



Work Out Your Own Salvation

Brownsburg Church of Christ

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Introduction:

Does anyone remember “The Karate Kid”? I’m talking about the 1988 version with Ralph Macchio and Pat Morita, not the 2010 remake. You know, “Wax on, wax off, paint the fence, paint the house, sand the floor.” Daniel needed to learn how to fight his enemy or he was going to get stomped (sound like anyone else you know?). But Mr. Miyagi had him doing household chores. And while I certainly don’t condone the foul language Daniel used in his punkish rage, I kind of get his punkish rage. He had no idea what he was doing or why. For a while it almost seemed like Mr. Miyagi was actually taking advantage of the boy who had asked for training. I don’t mind working so much, as long as I know it is useful. Do you ever feel like at school or on the job you’ve just been given busy work? Don’t you hate that? I mean, if you know that it is actually accomplishing some good, has a purpose, or gets something done you don’t mind even hard work. But arbitrary, pointless, purposeless work just to work—nobody likes that. When Mr. Miyagi returned home from a day of fishing while Daniel painted his house, Daniel completely lost it. And I kind of get that.

As much as I hate to admit it, I’ve sometimes had that same kind of feeling toward God. Read your Bible, pray, “go to church,” teach people the gospel, visit the widows and the shut-in, tell the truth, don’t lie, don’t cheat, don’t steal, don’t lust, and on the list goes. Sometimes it has felt like God just set up some arbitrary busy rules to see how well we could measure up. Then I can especially get upset when I’m told it is all about God’s glory. Has He just got me down here doing His household chores, stroking His ego, and doing pointless chores? Absolutely not.

Philippians 2:5-18 drives home that the “chores” God has given us are neither pointless nor arbitrary. Paul tells us to work out our salvation. The word translated “work out” is the same one used in passages like **Romans 5:3** in which we learn suffering “produces” or works out endurance. Also we find it in **Romans 7:8** in which sin “produced” or worked out in Paul covetousness of every kind. Paul is telling us we need to do what will produce or work out our salvation. Of course, our immediate question is how do we do that? After all, according to **Ephesians 2:8-10** we can’t work to receive salvation. But as we learned in our last lesson in this series on being God’s workmanship, we know that our work is actually useful because God is at work in us (**Philippians 2:13**) and God will complete His work (**Philippians 1:6**). But let’s add to that. Notice that Paul begins this sentence with “therefore.” As the old preachers used to say, “Whenever you see ‘therefore,’ you need to look before it and see what it’s there for.” In **Philippians 2:5-11**, Paul tells us about Jesus, who sacrificed everything, became like a servant, then was obedient even to the point of death. Talk about seemingly useless work. Talk about working to no purpose. After He did all that God asked Him, He ended up dying. But that isn’t the end of the story. Death wasn’t the end for Jesus. In fact, every bit of His obedience and work had a purpose. Jesus obeyed and worked and in the end was exalted by God. His name is now above every name. And every single one of those who mocked His name will eventually bow before Him and confess that He is Lord. God had a purpose for Jesus in all the work He commanded of Him. And in the end, God accomplished that purpose. And while the main purpose was for God’s glory, notice it also accomplished the exaltation of Jesus Christ. In the same way, the work God asks of us is for His glory (**Philippians 1:11**), but His purpose for us through this work is our salvation, our deliverance, our exaltation. Therefore, Paul says, work out your salvation. God really has a purpose for us. He doesn’t ask busy work. The work He asks of us and even empowers us to do by His grace is for our salvation just like Christ’s obedience brought Him exaltation. Therefore, work out your salvation.

This brings us full circle to the last part of **Ephesians 2:8-10** that we’ve been following for several years now. God has created good works that He expects us to walk in. These works aren’t arbitrary; they are for our salvation, our healing, our deliverance from this perverse and crooked generation. So what is this going to look like? How do we work out our salvation? In **Philippians 2:12-18**, Paul gives four keys for what this working looks like.

Discussion:

I. Obey

- A. Working out our salvation in this passage is essentially equivalent to obedience. God hasn’t saved us to set us free to follow our own will. He has saved us so we can follow His. This obedience is walking in the footsteps of our Savior. The word translated “obeyed” in **Philippians 2:12** is the verb form of the adjective describing Jesus in **Philippians 2:8**. God has saved us to be obedient like our Savior.

- B. The word translated “obeyed” literally means to harken to. It is the same word used in **Acts 12:13** to describe Rhoda answering Peter’s knock on the door. Paul is telling us that we need to answer the call of God to do His will and walk His path. As a general on the battlefield calls his soldiers to their duty, our General calls to us. As the obedient soldier harkens to his general’s orders, we must obey.
- C. Within **Philippians 2:8-13**, we learn that this kind of obedience takes humility (**vs. 8**). We must be faithfully obedient even if it leads to death (**vs. 8**). We must forever get rid of the idea that Christianity is a safe religion. Oh, it provides eternal safety for our souls, but it is a dangerous journey in this world. We must obey whether someone is looking over our shoulders or not (**vs. 12**). And finally, recognize that humble obedience leads to exaltation like our Savior Jesus was exalted (**vs. 9**).

II. Obey without grumbling and complaining.

- A. If we want to be blameless, innocent children of God without blemish who stand out and shine a light throughout this crooked and perverse generation, we not only obey, we obey without grumbling and complaining (**Philippians 2:14**). Of course, there are some who complain instead of obeying. We’ve really already dealt with that. Let’s think more about those who obey, but grumble and complain all the way.
- B. They hear their Lord’s command. They feel obligated to submit, but they hate it. Not only do they hate it, they will let everyone around them know. “Church! Are you kidding me? Do I have to go again?” “Oh man, I hate reading my Bible.” “I think it just stinks that God says I can’t get drunk or have sex with that person I’m not married to.” “I’ll forgive that person, but I don’t have to like it.” Some may not say anything. It is all in their body language, the surly expression, the pouting, whining tone of voice.
- C. How can we overcome this grumbling and complaining? We remember the outcome. Jesus obeyed without complaint and has been exalted above everyone. Paul says in **Philippians 3:11, 13-14** the reward is worth the risk and duty God lays on us. Nothing God has commanded is arbitrary. Every bit of it is uniquely designed to let us enjoy the resurrection from the dead, life eternal, and the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. What is there to complain about?

III. Hold fast to the Word of life.

- A. Parallel to obedience, Paul demonstrates that working our salvation means holding fast to the Word of life. Though Paul wasn’t there, I’m sure he had heard about Jesus feeding the 5000 and the aftermath that followed according to **John 6**. On the next day, the masses wanted to make Jesus king. Instead of submitting to their desires. He shocked them, offended them, and practically chased them off. He spoke of following Him in terms of cannibalism. “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (**John 6:53**, ESV). The result? “After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him” (**John 6:66**, ESV).
- B. Then Jesus turned to the 12 and asked, “Do you want to go away as well?” and Peter responded, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life...” (**John 6:67-68**, ESV). The Word of Life may be shocking. It may not be what we want to hear. It may turn our ideas on their heads. It may call us to do something we never thought we would or could do. But where else can we turn.
- C. Jesus Himself is the Word of Life (**John 1:1, 14; I John 1:1**). And the written Word He has revealed through His Holy Spirit is eternal life (**Acts 20:32**). Don’t let go of it. Don’t twist it. Don’t abandon it. Don’t pervert it. Sadly, many so-called Christians practice a kind of highlighted religion. That is, they carry their preconceived ideas into their study of God’s Word of Life and read only to shore up what they already believe or want to do. It is like they highlight the parts they like and abandon the rest. Don’t do that. Hold fast to the Word of Life. Don’t let Satan and suffering shake your hold. Don’t let preconceived ideas cause you to grasp the wrong thing. Don’t let apathy and procrastination cause you to weaken your grasp. There are plenty of things we shouldn’t grasp. After all, even Jesus, God the Son, didn’t grasp or hold fast to His obvious and apparent equality with God. He didn’t hold fast to His heavenly home and bliss. But we must always hold fast to the Word of Life.

IV. Hold fast with gladness and rejoicing.

- A. Paul said we must not obey with grumbling and complaining. In contrast, he explains that we should hold fast to the Word of Life with gladness and rejoicing. Paul explained that even if he was going to die, “poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith,” he would be able to rejoice and be glad. Even if his obedience and holding fast to the Word of Life cost him his life, he had cause for joy. Why would he complain? Instead he would rejoice.
- B. Paul was able to rejoice though his obedience led him to prison because it furthered the saving Gospel (**Philippians 1:12**). He was able to rejoice though his obedience led others to preach out of rivalry and pretense

because Jesus was being preached (**Philippians 1:13**). He was able to rejoice even though he was in the face of execution because he knew he would either go and be with Jesus or stay and help the Philippians (**Philippians 1:19-26**). He was able to rejoice if his obedience led him to be sacrificed on the offering of the Philippians faith because he knew his obedience would lead to deliverance and exaltation (**Philippians 2:8-9, 12**). He was able to rejoice even though his obedience caused him to give up all he had as a Jewish Pharisee because of all he gained and would gain in his relationship with Jesus Christ (**Philippians 3:3-14**).

- C. No matter where holding fast to the Word of Life takes you, no matter what it costs you, no matter who makes you suffer for it, stabs you in the back over it, hunts you down because of it, and even kills you for it, remember this is the Word of Life. What we gain is far greater than what it costs. The reward is worth the risk. What's not to rejoice about.

Conclusion:

Rejoice, and again I say rejoice! A Savior came into the world. He lived, He died, He arose. He conquered the enemies of sin, Satan, and death. He set us free to obey. His work on the cross makes our work of obedience effective and useful. We started by talking about *The Karate Kid*. If you saw that movie, you must remember the scene when Daniel let's his foul frustrations fly. Then Mr. Miyagi gives the grand reveal. Wax on, wax off was not busy work. Because Danielsan was being trained by a master, his work was effectively turning him into a fighter. When Mr. Miyagi has Daniel turn "sand the floor" into powerful blocks as Miyagi throws pointed punches, Daniel and the audience were in awe. Be in awe of our God. Despite the enemies around us and the suffering they cause, we can rest in the fact that God isn't just giving us busy work. We are being trained by the Master. He is working on us and His working makes our work effective and powerful leading to God's glory and our exaltation. Never believe that God's grace means abandoning our work. No. We are God's workmanship, therefore, we actually can work out our salvation. God is working. Get to work.