sensational entertainment, instantaneous enlightenment, and emotional excitement will jump on the newest rides and take quick shortcuts, but they will not be found with pilgrims on the long, hard road following the footsteps of Christ, who was obedient to death—even death on a cross (Ibid, 172).

**Fear and Trembling**—our work is to be sensitive. It is a sensitive awareness of the preciousness of the salvation given to us, resulting in a trembling concern lest we fail to live up to our privileges and to enjoy the richness of the divine benefits (Motyer, 127).

This is not the fear of a lost sinner before the Holy One, but the fear of a true child before the most loving of all fathers; not a fear of what he might do to us, but of the hurt we might do to him

The fear of the Lord is the best way to dispel the attitude of selfish ambition or vain conceit that so quickly ruins social harmony within the church (Hansen, 176).

Chiasm (Silva, 118):

Obey  
    In my presence  
    In my absence  
work

This verse has caused much debate among theologians. Is Paul hinting that the believer truly works for his salvation? Certainly not. 2:12 has a close parallel in 1:6 that it was God who began the work and will carry it to completion (Silva, 120).

Calvin rightly claims “that salvation is taken to mean the entire course of our calling, and that this term includes all things by which God accomplishes that perfection, to which He has determined us by His free election.)

κατεργάζεσθε the very verb choice is notable. Chrysostom explained this compound form as indicating “with great effort, with great care.” It is impossible to tone down the force with which Paul here points to our conscious activity in sanctification (Silva, 122).

God helps those who help themselves is not in the Bible! This of course is how many interpret 2:12.

**13** For it is God who is working in you both to will and to work according to his good purpose.

Silva's translation: [You may approach this awesome task with confidence] because God himself is the one [who makes it possible] by producing in your lives both the will to work and the working itself, and all for the sake of His gracious will.

The indwelling of God bears the marks of activity, effectiveness, completeness, and free divine choice (Motyer, 129).

Activity-

Effectiveness – energeo- which characteristically describes work which achieves its purpose; the outcome is guaranteed in the deed.

Completeness- in every action there are two aspects to be considered: the will and the deed, and one or another of these is often our downfall. God is working to recreate our wills and to impart to us his own capacity for effectual working (Motyer, 129).

**Working in—**

Means to put one's capabilities into operation, work, be at work, be active, operate, and be effective. All the capabilities of God are in operation, active, and effective in the work of believers (Hansen, 177).

Verses 12 and 13 are linked together as effect and cause: our work is the effect; God's work is the cause of our work. We work because God works (Hansen, 178).

**14** Do everything without grumbling and arguing, **15** so that you may be blameless and pure, children of God who are faultless in a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine like stars in the world,

When he speaks of the shining like lights he is quoting a passage from the book of Daniel (12.3), which speaks of 'the wise' – by which they meant Israelites skilled in knowing and applying God's law, not least in a time of persecution – shining in that way to the world around (Wright, 106).

In a sense, then, what Paul is saying is not just that the Philippians are to be a sign of light and beauty in a world of darkness and ugliness. They are to be a sign of God's new life in a world that only knows the way to death (Wright, 106).

**16** by holding firm to the word of life. Then I can boast in the day of Christ that I didn't run or labor for nothing. **17** But even if I am poured out as a drink offering on the sacrificial service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. **18** In the same way you should also be glad and rejoice with me.

# Illustrations

“I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.”  
\*Mahatma Gandhi

## Application

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Errors (Alistair Begg):

1. If I am to work hard then presumably I contribute my part. No, we contribute nothing.
  - a. Paul is not advocating a “God of the gaps” where you go as far as you can, then leave the rest for God
2. If God works in me than I don’t need to work hard at following Jesus Christ. You have to work like a slave to follow Jesus Christ.
  - a. Paul is not telling believers “to let go and let God.”

### **Jerry Bridges**

The pursuit of righteousness is His (Jesus)  
The responsibility for righteousness is ours

People talk of the purpose driven life or the purpose driven church. What advocates is the God-driven purpose.

From 1991 to 2007, Fuller Theological Seminary's School of Intercultural Studies conducted a survey among 750 Muslims who had converted to Christianity. Those surveyed represented 50 ethnic groups from 30 different countries. Here were the nine most-cited reasons for conversion to the Christian faith:

1. Christians practiced what they preached.
2. Christians appeared to have loving marriages in which women were treated as equals.
3. Christian-to-Christian violence was less prominent than Muslim-to-Muslim violence.
4. The prayers of Christians had healed the disabled and delivered others from demonic powers.
5. The Koran had produced profound disillusionment because it accentuates "God's punishment more than his love, and the use of violence to impose Islamic laws."
6. God had used visions and dreams to influence the converts' decision.
7. Muslims can never be certain of their forgiveness and salvation as Christians can.
8. As they read the Bible, the converts had been convicted of its truth.
9. The converts were attracted to the idea of God's unconditional love.