

Have this attitude in yourselves, which was also in Christ Jesus, who emptied himself, who humbled himself, who became a bondservant, who became obedient to the death, even death of a cross –

The summarized theme of Philippians 2:5-8

Review

Philippians 1:27-2:11 provides instruction about what to think and how to think with the end result being to love like Jesus loved and be willing to go through what Jesus went through in emotional distress because in this world we should expect pressure. It is not the avoidance of pressure that God honors but how we perform while under pressure.

Matthew 20:25-28 – What is the principle? Honor that God bestows is always given to those who are humble and serve God by being a servant to all, sacrificing time, money, energy, and even their lives for the benefit of the one who is loved.

1 Corinthians 9:16-27 – Discipline, sacrifice, and servanthood is the cost for the prize. Our prize is not heaven or eternal life but is the honor bestowed upon the believer who is a servant in this life.

So Then,

Philippians 2:12-16 – So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.

The phrase *work out your salvation* is often debated, and there are many different interpretations from a variety of sources.

The process of the Bible teacher:

1. Make observations from the text
 - a. Verifying the text
 - b. Verify translations
 - i. Review grammatical structure
 - ii. Review vocabulary
2. Identify meaning with verification
 - a. Only one interpretation
 - b. Test various hypotheses
 - c. Interpretation must agree with the immediate context, the book that it is in, and Scripture as a whole
 - i. Context is the primary tool for interpretation
 - ii. Scripture interprets Scripture

- iii. Passages do not stand alone; other passages will provide clarity for both meaning and theological impact
- 3. Secondary verification
 - a. This is where trusted teachers and/or commentaries are used to evaluate conclusions. If that teacher's interpretation differs from yours, then it is wise to evaluate your process with the teacher's process.
 - b. We never start with a commentary. That often leads to dangerous presumptions and often taints the process.

Verify Text and Translation

The Greek text of this portion of Scripture is very consistent and well-attested; there are no significant variants.

Literal translation of the text:

So then, my beloved, just as you always obeyed, not only as in my presence but now much more in my absence, with fear and trembling fully accomplish the salvation of yourselves. For God is the one who works in you both the will and the desire according to the good pleasure *of His*. You all do all things without grumbling and second-guessing, so that you would be blameless and pure, flawless children of God in the midst of a crooked generation, one that has been distorted, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding out *the* Word of Life, with the result *of being* a boast to me in the day of Christ, that I did not run in vain nor labored in vain.

Initial Thoughts on Verse 12

Sometimes a proper translation gives clarity to a text; sometimes the translation does not answer a question to our satisfaction. Verse 12 contains such a phrase, one that has been the topic of debate for years.

In verse 12, the NASB translation says *work out your salvation*. This is the main sentence in verses 12-13. Verse 14 begins a new sentence with an imperative. But the paragraph is more extensive. It would appear that the entire paragraph probably goes back to 1:27.

The rules of English do not govern the Greek language. Paul often connects rather long points by using conjunctions to ensure the points are connected.

1. Philippians 2:1 – “*oun*”
2. Philippians 2:9 – “*dio*”
3. Philippians 2:12 – “*hōste*”

The instructions of verses 12-13 are not isolated and must be taken within the immediate context of the larger paragraph. This is extremely important in understanding the phrase in verse 12.

“ὥστε *hōste*” functions with the indicative, imperative, and subjunctive moods to form independent clauses indicating purpose. The implication is that what has preceded has served as the means. When “*hōste*” is used for an intended result—the means and result are nearly indistinguishable.

In this context, what are the means for the intended results of verse 12, *work out your salvation*? The means first relates to the admonishments *conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel* and *have this attitude which was also in Christ Jesus*. The means also relates to the example of Jesus Christ. Considering the whole of the previous section, the intended results are to *work out your salvation*.

Interpretation of “Work Out Your Salvation”

The verb is “κατεργάζομαι *katergazomai*.” This is in the present imperative and indicates a perpetual activity. The verb is a compound of “ἐργάζομαι *ergazomai*” and the prefix “κατά *kata*.” “κατά *kata*” has a root definition of "down," but in composition (connected to a word as a prefix) it indicates "perfective force," meaning that the act is full and complete.

The meaning of this verb is understood in four main definitions, all of which are related:

1. to bring about a result by doing something (*achieve, accomplish*) – James 1:3, 20, produce
2. to cause a state or condition; (*bring about*) – Romans 4:15, brings about
3. to cause to be well prepared; (*prepare*) – 2 Corinthians 5:5, He who prepared
4. to be successful in the face of obstacles (*conquer*) – Ephesians 6:13, having done everything

The definition that best fits this context is “accomplish, produce or bring about.” This does not say “work in order to obtain salvation;” it says “fully accomplish your salvation.”

Salvation is “σωτηρία *sōtēria*.” The three main definitions are:

1. Deliverance (Acts 7:25)
2. Preservation (Acts 27:31-37)
3. Salvation (Ephesians 1:13) – This salvation is often understood in three aspects (past, present, future)
 - a. Past – refers to the justification of the believer, saved from the penalty of sin – Ephesians 2:8
 - b. Present – refers to the victory over the power of sin – 1 Timothy 4:16
 - c. Future – glorified, free from the presence of sin in your person – Romans 13:11

Which one is this? Is this speaking of one of these three aspects of salvation? Or is this more about deliverance/preservation? Or is there another choice?

The word *salvation* (σωτηρία *sōtēria*) appears three times in Philippians (1:19, 1:28, 2:12). The verb “*sōzō*” does not appear in Philippians. The only other cognate for this word group in Philippians is in 3:20, *Savior*.

When understanding a word or word group in a particular context, the primary concern is how the word is used in the same book/letter. Different definitions can be used in the same book, but only if the immediate context demands it.

What does salvation mean in the previous contexts?

Verse 19 - In this verse, the clue for the meaning of salvation is in verse 20 – according to my earnest expectation and my hope that I shall not be ashamed in anything.

The premise is that both him being in prison and the brothers proclaiming Christ from envy and strife could have held Paul down, put him to shame. Salvation here is preservation; Paul will not be put to shame. This is accomplished through two agencies: first, the prayers of the Philippian saints, and second, the support of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Notice that in these verses we’re not told if he

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was released from prison. Even in verse 25 where it appears that Paul is confident in coming to them, he digresses by saying whether he comes or remains in verse 27.

Verse 28 - The ones who oppose the truth will lose that battle to silence truth and the ones who strive for the doctrines of the gospel of the Christ will win; the truth will be proclaimed, and the gospel will be given.

This salvation, in verse 28, is also perseverance; the Philippian church was encouraged to know that, as they conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel, they will not be put to shame in contending for the truth of the gospel.

In 2:12 does salvation shift?

What can cause someone, or a group, to be put to shame in regard to the gospel? If we go back into the greater context of 1:27-2:11 (and verses 14-16), we can look at the opposite of the instruction.

1. Living a life that is contrary to the gospel
2. Not being unified in the doctrines of the gospel
3. Isolating yourself and not loving one another in encouragement and mercy
4. Not having spiritual fellowship
5. Doing/thinking only after your own personal interest
6. Being arrogant, thinking too highly of yourself
7. Claim your rights, even to the detriment of others
8. Complain and second guess (doubt)

What will be the result of thinking/acting like this?

1. Shame
 - a. When we consider Jesus Christ
 - b. When confronted by fellow believers or by the world.
2. Lack of unity
3. Rightfully blamed
4. Guilty
5. Vulnerable to accusation
6. Dim lights

However, if we take on the encouragement and instruction of Philippians and fully accomplish the mind of Christ, living for God while serving one another in love, we will never be ashamed.

Verification

It is one thing to conclude that *work out your salvation* means “to fully accomplish your preservation (not being put to shame).” But is this idea consistent in Scripture?

Luke 9:23-26 – Jesus begins by giving the qualifications for a disciple and ends with if one does not do these things, then it equates to being ashamed of Jesus and His words.

2 Timothy 1:8-17 – As an antithesis to being ashamed, Paul uses persecution or putting oneself in harm’s way as a manifestation to the mental attitude of not being ashamed of the gospel.

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Romans 1:14-16 – Not being ashamed isn't simply a private mental attitude concerning the gospel, but an outward manifestation of daily devotion to God and the gospel, allowing what is on the inside to work in the life.

Philippians 3:18-19 – Those who are walking as enemies of the cross are shamed.

1 John 2:28 – Abide in Him so that, when He appears, we will not be ashamed.

Can we put Philippians together in regard to “fully accomplishing your preservation” in not being ashamed at the gospel? It doesn't just refer to an internal feeling of shame, but not being ashamed means having proper doctrine, mental attitude, and behavior within the body of Christ.

When we live a life that is consistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ and have unity within the body of Christ doctrinally, mentally, and behaviorally, what are the consequences in the midst of this evil generation? Reread Philippians 2:14-16.