

Work Out Your Own Salvation

In Philippians 2.12-13, the Apostle Paul writes, “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, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” This is one of the clearest verses in the New Testament that highlights the interrelation between God’s work in us and the work we are to do in response to God’s work in us. Though salvation is from the Lord, it requires a response from us—a response that involves work.

Salvation involves work. Now we do not work for our salvation (see Romans 6.23; Ephesians 2.8-9), but we do work out our salvation. Our work does not earn us salvation or produce our salvation, yet our cooperation and effort are an essential part of experiencing God’s transforming power in our lives. Salvation, in terms of ongoing moral and spiritual transformation, is not a completely passive affair. We have a responsibility in the matter. It is by the Spirit that we put to death the deeds of the body (see Romans 8.13). God is faithful and will provide a way of escape during temptation, but we must make take advantage of that way of escape (see 1 Corinthians 10.13). We are kept by God, but we are also told to keep ourselves in the love of God (see Jude 1, 21). All of this entails work.

Salvation involves solemn work. We are to work out our salvation with “fear and trembling.” Similarly, in 2 Corinthians 7.1, Paul writes, “Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.” Salvation is serious business; it is not a trifling matter. Our eternal destiny is connected to our salvation. Thus, we need to have a healthy and holy reverence for God. We are not to cringe before God like a fearful animal, but we are to honor and fear him like a humble servant. The point is: we should not take sin or the holiness of God lightly.

Salvation involves empowered work. Paul says, “It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (vs 13). We work because God first works in us. God will finish the work he began in us (see Philippians 1.6), yet not without our faithful response to his work in our lives. Paul said, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me” (1 Corinthians 15.10). Paul worked harder than the rest of the apostles, but the work he did was done by the grace and power of God. Our very work and effort are produced by God. It can be summed up this way: “Without God, we cannot; without us, God will not.”

Pastor Mark Jackson

Larchmont Church of God | 3134 Taylor Blvd. Louisville, KY 40215 | larchmontchurch.org